Pli selon pli – Uncovering the Layers of Modernist Aesthetics

A study of performative aspects in Boulez and Mallarmé

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Introduction

It no longer seems controversial to state that what we, in perpetual lack of a better term, call "classical" music, or in academic circles, "Western art music", has lost its standing in the public arenas of the Western Hemisphere. The powerful bulldozer with the equally inaccurate name "popular music" has taken over the music scene, in terms of media exposition, music education in public schools, musical contributions to public and official ceremonies, and it is the idea of what music *is* in the minds of – what seems to be – the majority of people. A sad coincidence occurred while I was writing my thesis that accidentally supported this observation. The death of the French modernist composer Pierre Boulez went by rather unceremoniously in international media, and close to unnoticed in the Norwegian press; this was in grim contrast to the immense – at times balancing on the edge of embarrassing exploitation – coverage of David Bowie passing away the week after. There are of course several problems with such a simplistic presentation, and contradicting geographical and cultural variations certainly do occur, but the purpose here is to describe a certain general tendency.

The marginalized classical music scene appears to be divided into two equally struggling parts. On the one side, the traditional operatic and orchestral repertoire of the canon is reportedly suffering from an increasing percentage of gray-haired audience. On the other side, the contemporary classical music scene, although comprised of young, progressive, avant-gardists both on the performing and consuming side, seems to have a very limited appeal for the general public.

In his book on twentieth century music, *The Rest is Noise. Listening to the twentieth century* Alex Ross (music critic in *The New Yorker* – probably one of the most influential publications in Western culture)*,* provides classical music with something close to an obituary*:*

> While the splattered abstractions of Jackson Pollock sell on the art marked for a hundred million dollars or more, and while experimental works by Matthew Barney and David Lynch are analyzed in college dorms across the land, the equivalent in music still sends ripples of unease through concert audiences and make little perceptible impact on the outside world. Classical music is stereotyped as an art of the

dead, a repertory that begins with Bach and ends with Wagner and Puccini (Ross 2008:xvi).

As Ross indicates, music's transition into Modernism has had a rather small impact, at least in terms of visibility and relevance in the public sphere. The departure from functional tonality did not sit well with the larger audience, and the musical avant-garde has been accused of alienating the audience, disregarding the listener and composing with an elitist approach for the initiated few.

Whether or not this is the case, I think it is safe to state that *modernist atonal music*, a term that will be discussed in the first chapter, certainly is far less *emotionally* – and thus maybe less *intuitively* – appealing than the late Romantic style preceding it and the popular music developing around it. Does that mean it is rejecting the listener and refusing to communicate? Is there something in the nature of Modernism's aesthetic qualities that makes audiences perceive them as unappealing, or is it simply a matter of how we listen?

My project

A profoundly prominent figure within the realm of atonal Modernist music is the aforementioned Pierre Boulez. His reputation as a strict serialist, with a rational, cerebral and scientific approach to composing, puts him right in the eye of the storm. He has been a passionate advocate for the necessity of keeping emotions and any personal influence as far away from music as possible, and – although highly respected within the academy and conservatories for his groundbreaking work as a composer, and his maybe somewhat wider recognition as conductor – he still remains in obscurity outside of the classical music world, of which the lack of media coverage of his death was a somber reminder.

In order to explore "modernist aesthetics", apparently found so objectionable and uninviting by some, I will take a closer look at Boulez's major work for soprano and ensemble, *Pli selon pli – portrait de Mallarmé* (composed 1957-59, and later altered). To narrow down the topic, I will particularly look at the fourth movement "Improvisation sur Mallarmé III: Á la nue accablante tu". I chose this particular movement for a number of reasons. First of all, the poem on which it is based, *A la nue accablante tu,* sheds crucial light on Boulez's ideas on composition. Secondly, this is probably the less analyzed of the three improvisations "sur Mallarmé". The third reason has to do with the substantial rewriting the movement has

undergone over the years, and the impact this has on the audible experience.

I have chosen *performance* as the main subject of my analysis, rather than the written score, as I find the audible result of the music in question and the impact it has on the listener to be of major interest when examining the music's relative lack of popularity. The complete work has been recorded three times with Boulez himself conducting. First in 1969, with soprano Halina Lukomska and the BBC Symphony Orchestra, in 1981 with soprano Phyllis Bryn-Julson and the same orchestra, and in 2001 with soprano Christine Schäfer and Boulez's own Ensemble Intercontemporain.

The three albums represent three quite different versions of the work. Despite the mentioned compositional alterations, from a listener's perspective I find that one of the most pronounced differences between the recordings is the *vocal performance*. Each album features a new singer, and their expressions and interpretations are no less than worlds apart.

Halina Lukomska's performance on the first recording corresponds fascinatingly well with the most rigid stereotypes used to describe Modernism – her interpretation comes across as strangely distant and disconnected. In intriguing contrast to this, Phyllis Bryn-Julson's approach seems a little softer around the edges and displays more flexibility and expressivity, while, in terms of interpretation, Christine Schäfer might as well have been singing a Schubert lied, to put it crudely. By comparing the three recordings, I will seek to shed some light on the following questions: Is the nature of Lukomska's seemingly austere artistic expression really rejecting the listener? What effect do the radical changes in the two later vocal performances have on the aesthetic character of the work?

Methods and objectives

Thus, my project consists of two parallel and eventually intertwining lines of argument. I will examine the *aesthetic character* of the performance of this work, carefully chosen as a representative for *modernist atonal music*, and subsequently, look into and discuss the epistemological and ontological status of *performance as a work of art*.

The starting point, or rather the center, of both questions, is the specific and tangible listening experience of Halina Lukomska's enthrallingly ambivalent performance – austere and unapproachable, but with a strong sense of urgency and dedication. Orbiting this center are

some probably less tangible matters that needs exploration, in order to obtain an increased understanding of this performance.

One such orbiting topic is Modernism. What stylistic traits and performance ideals inhabits this style, genre and epoch? Postwar modernist serialism is infamous for its mathematical approach and cerebral compositional ideals. I will look into the background for these stereotypes, and demonstrate that there seems to be a tendency within postwar Modernism to view performance as an execution of a task, not an expression of artistry.

The next question is whether there actually is something uninviting or alienating in this music or in this performance. Susan McClary offers a possible answer. In her infamous 1989 article "Terminal Prestige", she blames the postwar modernist composers themselves for causing Modernism's marginal standing, by purposefully composing "difficult" music meant only for the initiated few and refusing to acknowledge any affiliation with their contemporary culture or society or the general public. Simultaneously, she accuses them of creating an atonal, serialist hegemony within compositional institutions and conservatories, all of which has led to allegations of elitism (McClary 1989).

McClary's critics suggest another answer to the same question. They find that her and other attacks on Modernism helped cause the marginalization, by facilitating a myth of its inaccessibility. In her retrospective 2015 article "The Lure of the Sublime. Revisiting the modernist project", McClary shows more understanding towards the postwar modernists, but still maintains that their aesthetics as such are alienating to the listener unless viewed in relation to their cultural and historical context (McClary 2015).

Another orbiting topic is *performativity*. Performativity serves both as a starting point for the second research question, but is also the point at which my two research questions intersect. The performative turn within the humanities is in short a shift from viewing a work of art as text, to viewing a work of art as performance. Performativity means that language also can constitute realities, not simply describe them. A text can be performative, for instance in the sense that the correlation between music and reception is possible circular, illustrated by the case presented by McClary. Performance can be said to constitute its own reality, by creating a unique situation that can never be repeated in exactly the same manner. Within musicology, recent years have brought forth an increased attention on performance as a work of art in its

own right and a demand for a new music analysis on performance's terms, in addition to the acknowledgement that theory, criticism and analysis do not only describe, but also influence music, and provide an altered view of musical meaning. Where one previously saw meaning as something that was immanent in the music, the meaning is now considered to be created within the listener.

Furthermore, the idea of *performativity* serves as a foundation for my understanding of the music of Boulez. Performativity seems to be a central aspect in both artistic ideas of Mallarmé and Boulez, particularly the idea of the anonymous writer/composer, and establishing a framework or setting from which possibilities can arise, instead of presenting a finalized product. Thus, their poems/musical works will *constitute realities* instead of representing reality.

Once this theoretical and methodological backdrop is in place, it is time to involve the actual work in question, or rather, the movement. "Improvisation III" is based on the Mallarmé sonnet *A la nue accablante tu.* The poem's text and Boulez's setting of it determines to a large extent the available choices for the singer. Consequently, since my objection is to analyze the vocal performance, it seems required to look into the poem itself. I seek to demonstrate what I understand to be *performative* elements in the poem, and illuminate the poetic features that I find to have essential functions in the performance of the vocal part of "Improvisation III".

One major finding I bring from this analysis is that Mallarmé puts emphasis on the material qualities of the work, particularly by disintegrating semantic structures and meanings from the language. This emphasis on material qualities is picked up by Boulez, and his setting of the poem is fragmented and distorted, with the division of words in semantically illogical places and extended and ornamented syllables. The vocal character of all three singers will be discussed thoroughly, and I seek to demonstrate how Lukomska's interpretation seems to be aloof, but with streamlined sonority and consistent vibrato. Subsequently, I will compare her performance to Bryn-Julson's distant expressivity and Schäfer's ostensibly heartfelt delivery, and demonstrate and discuss the differences. My agenda is not to find fault or inadequacies in the other performances, but rather to find and aesthetic justification for Lukomska's idiosyncratic performance, and argue that it can have appeal to listeners despite its maybe standoffish first impression.

I have yet to answer the last part of the question – is it simply a matter of how we listen? Having established a hypothesis that Boulez's artistic intent is to *establish a framework* for possibilities, what is the performer's role? Is she bound to simply execute and deliver the composer's intended content, in a modernist version of *Werktreue*? I introduce the theory that her role might be to extend the composer's anonymity to the performer, and that the performer thus becomes an equal facilitator of musical meaning.

In accordance with the performative turn, I then place the listener in the center of this performative work, as I argue that these presumed constituted realities come into play within the listener. I would say then, that this music is not alienating to the listener: on the contrary, it is inviting the listener to define the meaning. From here, I go on to discuss the impact of a performance that is not "anonymous", like the one of Christine Schäfer, whether the performative work requires an anonymous performer. This brings me to Roland Barthes and his ideas of the *grain of the voice* and the *body* in music, and I suggest, as he indicates, that this powerful and deliberate force can replace the points of reference that lack in atonal music, such as tonality, harmony, pulse and recognizable structures. I will also review McClary's criticism towards the alleged lack of contextual meaning in postwar Modernism, and I will elaborate on whether the idea of a performative work can facilitate a different way to experience musical meaning, or if maybe this *grain* or *body* is another such option.

1 Modernism

1.1 Starting point

The first of my two research questions in this thesis is to look into the possible reasons for *post-tonal modernist music's* relatively unpopular standing in mainstream society, or why it, as *Oxford Music Online* puts it, "failed to alter fundamentally the tastes and practices of 20th-century mass culture" (Botstein 2016).

Naturally, some important nuances should be added to this. Public opinion and cultural preferences are ever-changing, and in the dynamic and constantly evolving music scene, exciting and unpredictable things are happening all the time. "What's hot and what's not" is fundamentally ephemeral, and there is an abundance of cross-overs and merges at play. Gaps are being bridged and genres invented, and the boundaries between experimental jazz, sophisticated electronica and eclectic innovative contemporary classical music are by no means self-evident[1]. What I am attempting to address is a general tendency I find to be present around me, as a musician, as a musicologist, and as a cultural consumer. I have yet to hear a mailman whistle Schoenberg-tunes, and modernist or contemporary music is easily reduced to *one* category by those who are not interested, usually with one or both of the following arguments:

1. The music is aesthetically unappealing and uninviting.
2. It is difficult, inaccessible, and for the initiated few.

How did these perceptions come about? Is there something in the very aesthetics of Modernism that signals this? Or are there extra-musical reasons coming from the surrounding discourse?

1.2 Terminology

Before I venture into these questions, a definition of terms is in order. Daniel Leech-Wilkinson says that, "style is by its very nature a generalizing phenomenon" (Leech-Wilkinson, 2009:797). The demarcation of any style is bound to be unsatisfactory, but the

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[1] David Metzer has explored this topic in "Sharing a stage: the growing proximity between modernism and popular music" in *Transformations of Musical Modernism* (eds. E. Guldbrandsen and J. Johnson).

need for a terminology is obvious nevertheless. The question of what to call "Western art music" or "classical" music has its own well-known discourse within musicology, and trying to make subdivisions and distinctions within this genre causes no less trouble. There is an abundance of more or less interchangeable terms in circulation to denote the music of Schoenberg and the Second Viennese School that allegedly "broke with tradition" around the turn of the 20th century. Many of them indicate a bifurcation along such lines as "old vs. new" or "traditional vs. experimental" – avant-garde, modernist, contemporary, or why not just plain "new" music. Neither of these oppositions are adequate, since this style (if that is what it is) is a hundred years old and must be said to have created quite a solid tradition on its own. A perhaps more accurate distinction also in wide use, is "tonal vs. atonal", and the term "post-tonal" is used to describe the "new" tradition. Although this, too, is far from adequate, it might at least be considered closer to specific stylistic and aesthetics characteristics than to vague temporal epochs.

From a scholarly point of view, the task of definition can to some extent be simplified by subdivision, and by narrowing down more specified terms denoting both temporal and stylistic differences, and within the last hundred years of experiments, several such niches or subcategories occur, like *musique concrète*, serialism, minimalism and many more. However, since the classical music scene and the public perception of it to a large extent has maintained a certain bipartition between the "classical" canon and the "everything from Schoenberg to present-day composers that stuck to and expanded his break with tradition"-category, the need to have a more general name for the latter is ever-present.

One such umbrella term used in connection with the category in question, is contemporary music. My impression is that this term particularly applies when attempting to denote a *genre*, typically in concert programming or music stores. I would argue that this is accurate enough when it refers to music that is actually written today, or in whatever timeframe we want to encompass in "our present epoch", but I find it also to be used about the entire historical "post tonal"- tradition, which is less compatible with the literal meaning of the word "contemporary".

Modernism is another umbrella term in extensive use to cover "post-tonal" music, and this causes some confusion since Modernism also is used in reference to a limited style and/or time epoch, which followed by the other limited styles/time epochs *postwar Modernism* and

postmodernism, are creating an – of course too simplistic – but rather straight forward chronological development of musical styles.

It seems like academia has chosen the word Modernism to embrace all of this music. *Oxford Music Online* calls Modernism a term used "to denote a multi-faceted but distinct and continuous tradition within 20th-century composition" (Botstein 2016). In the introduction to the new anthology *Transformations of Musical Modernism,* editors Erling E. Guldbrandsen and Julian Johnson apply this broad definition of the term, and ask whether Modernism is a *style* or an *epoch,* and debate how to circumscribe it, whether it should be within historically, stylistically or ideologically boundaries (Guldbrandsen and Johnson 2015:1). Suggesting it cannot adequately be encompassed by either category or demarcation, they wind up calling it an "attitude of musical practice – in composition, performance and listening" (ibid.:2).

As I understand it, they find that this *attitude* is very much alive today. The confusion of addressing a hundred-year-old tradition as "modern" vaporizes when the authors translate "modernity" into an attitude of ever-evolving self-awareness and critical approach – to music and culture and society – instead of cemented conventions and a fixed set of aesthetics (loc. cit.). The editors deem narrow stylistic subdivisions of Modernism redundant, since the modernist attitude transcends fixed stylistic and historical elements. Postmodernism as an anti-modernist reaction is abandoned, and the postmodern ideas and practices are included in a long-term view of Modernism as a dynamic and infinite movement (ibid.:2f).

This definition of Modernism meets my requirements for an adequate umbrella term, and in the following, I will use Modernism in the "post-tonal-Schoenberg-to-present-day"-sense of the word.

1.3 Aesthetics

As we have seen above, Modernism is not easily defined, and it is comprised of an abundance of stylistic diversity. A demarcation of *modernist aesthetics* as such may thus seem futile. However, something about Modernism seems to keep the idea of a more or less unified style – or attitude – alive. I would argue that this *something* is often derived from what Modernism is not, from what separates it from most other forms of music. Guldbrandsen and Johnson lists a number of characteristics:

- "Dissonance, atonality, fragmented musical surface"

- "Resistance to traditional ideas of musical beauty"
- "Avoidance of melody or familiar harmony"
- "Lack of regular pulse, rhythm or groove"
- "Rejection of recognizable musical forms and ideas of expression"

(Guldbrandsen and Johnson 2015:1, placed in bullets by me.)

Although I do not perceive this as an attempted exhaustive description, it seems to me that it quite neatly captures something of an essence, and serves as a sort of smallest common denominator applicable to most branches of Modernism. From the listener's perspective, I would say that the most distinct consequence of these aesthetic features is that familiar points of reference are removed. The information presented is layered and organized in unprecedented ways, with substantial amount of divergent data delivered simultaneously. Whether said familiarity is biological, that tonality, pulse and structural coherence are more naturally intuitive to us, is indubitably a valid discussion, however, for my purpose here, I find it sufficient to settle for *familiar* as in "recognizable from other fields of music".

When directly addressing the music in question—postwar Modernism, serialism, the Darmstadt School and Pierre Boulez—I would say that another aesthetic element emerges, or rather is intensified, namely the musical *expression*. Expression is by no means an unambiguous term, and here I am using it as the result of the musical output, the audible, sonorous outcome. One stereotypical characteristic commonly used of postwar Modernism is that the music is *inexpressive,* in the sense that it does not seek to convey emotion or affect.

The purpose of this thesis is neither to examine *why* the aesthetics changed nor to provide a thorough presentation of *how* they changed. However, the connection between mentioned expression and its probable origin seems too paramount to leave out. The shift in compositional ideals after World War II was in part caused by the shattering devastations of the war, and, according to *Oxford Music Online,* "influenced by the shock of the Holocaust and Hiroshima" (Botstein 2016). Susan McClary points out how the postwar modernists turned towards a cerebral, objective, science based music, and away from the musical styles that had been abused by dictators to delude the masses (McClary 2015:23).

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In this environment, "enthusiasm for post-Webern serialism and experimentalism thrived" (Botstein 2016). The shadows of the war were, naturally, one of many reasons for a complex and multi-faceted musical development. As for Boulez, he could not "unreflectingly accept the forms handed down to him by tradition", as stated by Jonathan Goldman (Goldman 2011:1). As a true pioneer, Boulez developed the prewar serialism of Schoenberg and Webern in new directions, and Boulez's *Penser la musique ajourd´hui* from 1963 "came to symbolize the abstract scientist discourse of the post-war avant-garde" (ibid.:32).

In an attempt to nuance the stereotypical perception, Erling Guldbrandsen refers to what he calls "the general textbook image of European post-World War II modernism" as an unbalanced presentation of a unified rationalism and structuralism, with logic and rigidity as the leading stars (Guldbrandsen 2015:223). He further points out that although Boulez's own public statements have contributed to the idea that he had a strictly rational and calculated compositional ideal, analyses of the musical works do not necessarily correspond with his statement, nor with the textbook image (Guldbrandsen 2015:224).

Nevertheless, it seems to me that this period brings forward an overall enforcement of music as an intellectual and not emotional affair, and that this had some impact on musical expression.

1.4 Performance ideals

Although an explicit compositional ideal, *expression* in the mentioned sense of the word would be ultimately displayed in performance. The performance ideals of postwar Modernism both correlate and differ from other tendencies and approaches in the corresponding time period. According to *Oxford Music Online,* an anti-Romantic trend emerged in the 1920s, in which Heinrich Schenker, among others, was an eager advocate for abandoning the expressive improvisational style of the late 19th century, and around the middle of the 20th century, "an austere, explicitly anti-sentimental Modernist approach to performance" emerged (Botstein 2016). Botstein is referring to performance in general, but more specifically relevant in our case, are the findings of Daniel Leech-Wilkinson. In his article on the disappearance of portamento in recordings, he claims there was a substantial shift in singers' interpretation after World War II (Leech-Wilkinson 2006:253ff). He deems this to be a result of the grimness of the war, and the inevitable presence it must have had on the postwar generation. Leech-Wilkinson argues that portamento is perceived as an emotional

characteristic, and that its disappearance after the war is connected as a more or less conscious movement away from emotion in music. He uses baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau as an example of this, and finds it unlikely that he, or anyone, could "grow up as a performer in Germany during the last years of the war and the first years of the Allied occupation, and sing as if nothing had happened" (ibid.:254). Leech-Wilkinson says that singers where moving away from naïve, direct and unfiltered interpretation, genuine conveyance of the supposed feelings in the music, to a more detached, ironic distance, with several layers of the soul's complex trouble, parallel to the development and dispersion of psychoanalysis (loc. cit.).

It seems more than plausible that such a strong stylistic change influenced modernist performance ideals, but apparently, the compositional style also had considerable impact. In another article, Leech-Wilkinson addresses the performance ideals as a conscious effort to establish a new practice to new music: "[…] composers were working with performers they knew well, all aiming for a modernist approach to playing atonal music" (Leech-Wilkinson 2009:796). In Boulez's music, and in *Pli selon pli* in particular, Leech-Wilkinson claims that the pointillist compositional style resulted in a pointillist performance. He describes the pointillist style like "each note was a self-contained and fully calculated event", and states that this was "very noticeable in early performances" (ibid.:793). Performers "just played each note as written", and correspondingly with the apparent lack of coherence in the score, they made "no *audible* connection between the notes" (loc. cit.).

The above account sounds like something of a communal effort between composers and performers, and maybe it was, but Nicholas Cook describes the post-war modernist performance ideal as a search for a "universal performance practice", and an "impersonal development, beyond individuals" (Cook 2012). This ideology does not seem to leave much room for the performer as an artist. In contrast to the "intellectual" approach of Fischer-Dieskau sketched out above by Leech-Wilkinson, in which there definitely was room for a performer's reflections, a performance style "beyond individuals" would per definition not encourage any form of individuality. According to Arnulf Mattes, Darmstadt's "ideology of progress and anti-romantic objectivism […] diminishes the role of the performer as an interpreter", because the performer's task was simply to execute (Mattes 2015:245).

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Is this aesthetic expression inaccessible and alienating to the listener, and the cause of Modernism's struggle for greater relevance?

1.5 Seclusion and elitism?

Susan McClary offers another explanation for Modernism's assumed marginal standing – the composer's allegedly deliberate seclusion from the public sphere. In 1988, she held a conference paper entitled "Terminal Prestige: The Case of Avant-Garde Music Composition". The paper was later published in *Cultural Critique* in 1989. In the article, McClary accuses what she calls the "avant-garde composers" of claiming an aesthetically superior position in the music world, and dictating the style of composition being taught within music programs. She predicted this to be the end of their genre, and fears it can damage the development of "classical" music altogether, with this group sitting in an Ivory Tower, condescendingly looking down at the mainstream culture consumers, alienating the general public from the "classical" music scene.

The "avant-garde composers" seems to be a somewhat obscure target, which she does not explicitly define. As representatives for this label, she chooses mainly three composers, Milton Babbitt, Arnold Schoenberg and Pierre Boulez, and with quotes from each composer, she ends up with what she presents as the point of view of the "avant-garde". Throughout the article, it becomes evident that she is primarily talking about serialism, based on the chosen composers and the insertion of the term a few times later in the article. She also specifies in a later text that "Terminal Prestige" was aimed at what she refers to as "serialism and/or academic atonality" (McClary 1994:149). She is using the term "postwar Modernism" quite consistently, thus apparently aiming her criticism chiefly towards Babbitt, Boulez and their contemporaries. It seems like she is consciously creating a straw man, a generalized "avant-garde composer", and I have summed up his alleged views in these points:

- Music is an autonomous entity with its own ability to develop
- "Avant-garde" compositional style is the only right and natural development for music
- "Difficult" is an honorary label to have put on one's music, and if one's music is embraced by the general public, it is equally degrading
- Music has no contextual, social or cultural meaning, all meaning is *within* the music

- In order to develop in said natural manner, music needs to be protected from the bad influence of the public opinion and the mainstream mass-culture
- For this to happen, the composer and the music need to be secluded in designated environments
- Music departments in universities must save "music" by providing this environment, both practically and financially (McClary 1989:59pp)

McClary is in strong opposition to these views. Music as such is definitely not dying, she claims, instead "the twentieth century has witnessed an unparalleled explosion of musical creativity" (ibid.:64). However, the composers of avant-garde music are at the risk of digging their own grave, by refusing to relate to the rest of the music world (loc. cit). McClary also states that their seclusion from cultural and social influence is illusory, due to the fact that seeking separation from society per definition is to relate to it. Their music could be considered meaningful in many different ways on more levels, if they were not so rigidly stuck within their austere, mathematically based aesthetic ideals (ibid.:66).

I find her "avant-garde" composer term curiously inadequate, as it seems like she is addressing 90 years of music history and an abundance of composers and stylistic idiosyncrasies as one. I assume that this rhetoric move was willfully conducted by McClary to present a set of aesthetic values and an ideological fundamentalism she found objectionable. McClary acknowledges that Schoenberg, Babbitt and Boulez are from different backgrounds, but claims they can be linked together in their view on the audience as an "irrelevant annoyance whose approval signals artistic failure" (ibid.:61). In her 1994 "Response to Linda Dusman", a defense for "Terminal Prestige", she says that her effort to present such a provocatively polemic statement was made to make "Terminal Prestige" an "intervention" (McClary 1994:150).

Throughout her text, it seems like McClary is dividing the target for this intervention into two. The more specific part of the "avant-garde" appears to be the compositional programs in American universities, she is for instance stating that "serious" music, implied that this is the "avant-garde" music in question, gets the available funding, and that this is the only music taught to music students and tolerated (McClary 1989:63). The other more general target, is the – let us call it "postwar Modernist music scene/group of composers". McClary shifts back and forth between these two perspectives in her article. Both aspects are somewhat

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illuminated in the quote below from "Response to Linda Dusman". McClary emphasizes that her statements concerning "suppressed" students is based on semi-empirical, or at least some anecdotal evidence, and that her article in part

> [...] serves as a response to long, intense conversations I have had over the course of several years with composers, many of whom were trying to recover from having been browbeaten into submitting to the dogmas of serialism and/or academic atonality. Some of these were students who balked at sacrificing their creativity and imaginations to what they perceived as dated enterprises for the sake of academic legitimacy. But others were older: I remember especially an established composer in his fifties who shed bitter tears as he recounted the years he spent writing music he himself detested" (McClary 1994:149).

In addition to pointing out concrete problematic conditions within American universities in particular, I believe her other agenda, and reasons for creating the "extremist straw man", was to criticize a whole idea or realm of thought that she considered to significantly transcend the American academic circles.

McClary's intervention caused quite a stir and equally polemic contradictions for the postwar modernists' position. Joseph N. Straus claimed in his article "The Myth of Serial 'Tyranny' in the 1950s and 1960s" that serialism never constituted more than 15 percent of the music scene in the US (Straus 1999:304). He bases this on empirical evidence from his research, in which he has categorized 468 American composers active between 1950 and 1969. He has looked at who had the actual material influence, measured in published, performed and recorded music, positions held at institutions, and who had got reviews and received awards. This research was done to meet what he refers to as "the common conception" that postwar serialism dominated the compositional scene in the US in the 1950s and 1960s (ibid.:302). The article includes a number of quotes from scholars, writers and composers. The conclusion he draws based on his studies, is that serialism had no particular impact, and neither was it a homogenous style (ibid.:335). He claims that the composition scene was diverse, and although competitive, no one dominant style outnumbered the others (ibid.:303).

In my opinion, he does not necessarily succeed in his attempt to prove McClary wrong. There is a significant difference between *dictating* and *dominating*. Her accusation of *dominance* is, as I understand it, limited to compositional programs within the American academy. Mostly, her accusation towards the "avant-garde", is that they tried to *dictate* what Music with a

capital M should and should not be. She is the first to admit that their rigid views, quite on the contrary, kept them terminally marginal and not at all dominant in the music world. In fact, I would say that the foundation of McClary's accusations is precisely that an insignificant movement claims a disproportionate position.

However, even if Modernism allegedly only constituted 15 percent of the actual American music scene, a recent Norwegian example shows that the modernist legacy as a set of ideas reached beyond the American hemisphere. Even though Boulez seems to serve as the sole European representative in McClary's "avant-garde composer", the modernist realm of thought still seems to have some influence on the Norwegian scene. One of McClary's concerns was that promoting "avant-garde Modernism" as the only "right" way to compose, actually facilitated seclusion and lack of relevance instead of a decisive position. Is it possible that some hegemonic tendencies have set off similar mechanisms in Norway? On February 15th 2015, the Norwegian composer Marcus Paus's work *Concerto for Timpani and Orchestra* was premiered with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra[2]. This initiated a heated debate between Norwegian composers and conservatory professors, resulting in a series of commentaries and responses in the Norwegian online music magazine Ballade, and a lengthy discussion on the Facebook group *Composers in Norway* (Komponister i Norge)[3]. Professor Emeritus at the Norwegian Academy of Music, Olav Anton Thommessen, stated in his initial commentary that he was "severely aggravated" by the work (Thommessen 2015, my translation). He accuses Paus of copying American film music composer Max Steiner without giving him due credit, and of ignoring crucial musical developments, like Béla Bartók's compositions, in his writing for timpani (loc. cit.). Paus is an old student of Thommessen, who also claims that Paus has "refused to let himself be taught" (loc. cit., my translation). Thommessen's agenda seems primarily to be that the music is not at all innovative and new, and also that it ignores the (atonal) tradition.

One of the responses to Thommessen came from another Professor Emeritus at the Academy, the composer Ragnar Søderlind, and I hope Thommessen noticed that Søderlind also skipped important developmental steps. He says that the criticism of Paus' concerto is a sign of Modernism growing old, and that what started as a liberal movement has become "smug and

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[2] Broadcast on Norwegian Broadcasting's (NRK) radio channel P2, February 19, 2016

[3] This is a closed group, but I was given access while working on a term paper in spring 2015. It can be found here: https://www.facebook.com/groups/2400194279/?fref=ts

controlling" (Søderlind 2015a, my translation). He adds that, "Modernism is now so 'mainstream' that it has been elevated to the state's official music style [...]" (loc.cit). Thus Søderlind makes the same points as McClary did 25 odd years ago. Ragnar Søderlind is still trying to rock the same boat in a more recent commentary, from April 20th, 2015. He claims that the "Darmstadt-aesthetics" has a virtually totalitarian position among the composition programs in Europe (Søderlind 2015b).

This view seems to have seeped through the doors of the Norwegian Academy, because when Paus was interviewed on Norwegian Broadcasting (NRK)'s culture radio station P2, the program host (and musicologist) Marion Hestholm virtually scolded him for writing "traditionally" and in a tonal manner. She asked him why a "contemporary composer" would write in the style of 1940s Hollywood film music, implying that he somehow was obligated to follow a given tradition when he is a "real" composer within the serious arts at a serious conservatory (Hestholm 2015, my translation).

I find Thommessen's argument of *unoriginality* quite short sighted. It might be *unoriginal* if the goal is to develop music along an imagined evolutionary atonal trajectory, but atonality in itself can hardly be regarded as original a hundred years after Schoenberg. There are several other aspects of the work that can be viewed as original by other measures. For instance, writing music inspired by film music from Hollywood's golden age for symphony orchestra, centered on a timpani soloist, is as far as I know, not often done. There was also a visual element, the timpani soloist center stage, surrounded by his seven instruments that can be said to be innovative. I will argue that the following Marion Hestholm comment was equally short sighted: She implied that Paus was merely cherry-picking in aesthetics (Hestholm 2015, my translation). In the abundance of atonal styles, inventions and expressions history has produced this far, it would be hard not to "cherry-pick" in aesthetics even by choosing the atonal approach.

More than anything, I find this anecdote quite illustrative of the binary division within the classical music scene I have been addressing, and it actualizes the question of who is actually being shut out by whom.

McClary has turned back to this subject and reconsidered her arguments in her article "The Lure of the Sublime. Revisiting the modernist project" in the 2015 anthology *Transformations of Musical Modernism* (eds. Guldbrandsen and Johnson). McClary shows a

reconciling attitude towards the "avant-garde composer" and his project, and in retrospect finds their undertaking understandable, and even admirable in a historical context, considering the then-contemporary cultural circumstances (McClary 2015:23ff).

McClary endeavors to explain the circumstances in which this particular aesthetic, austerity, and sense of urgency on behalf of music as such could develop. One explanation she offers, is the aforementioned use of the deeply emotional and engaging music of the canon exploited by totalitarian regimes such as Soviet and Nazi-Germany for propaganda purposes, and how that could lead to a wish to make music for the intellect (ibid.:23). Another one is that the vast technological progress made during WWII created increased interest for hard sciences, and resulted in a weakening of the position of the humanities in the academy. This caused musicians to go in a mathematical, computer-based direction, in order to retain relevance (ibid.:24p). A third suggested explanation is the threat from the overwhelming popularity of popular music and its all-consuming mass-culture (ibid.:25).

However, although expressing understanding for the "avant-garde", McClary still passes some harsh judgments, and maintains some of her key points of criticism:

- The "avant-garde" advocated a "prohibition against addressing meaning" (McClary 2015:21)
- They ignored cultural meaning (ibid.:27)
- Their music was therefore unintelligible, and caused it to appear to uninvited listeners as "nuthouse music" (McClary 2015:22f)
- They thought that music was to "develop organically from within itself" (McClary 2015:22)
- Their form of Modernism was "the next necessary stage in the evolutionary trajectory of Western music" (McClary 2015:27)

Thus, even if she understands their objective, she still ascribes them the same attitudes. More than 25 years later, she still seems quite adamant in her claims that their music is per definition uninteresting or unintelligible, due to its lack of contextual or extra-musical meaning, and to the composers' refusal to reflect upon or interact with their surroundings. Subsequently, McClary advocates an all-inclusive, eclectic pluralism. She praises artists who explore a wide variety of feelings, meanings and expressions and combine the cerebral with

the emotional (ibid.:30ff).

McClary claims that the point of "Terminal Prestige" was not to attack Modernism as such, but simply some of the composers' views, attitudes and practices (McClary 2015:21). This becomes evident as she recognizes works of Boulez and Stockhausen as masterworks (ibid.:22). However, when she insists that music needs dramatic, emotional, and/or a recognizable aesthetic to have any public interest and appeal to an audience, does she not criticize the very essence in their aesthetic choices? As we have seen above, Erling Guldbrandsen contradicts the common conception of serial postwar Modernism as strictly and rigidly cerebral and controlled, and insists that the composers allowed for more interpretation and aesthetic preference than what scholars give them credit for, and also to some extent despite what many of them said and wrote in public. Nevertheless, I would argue that McClary's apparent dismissal of the entire idea of music as something other than, larger than or separated from extra-musical context or meaning, is diminishing a vital part of the postwar serialist project.

She claims that their music has value in retrospect, as it is now a historical epoch and the actors within it are self-reflective and recognize that their music is or was a part of a context. McClary offers a new explanation for the postwar modernists' avoidance of extra-musical meaning and emotional content in their music. She postulates that they were under the "lure of the Sublime" – referring to the Enlightenment era's replacement of *the Beautiful* with *the Sublime,* as the ideal for artistic meaning (ibid.:27). The nature of the Sublime has been discussed in philosophy for several hundred years, but McClary defines it as the "wild, untamable forces of nature" (ibid.:28). She then roughly outlines the development of atonal music, as starting with Beethoven breaking away from the rules of functional harmony. Later, composers abandoned conventions before they had a chance to settle at all, and innovation for the sake of innovation became a compositional ideal. However, she claims that this continuous search for the next new thing, constantly transcending tradition and expanding limits, inevitably led further into atonal, experimental territory. The branch of composers who kept on writing "beautiful" music, in the style often referred to as neo-classical, were ignored by scholars and the opinion elite of the institutions (ibid.:29). McClary further claims that Postmodernism needed to push the envelope even further in order to be taken seriously, and as a result, *the Beautiful* is practically dead in the arts (loc. cit.).

However apologetic and extenuating her attitude towards her old straw man appears, she is by no means ready to exonerate him completely. I perceive her setting up the superior Sublime against the inferior Beautiful as a replacement of one accusation of elitism with another. Her initial objection was that they elevated themselves and their music above the common crowd as insusceptible to social or cultural influence. This time around, she claims that they viewed their music as analogue to the edgy unpredictable Sublime as opposed to the obedient, streamlined Beautiful. Thus, the Ivory Tower remains, it just got redecorated.

There are other issues being addressed in "Terminal Prestige", such as the discussion of gender being part of the avant-garde's favored aesthetics – the austere and cerebral masculine versus the sensual and emotional feminine (McClary 1989:71ff). In "The Lure", McClary transfers this allegory to her new bifurcation: the masculine Sublime and the feminine Beautiful (McClary 2015:28). I believe a duly thorough investigation of the gender perspective would lead me too far away from my intended line of argument, but I will nevertheless return briefly to this subject in the last chapter.

1.6 Theodor W. Adorno

Adorno is quoted a few times in *Terminal Prestige,* but he is not explicitly targeted to a larger extent than any other "component" of McClary's straw man. However, the argumentation in Adorno's quite massive attack on the mass consumption of music, both in terms of cementation of a radio-friendly, classical canon and the market-driven popular music, fits the straw man's points of view like a glove.

Adorno's influence on modernist thinking is also well-documented elsewhere. His defense for Schoenberg and attack on Stravinsky in the 1949 book *Philosophy of New Music (Philosophie der neuen Musik*) made substantial impact (Adorno 2006). Adorno "dismissed Stravinsky and Bartók […] as false responses to modernity" (Botstein 2016). According to Arnulf Mattes, Adorno's lectures in Darmstadt left an "indelible mark" on composers and on "public opinion" on Modernism (Mattes 2015:246). *Grove Music Online* calls Adorno "the most influential postwar theoretical advocate of Modernism", and describes him as follows:

> If music was to follow its true historical logic and fulfill its political and ethical function, it had to resist the regressive habits of listening and the fetishistic use of

music characteristic of advanced capitalism and institutionalized by fascism (Botstein 2016:6).

As I understand it, the idea of music having a "true historical logic" is a key point in McClary's criticism. Botstein claims that, "Modernism was endorsed from the outset as an aesthetic strategy that fought against the domination and corruption of taste by business interests in the arts" (loc. cit.). Thus, the anti-commercial ideas predate Adorno, but his central texts "On the Social Situation of Music" (1932), "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening" (1938) – which must have inspired the above Grove-entry – and the infamous "On popular Music" (1941) are likely to have contributed to the myth or ideal of the *secluded composer*. It seems legitimate to link his persistent warnings of the destructive powers of mass culture and consumerism to the avant-garde composer's alleged withdrawal from the general public.

However, as I read Adorno, he does not first and foremost have an elitist agenda. He actually goes against the typical classifications of music, such as "lowbrow and highbrow", "simple and complex", "naïve and sophisticated" (Adorno 2002:441). He also claims that jazz rhythms are more complex than early Viennese classicism (loc. cit.). He might not be, as he is often accused of, negative towards popular music per se, but towards music that operates as a market commodity, which he found to be the case also with "a great share of supposedly 'serious' music adjust itself to the demands of the market" (Adorno 2002:395).

Adorno's main concern is the distinction between "standardization and non-standardization" (ibid.:442). He distinguishes between music that "unconditionally recognizes its commodity character, and, refusing any dialectic intervention […]" and music that "in principle does not accept the demands of the market" (ibid.:395). He finds that "*[s]tructural standardization aims at standard reactions"* and that such predictable and streamlined responses are incompatible with an "ideal of individuality in a free, liberal society", and that this leads to simplistic listening, even where other musical elements are more complex, as can be the case in jazz (ibid.:442, italics in original).

Adorno does not appear condescending towards the general public as such; with his sociological background, he rather seems to regard the market, consumerism, commercialism and capitalism as something close to autonomous entities, which both produce and are

facilitated by standardized music and art. He viewed Schoenberg and his school as the only real alternative to this standardization, as their music was the only one suited to shock the listener (ibid.: 396). I am assuming that he deemed this shock-effect necessary as a wake-up call or an appeal of increased activity or alertness, as opposed to the passive attitude caused by consumerism.

Additionally, Adorno had a more moderate view on modernist performance practices than the stringent Darmstadt ideal. According to Arnulf Mattes, the performance ideals of this time began with an a re-understanding of the prewar serialism of Webern and Schoenberg (Mattes 2015:245f). Adorno had strong views on how to perform the music of prewar Modernism, and in opposition to the non-interpretive postwar modernists, he wanted there to be interpretation in performances (Mattes 2015:246). Adorno admired violinist Rudolf Kolisch for his "cognitive comprehension of musical relationships, and most of all, the knowledge of all the structural and spiritual moments beneath the surface" (Adorno quoted in Mattes 2015:249). Thus, even if he found performance interpretation necessary, Adorno wanted the interpretation to be heavily founded in the written music, and he developed a "theory of musical reproduction/true interpretation" (Mattes 2015:248). These theories were to become a book in collaboration with Kolisch, but the book was never completed (loc.cit).

McClary is no less polemic and pointed in her treatment of Adorno than any other of her targets, and her cherry picking of quotes to fit the terrain to her map leaves as little room for nuances in Adorno's views as is the case with the rest. However, in "The Lure of the Sublime", she acknowledges Adorno's prediction of the harm streamlined music and lazy and uncritical listening habits can do to critical thinking, and how this partly pacified public paved the way for the Nazi propaganda machine and ultimately enabled the Holocaust (McClary 2015:26).

1.7 A performative text

Critics have blamed McClary for *causing* the marginalization of Modernism, reinforcing the very situation she was trying to stop. McClary blames the composers of marginalizing themselves and their music, and subsequently classical music in general, which may or may not be true – in any case, her description of them might have pushed them higher up in the Ivory Tower in the eyes of the public. Linda Dusman claims that McClary's type of academic definitions of and accusations against avant-garde music, or "New Music" as Dusman calls it,

sustains the music majority's, meaning the tonal music scene's, treatment of "New Music" as "the Other" (Dusman 1994:133p). Thus, "Terminal Prestige" is an example of language's power of definition (loc. cit.). The problem for "New Music" is not that is has created a hegemonic legacy, but that it is being overshadowed by a tonal mainstream (loc. cit.).

In his article "Darmstadt as Other," British musicologist Björn Heile addresses what he calls the "anti-modernist onslaught" within the English-speaking part of the musicological scene (Heile 2004:161). He accuses the New Musicology-movement in general, and "Terminal Prestige" in particular, of performing a criticism that suffers from "extreme generalization and reduction" of the modernist movement (ibid.:162). Criticizing the rhetoric, I pointed out above, Heile comments on McClary's ostensibly haphazard selection of three distinctly different composers (Boulez, Babbitt and Schoenberg) and some carefully selected extremist quotes, to represent a stereotyped "avant-garde composer" (loc. cit.).

"Terminal prestige" and the controversy it stirred is a perfect example of a *performative* text; in this particular case of how a discourse that seeks to describe a phenomenon, can be said to end up enhancing if not virtually establishing it. We have now seen a presentation of modernist aesthetics and performance ideals, and some central discourses of Modernism´s cultural and historical context. The next necessary step is to look into the discussions surrounding performance as a work of art. In the next chapter, the term *performativity* and its presence in music – in composition, text, performance and listening – will be thoroughly discussed.

2 Performativity

2.1 The performative turn

During my two years of master studies at the Department of Musicology, University of Oslo, *performativity* has been a recurring term, and I find this term and the surrounding discourses to be crucial in the understanding of the topics of this thesis: The listener's experience of an atonal piece of music that is not explicitly appealing to emotion or familiarity, and a performance that is not immediately or directly addressing the listener. Additionally, performativity seems to be a key component in the artistic ideas of Mallarmé and Boulez.

As I understand it, performativity is not a fixed term, but rather the epicenter of a variety of discourses. The origins and impacts of performativity are complex and wide-reaching, and it touches upon several disciplines and fields of research, such as philosophy, linguistics, literature, performance studies, anthropology, sociology and psychology. One such discourse is the so-called *performative turn* within the humanities. I understand this to mainly comprise the shift from viewing a work of art as mainly "text" – a written play, a musical score – to viewing the work *as performance*. In her book *The Transformative Power of Performance*, Erika Fischer-Lichte defines the performative turn as what is happening when "the creative process tends to be realized in and as performance" (Fischer-Lichte 2008:22).

Performativity as a term has its origin in linguistics. The term *performative* was first introduced by linguistic philosopher John L. Austin. In his lecture series, *How to do things with words,* held at Harvard in 1955, Austin suggested the invention of a new grammatical term. He argued that some sentences lacked adequate classification: sentences that are neither true, false, descriptive nor constative. On the contrary, they are actions. As examples of this, he uses the words "I do" in wedding ceremonies, and saying "I baptize you" as you swing a bottle towards a ship. These sentences are not statements, but actions. To utter the sentence *is* to perform the action (Austin 1975:7). Austin suggested to call such sentences "a performative sentence" or merely "a performative" (ibid.:1) *Performativity*, then, means a shift from language as object to language as action. Fischer-Lichte refers to Austin in her book, and points out that the performative sentences depend on actual changes in the world to be true performatives; they have to correspond with the social situation in which they are uttered (Fischer-Lichte 2008:24). In the wedding ceremony example, the sentence "I do" will

have to be spoken by the actual bride or groom in an actual wedding ceremony for the sentence to have a true consequence, and cause a real world change, in so far that the couple is in fact married afterwards. Thus, the performative sentence is both "self-referential and constitutive", as they create the situation they are describing (loc. cit.).

Performativity also has a second, apparently independent genesis. According to Erika Fischer-Lichte the term performativity appeared again in 1988, when Judith Butler, without reference to Austin, introduced it in cultural philosophy to describe the creation of identity as *actions* (Fischer-Lichte 2008:26). Butler means that gender identity is not a result of pre-existing social structures that are expressed through bodily acts, but the other way around: the bodily acts themselves constitute gender. These acts are not a result of a reality; it constitutes its own reality.

Erika Fischer-Lichte uses these two properties, constitutive and self-referential, as a means to explain the aesthetic status of performance-based experimental theater. She presents Mariana Abramovic's *Lips of Thomas* as an example, in which the performer physically and purposefully hurts herself. Among other things, the performer cuts the star of David into her own flesh, and thus, the semiotic meaning is upstaged by the material meaning. Although some spectators might have the capacity or presence to perceive and digest the symbolic meaning as well, the material meaning becomes more prominent and urgent. Fischer-Lichte claims that this performance is not a representation or a symbol of some external reality, but rather a creation of a new reality. Performance, then, is an event, and a genuine act of creation (ibid.:18).

Although Fischer-Lichte is mainly addressing experimental theater and the art form or genre *performance* art, and she seems to advocate that *the emergence of these new forms* is what constitutes a whole new aesthetic, her ideas of the ontological status of performance seem applicable to music.

2.2 Musicological perspectives
2.2.1 Work in progress?
Within musicology, I understand the core of performativity to be a redefinition of artistic autonomy. A work of art is not something that can be subjected to a scientifically waterproof definition or classification. Analysis and research of art should not, and could not, aim to

unveil its true meaning, because that truth simply does not exist. Objectivity is not a goal, and it is entirely inadequate as epistemological approach. This is in part because the receiving end of the art – the audience, the spectators, listeners, analysts, critics, researchers – are bound to be subjects to their own personal background, shaped by their heritage, their culture, their historical period, not to mention their mood at the time of the art experience. Any human being is by definition without the ability to pass an objective aesthetic verdict.

Another reason is that music is in a unique position, because as opposed to a play or a poem or a painting, music has two completely different ontological statuses. It can exist as written text, notation, scores, accessible to those who can read it. However, it also exists independently in another form, as audible, physical sound. It does not need to be written down before it can be performed, and then become music. The other way around is equally possible. It is a means of expression available to virtually everyone who has a voice.

In musicology, music as text seems to have landed a superior position. Nicholas Cook claims rather harshly that, "musicologists don't understand music as a performing art" (Cook 2003:204). He blames this on musicology's philological origin, and argues that this has caused musicologists to consider performance as a reproduction of a text – a performance is a performance *of* something (loc. cit.). Cook also claims that music theory is as a whole structural, and that this has led to a way of thinking about knowledge or theory as prior to and superior to performance (Cook 1999: 241f).

The origins of a performative reorientation are diverse, and span from musicologists working to include popular music in academic research, ethnomusicologists trying to explain how social context was paramount to understanding music, and from "ordinary" musicologists, who simply did not find the structural analysis of the score adequate to describe the work, like Joseph Kerman with his notorious game changing article "How we got into analysis and how to get out" (Kerman 1980[4]). Additionally, performers of modernist music have advocated acknowledgement for the performer's freedom in music with prescriptive notation.

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[4] Kerman, Joseph 1980. "How We Got into Analysis, and How to Get out" in *Critical Inquiry,* Volume 7, No 2, pp. 311-331

As opposed to descriptive notation, prescriptive notation tells the performer what to do, instead of what notes to play. The sounding result is then left up to the performer.[5]

As I understand it, at present, the performative turn within musicology is a work in progress, and in the discourse and relevant literature, the performative turn is presented as both a reason for current situations and as a future ideal. Nevertheless, the impacts or desired impacts are the same, and I perceive that they are covered by these four questions:

1. What is a musical work?
2. What is musical meaning?
3. What is musical analysis?
4. How should one analyze performance?

In the following, I have summed up what I perceive to be the attempted answers to these questions.

2.2.2. Performance as a musical work

According to Nicholas Cook, regarding the score as the musical work, leads to an unfortunate hierarchy between the score and the performance. A performance is then considered to be a presentation of an "original", but according to Cook, this original does not exist, but what does exist are several parallel editions (Cook 2003:207). In opposition to this, he states that we need to consider performance an independent work of art, its own entity, that has immanent value, and is not only a representation of the "original" work (loc. cit.). This is analogue to Lydia Goehr's attack on and "the imaginary museum" of the canon (Goehr 1992). Both the work as text and the work as imaginary object have rendered performance subject to the idea of *Werktreue* – that there exists an original version of the work, and that the performer's task is simply to convey it. Instead, Cook suggests viewing the work as a horizontal line where all representations of the work are equal, where there is no ontological difference between versions of a work, because there is no original (Cook 2003:207).

Erling Guldbrandsen, on the other hand, states that the idea of a "copy" and an "original" is not a new thought. In his article "Modernist Composer and Mahler Conductor: Changing Conceptions of Performativity in Boulez", Guldbrandsen links it to the discourse on *mimesis,* imitation, and connects it in a backwards trajectory through the history of philosophy, via

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[5] For more on this topic, look at Tanja Orning's article "The ethics of performance practice in complex music after 1945" in *Transformations of Musical Modernism* (eds. E. Guldbrandsen and J. Johnson).

Derrida, Kierkegaard, Hegel and finally back to Plato (Guldbrandsen 2006:142). Derrida sees no point is this reversal of hierarchy, as this operation only reassures the relationship. A copy cannot exist without an original, but the original does not have the status as such unless there is a copy (loc. cit.). If you claim that the copy is equally valuable as the original, the basic structure prevails.

2.2.3 Musical meaning as social interaction
A profound consequence of viewing performance as an autonomous musical work is the shift in the definition of musical meaning. Critics of structuralist and text-based approaches to music have accused their opponents of believing that music has immanent meaning. In opposition to this, Nicholas Cook has the following statement:

> The extraordinary illusion – because that is what it is – that there is such a thing as music, rather than simply acts of making and receiving it [...] (Cook 2003:208).

I read this as a statement that music has no immanent meaning, that meaning happens when music is performed and listened to. He also claims that music is "an irreducibly social phenomenon" (ibid.:206).

This view has strong support in fields where performance studies were first advocated, such as in popular music studies. This discipline has strived to gain recognition as a topic worthy of academic research. Phillip Tagg talks about the press' ridicule of popular musicology's first conference, International Conference on Popular Music Research, as late as 1981 (Tagg 2000:71f). The press considered it incredible to perform serious research in such an unserious and light weight field as entertainment (loc. cit.). One of the main causes of this was how popular music in general falls through when analyzed within the parameters of classical music, or rather "(...) 'evaluated' along some sort of Platonic ideal scale of aesthetic values (...)". Tagg points out that a lot of elements and forms of expression within popular music are difficult to express through traditional notation (ibid.:75). Tagg claims that the relationship between the listener and the performer, the sounding music emerging in performance and "the sociocultural field of study" are more important parameters in analyzing popular music (ibid.:82).

From anthropology come analogous thoughts. In criticizing traditional score based music analysis, Steven Feld claims that music cannot be expressed with language, because "one cannot say with words what music can say without them" (Feld 1994:93). In order to make the same point, Clifford Geertz, says, "if you have to ask what jazz is, you are never going to get to know" (Geertz 1983:94). Geertz links this to Wittgenstein and his famous quote: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" (Wittgenstein quoted in Geertz 1983:95). As a consequence of this, Feld deems it inadequate to relate to music solely through score and notation, and apply semiotic meaning, because musical meaning emerges in the listener's context and interpretation. Feld recognizes that for instance Phillip Tagg previously has opened up to include some aspects of the audience's experience, but accuses him of still presupposing that there is "something" inside the music itself that the audience are being exposed to (Feld 1994:82). In Feld's opinion, musical meaning is being formed by all the aspects of the listener's experience, and neither the music expressed in a given situation, the listener's experience or the surrounding circumstances can be regarded as isolated events (ibid.:181).

Erika Fischer-Lichte claims that the line between performer and receiver is softened in performance art. She argues that the meaning in a performance emerges in the entire situation surrounding it, and in the symbiotic relationship between performer and receiver (Fischer-Lichte 2008:75f). According to Fischer-Lichte, conventional boundaries dissolve when we talk about a work of art as experience. She claims that the "subject/object" distinction between audience and performer is no longer valid, but that art happens when the two interact (loc. cit.).

2.2.4 Performative music analysis
Nicholas Cook wants a music analysis that is *aware of its own performativity,* meaning that the analyst is aware of what it *does*, not merely what it *is* (Cook 1999:242). This means that musicological language or discourse molds musical practices, and this is the reason for the score-based view of the work. This is in line with the performativity of texts mentioned above.

As far as I understand, many of the wishes for a *performative* music analysis are already thoroughly formulated in hermeneutics. The two hermeneutic scholars Schleiermacher and Gadamer seem to agree that it is crucial for the interpreter to include his own point of view

into the reading of a text. Schleiermacher states already in lectures on hermeneutics in the fall of 1829 that the interpreter's understanding of a text is determined by his relation to it, particularly in the sense that a reader from the present will not understand a text from the classical Greek antique in the same way as the then-contemporary reader (Schleiermacher 1999:74). When trying to account for the present state of hermeneutics in his day, Schleiermacher consistently returns to what influence the reader's personal, cultural and professional background has on his understanding of the text. Some 130 years later, in 1960, Hans-Georg Gadamer thoroughly elaborates on how to navigate carefully to avoid judging a text based on personal predispositions, and at all times be aware of where one's interpretations origin (Gadamer 1999:128ff).

Additionally, the idea that an interpretation of a work is *performative* can also be traced back to early hermeneutics. Schleiermacher states that the interpreter should endeavor to understand the author better than he understands himself (Schleiermacher 1999:60). It lies implicit in this that the reader has to add his own knowledge of the author and his historical and personal surroundings, and thus add something of his own, consequently creating something new.

2.2.5 How to analyze performance

Performance analysis as such is not new. According to Nicholas Cook, traditional performance analysis is based on one of two scenarios: The performer analyses the work before playing, in order to determine "how to play it", or a critic analyses the performance afterwards and evaluates whether or not he played it "rightly". In both cases, there is a presupposition that music has immanent meaning. The performer's task is to *find* this meaning (Cook 1999:240). The performance is treated as an interpretation, not as an independent work. Cook claims that the problem with traditional structure analysis is that it compares the work to an imagined reality, the "original", as mentioned above. The work and all its context is its own reality, and each performance is also its own reality (ibid.:182f.). Music as performance is so fundamentally different from written music, that performance analysis needs to be based on its own epistemological approach, and not merely an adaptation of traditional structure analysis (ibid.:178ff).

Is this applicable to all musical works? As I understand it, the difficulty in creating a music analysis that recognizes performance as an independent work lies in that this is not

adequately targeted by the existing forms of analysis. In claiming that all performance is a work of its own and must be analyzed accordingly, does one not risk repeating the same unfortunate pattern of trying to mold all music into the same form? If we apply Erika Fischer-Lichte and Nicholas Cook's new definitions, that musical meaning emerges in the interaction between listener and performer, is this an adequate term for *all musical works?* The new work term is molded on music that is not a *representation* (of something else), but rather on music that is performative in its nature, for instance:

- Music based on (advanced) improvisation over simple structures or starting points, such as a chord sheet (jazz, or general bass in Baroque music)
- Works based on simple compositions where the performer's personal characteristic and expression are the main artistic output (singer/songwriter, pop music)
- Atonal or experimental music with prescriptive notation that leaves a lot to the performer

I find that this performance-based, material approach to perceiving music is inadequate in dealing with music that is created on different terms than the categories above. Additionally, this approach would leave out some important aspects, such as the work as an intersubjective idea, within certain subcultures, or simply between everyone who is familiar with it. Complex, tonal and harmonic music, for instance a Beethoven symphony, is based on a meticulously planned score, composed over hours and hours of mental labor. Can the performance of such music to a larger extent be viewed as a work in its own right, or will it per definition be closer to a mimetic representation? Or can we even go as far as stating that it ought to have a character of mimetic representation; not only, or necessarily as a re-presentation of the "original" score, but as a performance of something that very much operate on preexisting terms? A performance of a score that is based on a known tonal system, on rules or norms of harmonic composition, thus presupposing a substantial cultural context, a known reality – cannot be said to constitute an entirely new reality.

It seems to me that tonal, harmonic music is not as naturally targeted by the idea of "performance as a work of its own" as the other forms of music I have mentioned above. The only exception would be if the listener were completely unfamiliar with all tonal music, then Erika Fischer-Lichte's merge of the performer and the listener would make the same sense as for experimental or improvised music.

In a more recent article, Nicholas Cook admits it would "be absurd to deny that there is a dimension of reproduction" (Cook 2014:24). He has previously suggested to replace the word "text" or "score" with "script", claiming that is a more accurate way to describe how the performer relates to it, and a suggestion of how the analyst can better use it (Cook 2003:206). In the 2014 article, he suggests to borrow the word "referent" from popular music analysis, in which it is used to describe the basis chord sequences a performance is based on, for instance a jazz "standard" (Cook 2014:25). Cook suggests that the term is applicable to the musical score in classical music. In that way one can talk about how the performance of a classical piece of music relates to its referent (ibid.:25f).

I find *referent* to be a rather adequate term when trying to describe the flexible and complex relationship between the performance and the score. Despite the fact that numerous innovative musicologists have spent the last decades criticizing and looking for alternatives to the traditional structural score-based analysis, to my knowledge, their efforts are not thus far rewarded with *one* unifying adequate replacement.

Spectrograms are in common use as a tool for analyzing performance, but Cook argues that this kind of auditory analysis is not sufficient to analyze performance, that performance analysis needs its own epistemological approach, and that one should not simply substitute one type of structural analysis with another (Cook 1999:250). In a Cambridge lecture from 2012, Cook claims that empirical and social/cultural analysis supplement each other, and that each form can say something about the work that the other cannot (Cook 2012). Cook wants a pluralistic approach, which operates simultaneously on several levels.

Erling Guldbrandsen argues that a new, fixed performance analysis is futile. He would rather see an exploration of all the elements and powers surrounding a work – in the ongoing discourse, the relationship between composer and performer, performer and listener (Guldbrandsen 2006:141). Gulbrandsen says that the performative probably needs to be developed further, and extend the musical work to include all factors surrounding a work – reception, critique, discourses and historical and cultural context (ibid.:141).

2.2.6 Recordings as art objects
It seems to me that the discussion on how to analyze *performance* is often in reality a

discussion on how to analyze *recordings,* without the difference being problematized. There are exceptions, of course, for instance the extensive work of CHARM, The AHRC Research Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music[6]. Notwithstanding their efforts, my impression is that a recording is often viewed as a true replica of "the work", which in this case must be the performance. Nicholas Cook suggests that the relationship between the performance and a recording of it, is analogue to the traditional connection between score and performance in the *Werktreue* tradition – the recording must be true to the performance (Cook 2014:26). This is in many cases an illusion, at least when considering the endless possibilities in a recording studio: for instance, choosing the best of innumerable takes and recording individual instruments and harmonies separately. Cook calls it to "construct virtual or fictive [performances]" (ibid.:27). Not to mention the artistic choices of the producer. In popular music, I would say producers' efforts are often inseparable and integrated part of the artistic expression of the musical performers, or as Cook says, the production process has a "fragmented authorship" and is "irreducibly collaborative" (loc. cit.).

I suppose the larger works in Western art music, which require a big production with a full symphony orchestra, are often recorded in an actual performance, but even then, the sound is going through the choices of a producer before reaching the listener. Sound engineering and record production is an art form in itself and a topic vast enough to require a thesis on its own, hence, I will not elaborate on the topic. Nevertheless, it seems to me that a recorded work holds its ground as a work of art in its own right. It is a physical object, a fixed soundscape available to the listener at any given time he or she might choose to play it, comparable to a painting in an art gallery.

2.3 Creating a performative work – A "shared vision"

In addition to being relevant for my performance analysis, the concept of *performativity* seems to be a crucial aspect in the works of Mallarmé and Boulez. Mary Breatnach claims that Mallarmé and Boulez have a "shared and definable vision of art and of artistic purpose" (Breatnach 1996:ix). It seems to me that one very significant common denominator of this "vision", is that a work of art, at least a poem or a piece of music, should be *performative* in its nature, meaning that it should not be created as a projection of some fixed message or meaning. Rather, a work of art should facilitate the presence or *emergence* of several possible

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[6] http://www.charm.kcl.ac.uk

meanings. Or, if we apply the definition of performative summed up by Erika Fischer-Lichte – it should *constitute new realities* and be *self-referential*.

Mallarmé's influence on Boulez is a well-known phenomenon, which has been subject to extensive research. According to Erling Guldbrandsen, there are references to Mallarmé throughout virtually everything Boulez has written or said about music, and Mallarmé's approach to creating poetry has had an influence on Boulez's compositional techniques (Guldbrandsen 1997:255). Although their lives and work are some eighty years apart, Boulez viewed Mallarmé as his "aesthetic contemporary" (ibid.:259, my translation).

Barbara Johnson claims to discover a potential "truly revolutionary performativity" in the Mallarmé prose poem *La déclaration foraine,* when she reads the poem applying John L. Austin's theories of performative sentences (Johnson 1980:58). Her reading shows examples of both eliminating the author in a meta perspective and of performativity it results in. This is what I perceive to be the essence of her recount of the poem: A man and a woman enter a market place. The woman mounts a table in an empty stand, and suddenly faced with an expectant audience, the man recites a sonnet about the beauty of the woman's hair, apparently improvised on the spot off the top of his head. Whether the incident was calculated or improvised remains unclear in their conversation as they leave the premises, likewise whether the poem would have ever been created had it not been for those particular circumstances (ibid.:56f).

Johnson finds several performative qualities in the poem. I will here present the two most relevant in this context. The first one, is what Johnson perceives as a removal of the *subject*, of which she claims Mallarmé had a particular desire (ibid.:58). Johnson compares the unclear circumstances surrounding the recitation of the sonnet in *La déclaration foraine* to the ambiguous status of the referent in Austin's *performative* sentence (ibid.:55f). Linguistically, a performative sentence cannot have a referent, as the sentence is not a statement *about* anyone or anything – the sentence is the action of the utterer, and the utterance is the action. It is thus self-referential. For all practical purposes, however, there is most definitely a referent present when the sentence is uttered – the person who performs the act by speaking it. One can say, then, that the utter is disconnected from the utterance. In the same manner, the "poet" is disconnected from his utterance, as he claims he squirted out the sonnet as something close to a reflex, inspired by the pressure from having an audience. The

utterer admits no ownership to the utterance, thus it becomes self-referential, and subsequently, performative, as is it not a prewritten or constructed text as such – it is an action.

Johnson links this to the famous Mallarmé quote about the anonymous author: "The (poetic) work implies the elocutionary disappearance of the poet, who leaves the initiative to words…" (Mallarmé in Johnson 1980:150). Johnson speculates whether Mallarmé is referring to or promoting his own ideal of the anonymous author by questioning the connection between utterance and utterer. However, Johnson states that even this lack of connection between is so vaguely spoken of by the two actors in the poem, that the separation between utterer and utterance is an open question. Did the "poet" think about the poem already in the carriage? Would he ever have said it out loud were it not for the unexpected situation?

This ambiguity brings us over to the other relevant example of performativity; Mallarmé's non-referentiality, or the "non-correspondence between the obvious and the true" (Johnson 1980:53). As I understand it, Mallarmé carefully excludes every intuitive and straight forward option, or in Johnson's words, he challenges intelligibility itself by creating "seemingly exclusive readings of the same piece of language" (ibid.:65).

The mentioned non-referentiality seems to me as the essence of Mallarmé's performativity. As the objects and elements in his poems never are what they seem, they have to be something else. When the poem makes no conceivable sense on semantic, figurative or semiotic levels, other layers of meaning are forced into play; the material qualities, such as assonance or alliteration, the visual appearance of the poem, the typography et cetera.

I find that the deconstruction of language serves yet another performative purpose. By avoiding or ignoring common rules of language and traditional meaning of words, Mallarmé creates a sort of alternative, inner *structure*. Hugo Friedrich states that Mallarmé deals with simple items in his poetry, but distorts their ordinary meaning and purpose, or describes them as absent, so that their main presence is simply in language (Friedrich 1956:96). Correspondingly, Boulez says that Mallarmé treats words, for instance the word flower – as a general idea. Then the flower as a metaphor or symbol, reiteration of reality, is irrelevant. The word flower is a presence, an entity in itself (Guldbrandsen 1996:12, interview part 3). It

seems to me that when the connection between items are unclear, new possible connections occur and creates new and unpredicted correlations between the items.

In the analysis of *A la nue accablante tu* in the next chapter, we shall see two other examples of such structure. One is that the sentences are tied together by a syntax that provides no obvious thematic meaning, so that the primary purpose of the syntax becomes creating structure, not carrying semantic or thematic meaning. The other one is that Mallarmé simply subjects his poetry to preexisting fixed outer forms, like the sonnet*,* and rigidly obeys the formal rules.

I find Mallarmé's poetry to be performative in two ways, then. Both because it constitutes new concrete, self-referential realities in terms of material qualities and structures, and because by deconstructing the face value, logical meaning of virtually everything, he opens up to infinite possibilities. The poem is creating new possible realities while being read.

This constitution of new realities seems to me to be analogue to Nicholas Cook's effort to lift performance out of the shadow of the score – to elevate the status of performance to a work in its own right instead of being a copy of an original. This brings us back to the term *mimesis*. According to Erling Guldbrandsen, Derrida separates between Mallarmé's and Plato's idea of mimesis (Guldbrandsen 1997:284). Derrida thinks there has been an artificial break between two different views on mimesis since Plato (ibid.:285). As we have seen earlier, Plato finds that art imitates the truth. Derrida claims that Mallarmé's form of mimesis is not only a copy, because it is impossible even for a reiteration to *add nothing at all.* There will always be a slight change, even the fact that the repetition *is a repetition and not the original* is in itself per definition a new aspect. Thus, the copy actually says more than the original. As I understand it, Derrida's essential point is that Mallarmé's poetry creates new realities; it is not merely a representation.

I would argue that many of these performative elements are present in Boulez's thoughts on composition, too. In a 1996 interview with Guldbrandsen, Boulez refers to Mallarmé's anonymous author, and explains how he shares Mallarmé's view that the work of art shall transcend the author's voice or presence (Guldbrandsen 1996:11, interview part 3). As I understand it, the use of serial techniques is one tool to achieve this anonymity. One of Guldbrandsens main findings in his doctoral thesis, is that Boulez's use of serial techniques

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were not motivated by the idealist view that composition should be cerebral and mathematical, as common conception has it, but as rather as a tool to "produce material" (Guldbrandsen 1997:357). Boulez uses the created series to generate material, to get started with instrumentation, and the rules are ignored when other considerations dictate it (ibid.:356). In the mentioned interview with Guldbrandsen, Boulez describes his reason for developing and using serial techniques as a way to free himself of his own thoughts, memories, habits, influences and so on. He wants to create a system that generates something he could not have thought of himself (Guldbrandsen 1996:19, interview part 3). Boulez says that if one sits down to write freely, one is not free at all, but a "complete prisoner" of one's personal context (loc. cit.).

It is my impression that the structures provided by serial composition to some extent are comparable to Mallarmé's grammatical and material structures, caused by his poems' apparently nonsensical content. As I understand it, the serial framework serves as a foundation of an *open form* – a form that facilitates several interpretations. Jameux speaks of Boulez's complexity of the form as a means of creating possibilities (Jameux 1991:333). Boulez himself claims to see the work as a labyrinth with several possible paths (Guldbrandsen 1997:263). Thus, Boulez as a composer has stepped out and let the system he facilitated dictate much of the work's creation. As I shall seek to demonstrate in my analysis, Boulez is also underlining and extending Mallarmé's emphasis of material qualities in the way he sets the poem to music.

As I see it, performativity is a core component in the joined artistic idea of Mallarmé and Boulez. They both seek to create works that are open-ended, create infinite possible meanings and constitute new realities.

At this point, both the historical, cultural and theoretical backdrop for my analysis is presented. In this chapter, we have seen both how performativity is crucial in understanding performance as a musical work, and of the artistic idea of Boulez and Mallarmé. In the next chapter, we shall move on to the poem used in the music, and look for performative elements and material qualities which will be relevant for the setting of the text to music, and for the choices available to the singer.

3 A la nue accablante tu

3.1 The poet

The poems used in *Pli selon pli – portrait de Mallarmé,* are (as suggested by the title) written by French symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898). Each movement is dedicated to a different poem, and the fourth movement is based on the poem *A la nue accablante tu,* written in 1895.

Despite a relatively modest production, Mallarmé is widely recognized for his severe impact on poetry, and particularly for his inauguration of Modernism. His poetry is layered, complex and ambiguous, and according to Hugo Friedrich, its "obscurity is feared and famous. It has to be decoded by the language used only by this particular writer" (Friedrich 1956:94, my translation). Mary Breatnach claims that his poetry is often referred to as being "difficult" (Breatnach 1996:22). As we have seen in the first chapter, this is a label it shares with Boulez's music.

> A LA NUE accablante tu
> Basse de basalte et de laves
> A même les échos esclaves
> Par une trompe sans vertu
>
> Quel sépulcral naufrage (tu
> Le sais, écume, mais y baves)
> Suprême une entre les épaves
> Abolit le mât dévêtu
>
> Ou cela que furibond faute
> De quelque perdition haute
> Tout l'abîme vain éployé
>
> Dans le si blanc cheveu qui traîne
> Avarement aura noyé
> Le flanc enfant d'une sirène.

3.2 Outer structure

According to Mary Breatnach, one of Mallarmé's trademarks, particularly in his earlier poetry, is the contrast between the simple structural appearance and complex content (Breatnach 1996:22). Although written late in his life, this description is most adequate for *A la nue accablante tu.* By first glance, the poem looks rather straightforward. Visually, it appears uniform and formal, and its structure is regular and systematic.

Corresponding with the Italian *Petrarca sonnet*, *A la nue* has fourteen verses, arranged in a dualistic manner. The verses are divided an *octave* (eight verses) and a *sestet* (six verses). The octave consists of two *quatrains* á four verses*,* and similarly, two *tercets* á three verses make up the sestet. The quatrains' end rhymes are consistent with the Italian sonnet, abba + abba, but the end rhymes in the tercets are in the style of the French *sonnet régulier:* ccd + ede.

1. A LA NUE accablante tu (a)
2. Basse de basalte et de laves (b)
3. A même les échos esclaves (b)
4. Par une trompe sans vertu (a)

5. Quel sépulcral naufrage (tu (a)
6. Le sais, écume, mais y baves) (b)
7. Suprême une entre les épaves (b)
8. Abolit le mât dévêtu (a)

9. Ou cela que furibond faute (c)
10. De quelque perdition haute (c)
11. Tout l'abîme vain éployé (d)

12. Dans le si blanc cheveu qui traîne (e)
13. Avarement aura noyé (d)
14. Le flanc enfant d'une sirène. (e)

3.3 Meter and rhythm

Despite these consistencies with the French and Italian sonnet form, neither the French *alexandrine* nor the Italian *hendecasyllable* metric styles apply, and the Shakespearian iambic pentameter is also too long for the quite short verses of *A la nue.* There seems to be no consistent metric pattern, except for the 6th, 7th and 14th verse that all have identical structure; two iambs followed by an anapest. However, a scansion reveals that there are three ictic beats in each verse, which provides a sense of a steady rhythm, thus contributing to the overall sense of a stringent form. One exception might be the fourth and twelfth line, in which semantically, the first syllable can be both stressed and unstressed, thus providing these verses with, respectively, two and four beats. Still, the general tendency of a regular rhythm appears solid. I will return to the meter and rhythm of the poem in the analysis of the soprano part.

3.4 Sonority and musicality

Another element that adds to this feeling of coherence and creates a sense of unity is the extensive occurrence of assonance and alliteration. Certain vowel sounds are repeated throughout the poem, particularly *a, u* and *é/è*. This occurs in the end rhymes, as displayed below,

End rhymes	Phonemes
a	u
b	a
d	é
e	è

but also in other syllables, both the ictic and non-ictic ones. The most prominent example of this is in the first two verses, *A la nue accablante tu/Basse de basalte et de laves*, where the vowel sound "a" is repeated respectively five and four times. *[A meme] les echos esclaves* is another representative example with its repeated "e"-sounds. The chosen samples are also examples of consonantal alliteration, respectively the "b" of *accablante, basse* and *basalte,* and the repetition on "s" and "c" in all three verses.

In addition to contributing to coherence, Mallarmé's refined play with the words' and syllables' immanent musicality creates a new layer of meaning, or "a separate sensuous

dimension" (Guldbrandsen 1997:320). These sonorous qualities certainly play a part in Boulez's musical interpretation, and they shall be discussed further in the analysis of the soprano part.

Although Mallarmé might have meant that "rhythm, musicality and beauty is a goal in its own right" (Guldbrandsen 1997:309), it seems likely that the purpose of alliteration at the same time could be stressing important thematic elements, for example in the last verse, *[Le] flanc enfant [d'une sirène].* The "f" 's certainly make these two words stand out, and could signal that there is a reason that the *flank* of the siren is mentioned, and not just the siren herself, or seek to bring attention to the fact that the flank is *childish/childlike.* This brings us over to the next layer of the poem – the thematic meaning.

3.5 Thematic meaning
3.5.1 "Literal" meaning and inner structure
The framework and formal outer structure of the poem creates a sense of coherence and regularity that stands out in stark contrast to the impenetrable, nontransparent thematic meaning of the poem. In my effort to disentangle this knot, I will try to organize the themes of the poem in *layers of meaning*, along what I perceive as the different pillars of the inner structure.

I have called the first layer *literal meaning,* and by that, I mean, what would be a plausible answer to the question *what is going on.* When first reading through the poem, one is faced with what appears to be fairly ordinary, manageable elements, but the trouble begins when one tries to find coherence and connection between them. They seem to be caught in obscure context, and their purpose is veiled by ambiguity. One of the main causes of this obscurity is the playful syntax. Guldbrandesen demonstrates how the poem's chronological narrative changes according to how one interprets the syntax (Guldbrandsen 1997:313). By applying different possible versions, he finds an abundance of contradicting but equally plausible course of events.

In his analysis of the Mallarmé poem *Sainte,* Hugo Friedrich states that the elements in the poem are not necessarily supposed to relate to each other in a literal or logical way (Friedrich 1956:98). He claims that Mallarmé often describes or mentions items that are not actually present in the poem's image or narrative, maybe just mentioned as something that is missing,

and that this disconnection from the circumstances is a way of making the items represent only themselves, or be present only as the item in its own right (loc. cit.). I find this approach quite relevant for *A la nue,* considering that the elements at play seem rather feasible in themselves. I want to see what information that can be the extracted by examining the separate elements of the poem without regard to the syntax, and without dealing principally with their relation to one another.

Upon translating and examining the poem, I came across a sort of *inner structure*. The mentioned *elements* are evenly spread out – each verse includes one element, or more specifically a *noun* (except for verse 13). The following display is a combination of my own translation and the ones of Breatnach (Breatnach 1996:120f) and Cohn (Cohn 1980:229f).

1. A [damning/stormy] cloud
2. Bank [of basalt and lava]
3. [Enslaved] echoes
4. Horn [without virtue]

5. [Grave-like] shipwreck
6. [Oozing and knowing] foam
7. Flotsam
8. [Undressing/undressed] mast

9. [Furious] mistake
10. [Lofty] damnation
11. [Shallow] depths/abyss

12. A [very white] strand of hair [which trails]
13. Stingily drowned
14. A [childish/childlike] siren-flank

Apart from in the first tercet, all these nouns are fairly concrete items. The nouns in the first tercet are more abstract, and I will leave them out for now. Even without an explicit account of these nouns' relation to one another, some possible links and probable connections appear:

- Underneath a cloud, there is a bank (of basalt and lava)
- Something is echoing (a sound has been made?)
- A horn might have sounded (and made the echo?)
- A (physical) shipwreck is seen/a shipwreck is taking or has taken place
- Foam indicates stirring water (from the sinking ship?)
- Flotsam indicates that there has been a crushing impact already
- A mast without sail – the mast of the sinking ship?
- A trail of foam (shaped like a strand of white hair), might be a track left by the ship or the siren
- Only the flank of a siren is visible, indicating that the rest of her is below water, maybe either floating (dead) or sinking (drowning)

This is what can be deduced from the simple fact that these elements are placed together in a text. Rather than a narrative, which describe what has happened or what is going on, what emerges from this approach is a sense of *current action*. Evidence to support this can be found in *le mât dévêtu*; The word *dévêtu* can be both a verb and an adjective, and if we choose the first option, it could mean that the mast *in the process of* losing its sail, *the undressing mast*. This might suggest that the mast is *in the process* of sinking. Similarly, the reference to the siren's mere *flank* could indicate that she is currently sinking. There is also the mention of foam, both around the flotsam, and possibly as a trail left either by the wrecked ship or the siren, and considering the ephemeral quality foam, this suggests that what caused the foam to emerge just happened or is still going on. Thus, I get a sense of a displayed ongoing scenario, or maybe a visual image for the inner eye, rather than a chronological narrative.

In the above account, I left out the more abstract elements of the first tercet. This shift from the concrete to the abstract corresponds slightly with another possible inner structure – the turn, or *volta*, in the argument or dialectic that typically takes place within a sonnet. After displaying the relatively concrete elements in their obscure context, clouded by vague insinuations, a more drastic judgment is passed on the situation, by adding elements with ominous connotations. A mistake has taken place, there is talk of damnation, and of an abyss, whether metaphorical or literal, it still has a somber ring to it. In the last tercet, we are once again presented with fairly concrete elements; the poem laconically describes a trail of foam

and a possibly drowned siren. According to the inner logic of a sonnet's argument, the tercets should now have given us the resolution. That, however, would presuppose that we *understood the proposition* clearly, and this is where we encounter the several possible interpretations of the poem's syntax. When Guldbrandsen analyzes the syntax, he ends up with several conflicting but equally grammatically valid possibilities. For instance, the quatrains can be read either as *the shipwreck has abolished the mast*, or, as that *the mast has abolished the shipwreck*. Likewise, in the tercets: Either *the abyss has drowned a siren*, or *the siren has drowned the abyss* (Guldbrandsen 1997:317f). There are therefore many possible propositions and resolutions of the argument. A note on "mistake" – Mary Breatnach translates the word "faute" with "lack". With one possible syntax, this sentence then becomes connected to the next: *(…) for lack/Of some exalted perdition.* The abstractness of "mistake" as the big shift would in that case be somewhat invalid, although the entire tercet has a more abstract nature than both the preceding and following verses (Breatnach 1996:121).

There is another clear shift and possible *volta* in the ninth line, namely the word "or" [ou]. When taking the syntax into consideration, there seems to be a question of whether or not there has actually been a shipwreck, or if the main event that has occurred is the drowning of the siren. Without the word "or", one might think that the drowned siren, in capacity of resolution, took over the scene and ruled out the possibility of the shipwreck, but "or" indicates that the arguments or situations presented in the quatrains and tercets are two equal possibilities.

The word *or* is peculiar in another sense, too. The idea that there has *either* been a shipwreck *or* a drowning of a siren is somewhat mysterious, when mythologically the sirens are the *cause* of shipwrecks, luring sailors towards the reefs (or banks) with their irresistible song. It seems odd to give a siren and a shipwreck main roles in the same poem without observing that link. Is it possible that the siren lured the ship to wreck and was caught in the undertow?

Clearly, there are unlimited possible answers to the question of *what is going on,* and even this *first* layer of meaning keeps opening up in new directions the closer you look.

3.5.2 Symbolic and metaphorical meaning
The presentation above of the thematic meaning deals with the concrete or literal events or images that supposedly are being conveyed through the poem. When peeling off yet another

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layer, a whole new sphere of symbolic connotations and associations comes into play. I have called this level the symbolic and metaphorical layer.

Robert Greer Cohn's analysis deals extensively with this aspect. He dives straight into the underlying meanings, and he seems to be operating with three main frameworks of reference, or three *layers of meaning,* if you will, sublayers within the symbolic layer.

1. The "Land of the Poetry of Mallarmé"
   Cohn refers to words, terms and items in *A la nue,* which are also used in other Mallarmé poems, and transfers their presumed function and symbolic meaning from one poem to another. Thus, he simultaneously leans on a presumed established meaning, helps reinforce this meaning, and relates to and helps create a supposed inner logic of Mallarmé's poetic universe.

2. The (preceding) Western cultural canon
   Cohn places elements in *A la nue* within literature, poetry, music, art and mythology. It remains unclear to me whether Cohn assumes that Mallarmé is consciously making these references, if it is Cohn's personal interpretation, or if it is simply an account of intertextuality.

3. Mallarmé's personal life
   Cohn claims that Mallarmé places himself and characters from his life in the poem. For instance, the siren is simultaneously a reference to Mallarmé's deceased son (*flanc enfant*), Mallarmé as a father, and as a poet – as a representative universal Poet with capital P (Cohn 1980:234f).

All these approaches seem to place emphasis mainly on Mallarmé's presumed *intent*. As far as I can tell, that seems to go against some key issues Mallarmé stood for as a poet – creating a set of possibilities existing simultaneously, as I shall explain more thoroughly in the next chapter. I'm not sure that Mallarmé's *intention* was that readers should interpret his poem by looking for his intention (!). Be that as it may, if the point of the poem is to open op to limitless possibilities, the poet's intended meaning is of course highly relevant as *one* of these possibilities.

Cohn finds that the poem asks about and/or comments on the Big Eternal Questions: the fate of humanity, life and death, status of the art, the nature of existence. He compares this shipwreck to the one in *Un Coup de Dés*, and interprets it to symbolize "Man's fall" (ibid.:229). There is certainly enough gloomy, somber imagery to support this interpretation, such as damning, grave-like, enslaved, without virtue, damnation, drowning – not to mention that the nature of a shipwreck is sufficiently dismal in its own right.

As mentioned above, I perceive the poem more as an image than as a narrative. This image displays a number of current events, such as the stirring foam, the sinking mast and siren, but maybe the clearest overall impression is that something *has* taken place, just now, and the scenery presented is the aftermath of something. Here are three possible aftermaths:

- Post-coital: There are a number of erotic undertones to be found in the poem. Cohn points out the erotic potential in "the swallowing of the stripped mast by this dark gulf" (Cohn 1980:233). The phallism of the "naked" mast is quite extrusive. Whether or not the mast has abolished something or has been abolished, it is, as Guldbrandsen observes, "on its way down" (Guldbrandsen 1997:315). The dying/dead/raped(?), innocent/virginal (child-like) siren fits neatly into that picture, and the white foam floating idly on the stirred up "battlefield" or crime scene ocean, might very well pass of as sperm, the latter also as observed by Guldbrandsen (loc. cit.).

- Post (good/worthy) art: The arts have deteriorated and stagnated – music/art (horn) is without virtue, forced to only repeat itself (enslaved echoes) – everything collapsed altogether (shipwreck) and left the pure and singing siren dead. According to Guldbrandsen, a common reading is that there has been "no real shipwreck, but a poetic defeat, symbolized by a drowned siren" (Guldbrandsen 1997:318)

- Post-apocalypse: The siren is Humanity, the shipwreck is Armageddon. A prominent feature of the poem is the recurring theme of dark versus light. The dark cloud, the dark bank, dark stirring ocean, and the white siren, white foam, white trail/hair. Good versus evil, life versus death. Darkness prevailed, and left goodness (siren) floating lifelessly in the water.

3.6 Concluding observations

When peeling off these layers, one doesn't seem to get any closer to the core. Instead, the poem expands, as an inexhaustible spring. The stringent sonnet form (save partially the meter), the fairly even rhythm, the coherence in sounds and timbre, and the clear-cut typography stand out in opposition to the incoherent and eclectic abundance of meaning.

It looks like the austere, streamlined form facilitates all the possible interpretations. Some features get a new purpose, for instance the syntax. It is moved from being a vehicle of thematic meaning to becoming a tool to create structure. The syntax abandons its original task – to provide meaning to the particular combination of words, transcending the meaning of each individual word – and is instead part of the scaffolding. The poem is then "perpetually fluctuating between several possible readings" (Guldbrandsen 1997:313, my translation).

I see this as an indication of what we have seen in the previous chapter, that for Mallarmé, the *structure is more important than the narrative*. Mallarmé's poem is an abundance of material qualities and floating self-referential objects, and is performative, in the sense that no fixed meaning or message is being conveyed, the poem is rather a facilitator of potential meaning. It is then time to look at the music, to see what Boulez has done with Mallarmé's text, and how the singers choose to approach it all.

4 The Music – "Improvisation III"

4.1 *Pli selon pli*

The work *Pli selon pli – portrait de Mallarmé* consists of five movements, each based on a poem by Mallarmé. The title is from another Mallarmé poem, *Remémoration d'amis belges*. The piece was written between 1957 and 1962, recorded in 1969, and then again in 1981. The first score from 1959, upon which the two first recordings are based, is withdrawn by the composer. A substantially rewritten official score was published in 1982, and then the piece was recorded again in 2001, now corresponding with the published score. These are the five movements:

1. Don
2. Improvisation sur Mallarmé I: "Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui"
3. Improvisation sur Mallarmé II: "Une dentelle s'abolit"
4. Improvisation sur Mallarmé III: "A la nue accablante tu"
5. Tombeau

4.2 Terms of analysis

As stated earlier, the purpose of this analysis is mainly to examine the character of the vocal performance. Additionally, I want to examine the conveyance of the poem's text, both how Boulez has chosen to set the word to music, and how the singers choose to sing them. I will also look for ways in which the performance of the soprano part underlines or enunciates other aspects of the poem, or the idea of a performative work, as presented in chapter 2. This is going to be an auditory analysis, based on the listening experience. I have chosen not to apply any structural tools, such as a spectrogram. Although spectrograms can be useful for analyzing performance, particularly when there is no available printed score, I find it not all that relevant when examining aesthetic ideals from a listener's perspective. I will be looking for rather intangible entities, for instance expression, intention, communication and conveyance of meaning – qualities that would not be measurable with a spectrogram. I will also leave out another important auditory aspect, that unquestionably has a profound impact on the sounding result, namely the technical details of the recording. Clearly, there is an abundance of direct consequences for the music's aesthetic outcome embedded in the production process, not to mention the mere limitations of the equipment available at the time

of the first and probably also second recording, and the development in the field before the last one. However, as I see it, an in-depth examination of the recordings from a technical point of view would be an entirely different discourse.

4.3 Recording 1: Halina Lukomska and BBC Symphony Orchestra (1969)

4.3.1 Formal overview

In order to isolate the soprano part, I have made an overview of the formal structure of the movement, based on what from a listener's perspective appears to be a clear division into sections, most of the time indicated by an actual audible rest, or by a clear change of character in the music that seems to indicate a new beginning. This is not to be confused with an attempt to define the *musical* form, in terms of instrumentations, texture and compositional choices. I have simply provided an audible division along the recorded timeline, in order to orient the reader on where in the movement the vocal segments appear.

The musical form is tremendously complex, and several suggested solutions on how to organize the compositional structures are available, notably in the writings of Dominique Jameux (Jameux 1991), Arnold Whittall (Whittall 2004) and Erling E. Guldbrandsen (Guldbrandsen 1997). Although an in-depth analysis of the musical form possibly could be useful in my context, particularly in further exploration on the connection between the poem and the music, I find that a sufficiently thorough exploration of the subject would lead me too far off course in my efforts to examine the aesthetics of the vocal performances, from the point of view of the listener.

I have divided the movement into 7 such temporal sections. Within each section, the soprano part is isolated by a subdivision into *segments*. The segments in which the soprano appears are named "V" for voice, and these segments include both a cappella and with accompaniment/in interaction with the ensemble. The instrumental segments are called "E" for ensemble, and this should not be confused with *tutti*; there might just as well be few instruments or only one in an "E" segment. For the most part, I will treat the ensemble as a unit, as the soprano's opponent, collaborator, backdrop, accompaniment or whatever other roles it may take. The purpose of the "E" category is to separate these segments from the ones where the soprano is involved. I will comment briefly on the individual instruments, which interact with the soprano in a particularly interesting fashion or stand out in other ways.

When the segments overlap and voice and ensemble appear together, it is marked by indentation. For instance, in Section 2, the ensemble begins playing at 1:48, and the soprano enters at 1:57 while the ensemble is still playing. The soprano finishes at 3:04, and at 3:05, the ensemble continues without her. The instrumentation is not complete. I am accentuating the most prominent instruments.

Section 1 (0:00-1:46)

E1 (0:00-0:07)   [Harps]

V1 (0:08-1:18)   [A cappella]

E2 (1:19-1:46)   [Guitar, mandolin, xylophones]

Section 2 (1:48-4:49)

E3 (1:48-3:04)   [Flutes]

      V2 (1:57-3:04)   [Flutes, harps, cello, cowbells]

E4 (3:05-04:59)   [Guitar, mandolin, cowbells, xylophones]

Section 3 (5:00-5:43)

V3 (5:00-5:40)   [Cello, tenor trombone, flutes, cowbells]

      E5 (5:06-5:43)

Section 4 (5:45-6:51)

E6   [Xylophones, harps, celesta, bell plates, guitar, mandolin]

Section 5 (6:52-10:04)

E7 (6:52-07:52)   [Cello, flutes, bass drum]

      V4 (7:30-7:52)   [Flutes, bongos, tenor trombone, contrabass]

E8 (7:53-10:04)   [Xylophones, flutes, celli, contrabass]

Section 6 (10:06-14:00)

E9 (10:06-12:36)   [Celesta, cello, flutes, xylophones]

      V5 (12:36-13:40)   [Tenor trombone, xylophones, cello]

E10 (13:40-14:00)   [Flutes, celli]

Section 7 (14:01-15:51)

E11   [Celesta, xylophones, guitar, mandolin]

As the overview shows, the soprano part appears in section 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6. In section 1, the soprano has an independent a cappella role. In section 3, the soprano starts off a cappella and is joined by the ensemble. In 2, 5 and 6, the soprano segment is engulfed in an ensemble segment.

V1	(0:08-1:18)	Wordless vocalise on A
V2	(1:57-3:04)	Wordless vocalise on A
V3	(5:00-5:40)	*A la nue accablante tu*
V4	(7:30-7:52)	*Basse de basalt et de laves*
V5	(12:36-13:40)	*A même les échos esclaves*

4.3.2 Layers of meaning

In contrast to the poem *A la nue'*s deceptive straight forward appearance, the movement "Improvisation III" comes across as rather enigmatic from the outset. While the layers of meaning in the poem emerge one by one as they are being peeled off, the music seems to present clusters and piles of meaning and information that need to be separated and deciphered. Despite the fact that the soundscape is at times quite transparent – for instance in the soloist parts with single instruments or groups of instruments, like the soprano, xylophones or celesta – there is always some curious obscurity: a complex melody line, dense rhythmical patterns or an abundance of sonorities. Susan Bradshaw describes three contrasting groups of timbre, the "hard, bright sounds of xylophones, harps, mandoline [sic], guitar and percussion against the alluring entanglements of flutes, cellos, basses and tenor trombone, linked by the intermediary chiming of celesta and bells" (Bradshaw 1986:186). These multiple timbres at play simultaneously – from the fragile, brittle sound of a plucked high-pitched mandolin string, a broad bow stroke on the contrabass and everything in between – create a fragmented, eclectic soundscape, but the mentioned groupings and the recurrence of certain timbres, like the clusters of xylophones, are contrastingly unifying.

4.3.3 Time and space

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the poem *A la nue* could be interpreted as presenting an image rather than a narrative. In the music, I find that the music goes back and forth between these models – the image and the narrative. The first *section* is an example of this duality. The harps in E1 come forward as an introduction, creating tension and

expectation by forming an ascending gesture that has no apparent end. This makes a temporal connection with the vocal segment following it. In contrast to this, the vocal section following it comes across as an exploration of *space*, rather than an event that happens in *time*. V1 consists solely of one long unaccompanied vocalise, on the vowel sound "a". The vocalise can be said to comprise 17 rapidly consecutive/connected phrases of different lengths, and within them, similar rhythmic patterns are repeated in different variations. The phrases are divided by short rests and/or by the singer taking a breath. These rests/breaths are essential in creating the impression of the vocalise's division into phrases. In more traditional, tonal classical vocal music, a common way to separate phrases or shape a phrase is by "phrase arching" as Nicholas Cook calls the act of shaping a phrase as a dynamic and rhythmic "arch", by using crescendo/decrescendo and accelerando/ritardando (Cook 2012). These phrases have no such even dynamic development. Some of them certainly start and end softly, but specific dynamics are often restricted to single notes. When there is no build-up and release of tension during the phrase, it gives the impression that all the notes have close to equal importance. I find this to provide the mentioned sensation of the portrayal of an image. I do get a sense of the music being built around the top note, but rather as pieces put together, as an architectural structure, with objects of varying heights surrounding the highest pole.

A more ambivalent impression of the time/space aspect appears in Section 2. Again, the voice appears to have an intro, which could be perceived as a forward motion. In E3, two long sustained notes on flutes stand out as a fanfare. It sounds like the flutist holding the top pitch is flutter-tonguing, and this gives the fanfare a distorted and ominous flair. V2 consists again of a long vocalise sung on "a", but this time she is accompanied by the ensemble. The soprano is by far the most prominent sound element, and the ensemble appears as a backdrop for the voice. On one level, it sounds like the ensemble and the singer are performing independently of one another. There is a flute resting on a sustained note in the background, accompanied by single sounds of harps and plucked strings of a contrabass. The soprano sings similar separated gestures with seemingly equal emphasis, but they now consist of shorter notes in more rapid succession, and the gestures appear almost spasm-like at times. The expression in her voice sounds more intense. Starting at 2:29, the occasional plucked string of the harp and contrabass is joined by other instruments. The sounds of the mandolin, guitar and cowbells resemble the soprano's jerky gestures.

One could argue that this gradual instrumental expansion, in combination with the heightened intensity in the performance, gives an impression of temporal development, or a forward motion, but I find an ambivalence here. The mentioned expansion might just as well be experienced as layers of meaning, in a more literal sense than above.

4.3.4 Ensemble and soprano

The relationship between singer and ensemble is very different in the two first vocal segments. In V2, the ensemble sounds more like a backdrop, and in V3 the soprano and ensemble sound quite symbiotic, engaged in a dialogue as equal parts. According to Dominique Jameux, the wordless voice serves as a transition between words and orchestra (Jameux 1991:328). This build-up of unaccompanied wordless voice followed by accompanied wordless voice, subsequently followed by accompanied voice using words could certainly support that observation.

In V3, the soprano has the leading role, quite literally, and the ensemble follows her movements. The text of the poem is divided into phrases, as we shall see below. In the two first phrases, the soprano seems to utter a "statement", and then the ensemble responds by imitating some of the elements; a resembling pitch and/or a similar rhythm. The four next phrases are shorter and follow each other more closely, the responses overlap and merge into the soprano's next gesture. It sounds like the ensemble is commenting on and underlining the soprano's statements. The ensemble appears as they are making one united effort, as if the different instruments take turns in the same connected wave or gesture of echoing the soprano, first celli, then flutes, followed by tenor trombone, harp, and finally solo cello.

It seems conspicuous to link this to Mallarmé's "enslaved echoes", and the fact that there is no involvement with the actual words *échos esclaves* at this point, as these words are first sung in segment V5, would be analogue to Mallarmé's alleged use of objects simply present as *words*, or ideas, and not as an entity with a function or connection to its surroundings. However, this call-and-response-like model is used by Boulez in several other pieces, for instance, *Repons*, *Dialogue*, *Rituelle* and *Domaines*, so one cannot exclude this feature as a more general aesthetic choice. The section is ended by a short cello solo, which sounds mysteriously melodic and is also played in a very expressive fashion, resembling a Romantic playing style. This musical figure stands out as an independent object, as a last, unflinching echo.

In V4, the ensemble is in the background, and the soprano part in the foreground. Like in V3, there is interaction between the soprano and the ensemble, although this time, it is not as a response or echo, but something that is happening simultaneously. Lukomska's drawn-out, sliding notes and subtle glissando and the lengthy notes in flutes and trombone are contrasted with short single strikes on the xylophones and bongos, and what appears to be quick abrupt strokes with the bow on contrabass.

In contrast to the "call-and-response" between singer and ensemble in V3, when literally singing of echoes in V5, the voice and ensemble have no such interaction. The soprano sounds disconnected from and assimilated into the ensemble at the same time; there seems to be little direct interaction, instead she is blending in as one in many fragmented sounds in the ensemble. There is a contrast between long held notes in the voice, flutes, tenor trombone and celli, and short abrupt sounds in xylophones, claves and bongos.

There might be something more directly figurative in the character of the longer phrases in V1. They have a sort of a wave-like quality, and they come forward as uneven and edgy waves, like the movement of a heavy object being thrown through the air while attached to a fixed point by a rubber band – it will bounce back in a jerky manner. These "sound waves" makes me think of the waves in the sonnet, hitting the bank *(basse)* in the stirred-up sea.

4.3.5 Words of the poem

The first time the words of the sonnet are included is in V3, when the first verse is set, *A la nue accablante tu.* The words are sung in a fragmented, disconnected manner, or, quote Susan Bradshaw, "so distorted by syllabic meaning as to be virtually sapped of meaning" (Bradshaw 1986:186). They are divided into the following phrases, with mentioned comments from the ensemble in between. The words of the verse are stretched out over several notes, and some syllables are prolonged. I have made a rough scheme to show approximately how the syllables are distorted. The hyphens indicate a change of pitch:

1. A-a-a
2. la-a
3. nue
4. a-

5. ca-a-

6. blan-te

7. tu

As Bradshaw points out, the words are *not* sung in a fashion that supports the thematic meaning of the words, nor are they reproducing a speech-like pattern, and the soprano sounds like an instrument "playing" sounds and letters. This gives the impression that other qualities of the words are more important, like the material sound of the syllables, consonants or vowel sounds. The "a"-sound is extended, as an enunciation of the poem's assonance. The elongated "a"-sound in V1 could be interpreted as an extensive accentuation of the first letter and word of the sonnet, which is "A", and/or as an echo of Mallarmé's extensive assonance on the letter "a" in the first phrases of the poem.

A similar pattern is repeated in the setting of the second verse: *Basse de basalte et de laves,* in segment V4. The words are being sung in one more or less continuous phrase. The vowel sounds on the accentuated syllables are prolonged and ornamented with melismas. I have capitalized the syllables in which the vowels are ornamented:

1. BA – sse

2. DE –

3. BA – SA – lte

4. ET –

5. DE –

6. LA – ves

If one presupposes that elongation and ornamentation equals emphasis or stress, this does not correspond with the meter in the poem. All the ictic syllables are ornamented, but so are several non-ictic ones. In the last word, *laves*, the non-ictic syllable "-ves" is divided into two short beats being sung as two soft jolts: "ve-es", thus enunciating a non-ictic syllable twice. Once again, common verbal practices are deconstructed.

In V5, in the setting of the third verse *A même les échos esclaves*, the deconstruction of the words seems to be taken to a new level. The syllables are now cut off from one another, as if they were separate units, with short instrumental interludes in between. The phoneme "e" is

extended virtually every time it appears, again playing on the poem's assonance. The vocal gestures are stretched out and sustained, in contrast to the jerky motion and rapid melismas in previous vocal segments. The words are divided into these new components:

1. (e)[7] A
2. me-
3. e-me
4. le-
5. es
6. é –
7. chos
8. e-
9. e-
10. sclaves

4.3.6 Vocal performance

Modernist performance practice has, as we have seen earlier, been accused of being austere and cerebral. I find Lukumska's performance to correspond with this to some extent. As a whole, her performance comes across as rather controlled and withheld. The variations in her expression are quite subtle. There is very little or no legato phrasing, and it often sounds like she is simply (re)producing a pattern, one note at a time, as if each note has equal importance. This creates an almost non-legato execution, a sense of the notes being connected and separated at the same time. In accordance with this, I find Lukomska's dynamic variations at times abrupt and sudden, instead of gradual, as if each note has its own designated volume. At other times, there are obvious crescendo/decrescendos, but I find that they are quite soberly conducted, and not utilized for dramatic effect.

Daniel Leech-Wilkinson claims that the pointillist compositional style in fashion at the time *Pli selon pli* was written inevitably led to a pointillist performance (Leech-Wilkinson 2009:794). However, he claims there was a gradual softening of this performance practice towards a more coherent style, and that the recording of 1969 therefore is "far from

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[7] It sounds like she starts with a different word, or just the letter "e", before, transforming into the "a" of the first word. I cannot make out whether she utters a different word first, or if it is a sloppy articulation.

pointillist" (loc. cit.). This may be true for the recording of the work as a whole, and perhaps for Boulez's conducting style. I nevertheless find the term 'pointillist' to be a right-on-the-button description of Lukomska's performance. This note-by-note way of singing seems to me to emphasis the sensation of listening to exploration of space instead of development in time.

I find her particular use of vibrato to represent a fascinating paradox. I am aware of the disagreement among schools of vocal technique as to whether vibrato is a deliberate effort or rather a feature that is facilitated by other technical efforts. I shall leave that discussion out of my analysis, and regardless of on what side of the fence Lukomska belongs, the sounding result is remarkable. Traditionally, it is my impression that the vibrato is where the emotions are allowed to vibrate, metaphorically and quite literally speaking, to such an extent that vibrato has become almost synonymous with pathos and emotional expression. It would therefore seem like a natural choice to limit or avoid altogether the use of vibrato in an aesthetic tradition that supposedly seek control and restraint. Instead, Lukomska manages to make even the vibrato withheld. Her controlled vibrato gives the oscillation of each note associations to a sinus sound wave.

The combination of the sober, controlled demeanor and the tendency to enunciate each note leaves an overall monotonous impression. Stravinsky called the work "both pretty monotonous and monotonously pretty" (Stravinsky 1971). Additionally, I perceive no direct attempt to appeal to the listener, as of the controlled and withheld expression creates a certain distance. However, this monotony is by no means non-communicative. On the contrary, something in her voice comes across as urgent and demanding. There is a strong sense that *something* is being conveyed. Her performance does not seem indifferent; it is rather as if this *something* is being held under pressure.

4.4 Recording 2: Phyllis Bryn-Julson and the BBC Symphony Orchestra (1981)
4.4.1 Formal overview
Because based on the same withdrawn score, the compositional structure is the same in this recording, except some changes made during rehearsal (Jameux 1991:327). I will not elaborate on those changes, as the soprano part's appearance has the same segmented structure in both versions. The time intervals are different, as the movement as a whole is

longer in the second recording. The two versions are respectively 15:51 and 18:29 minutes long. The vocal segments have different time intervals:

Vocal Segment 1 (0:10-1.38) Wordless vocalise on *A*
Vocal Segment 2 (2:27-3:59) Wordless vocalise on *A*
Vocal Segment 3 (6:15-7:03) *A la nue accablante tu*
Vocal Segment 4 (9:02-9.31) *Basse de basalte et de laves*
Vocal Segment 5 (14:50-15:59) *A même les échos esclaves*

4.4.2 Vocal performance
Paul Griffiths describes Bryn-Julson as "angelically gentle", as opposed to Lukomska "inclined to be hard-edged, metallic and vociferous" (Griffiths 1983:747). There is something to that observation. Bryn-Julson certainly sounds soft and tender at times, there is for instance no massive increase in intensity in the vocal performance between first and second vocalise, but at other times this gentleness changes rapidly – some higher notes are suddenly strong and vigorous. Bryn-Julson's performance comes across as more diverse and expressively complex than that of Lukomska. She varies the intensity and dynamic to a greater extent, and her crescendos/decrescendos are more pronounced. She also uses more glissando, particularly in the vocalises as well, and according to Paul Griffiths, Bryn-Julson "finds much more in the detail of quarter-tone and glissando" (loc.cit).

Through my own vocal training I have learned that one of the main objections in the Western classical tradition is to be able to maintain an even sonority and equal quality throughout the vocal register. Bryn-Julson seems to disregard this convention, and instead she varies the sonority and timbre phrase by phrase, or only sometimes pitch by pitch, note by note, or some connected notes in a row or only parts of a phrase. I would say that even the vocal *style* changes several times in a phrase, sometimes she slims down the tone all the way to a speech-like, quite soft-spoken tone, which is not even in line with the classical singing style. Another such stylistic break is the inconsistent use of vibrato – how she leaves it out even on the long notes, for instance on the softest top notes. Examples of this can be heard at 00:57 where the tone is so soft it is barely audible, and at 1:35, where a long note is kept very thin.

This results in a more fragmented impression than the one of Lukomska, because Lukomska's note-by-note approach sounds planned and calculated, but Bryn-Julson sounds scattered,

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because of the inconsistencies, and it sounds somewhat haphazard and random. The fragmented, personalized feel is increased by the slightly audible "h"-sounds, for instance at 3:08. This is another singer's convention Bryn-Julson does not observe. Allowing the "h"-sound between notes in a vocalise, which is a sound that might come naturally or make it easier, is something one is trained to avoid. Considering the high level of the remainder of her performance and her professional acclaim, I find it unlikely that it is a simple technical flaw. It seems more probable that it is an interpretive choice, a choice corresponding with the flexible and varied character of her performance.

These subtle "h"-sounds leaves a tiny hint of *New Vocality*. In her essay "The New Vocality in Contemporary Music", Cathy Berberian advocates her passion for using the whole voice and all its "emissions" (Berberian 2014:47). When *Pli selon pli* was first recorded in 1969, it was only three years since both the publishing of this essay, and Berberian's signature composition *Stripsody,* which was written the same year (1966). This seems to have had no such impact on Lukomska. Unless, perhaps, one could argue that Lukomska's way of using her voice as a tool for facilitating sound rather than conveying a thematic message, also an expansion of the conventional usage of the voice. Susan McClary seems to think that Berberian's greatest innovation was her vitality communicative powers, as opposed to other performers of open forms who "do everything in their power to prevent any rhetorical interaction with their listeners" (McClary 2014:xxvi). In which case, neither of the two performers can be said to be affiliated with New Vocality, as Bryn-Julson's performance, although dramatically expressive, is not very communicative.

All these variations make Bryn-Julson's vocal performance seem less monotonous. I nevertheless perceive a great deal of the same contained, reserved manner of Lukomska. She is similar to Lukomska in the sense that the vocal effort does not seem directed at the listener. She is maintaining some sense of distance and detachment. The variations sound like material, like experimenting with sounds, not conveying a meaning, an impression that maintains the superior position of the material qualities.

4.5 Recording 3: Christine Schäfer and Ensemble Intercontemporain (2001)

4.5.1 Formal overview

This is the only recording that corresponds with the published score from 1982.[8] The rewritings are substantial, and most certainly contribute to give the work new aesthetic dimensions, worthy of thorough examination. However, since this is a performance analysis, I will focus on the changes in how the text of the poem is set, and on the changes in the singer's performance. I will only briefly include the score when I find it helpful to shed light on these topics. In this version, my isolation of the soprano part results in three additional vocal segments:

Vocal Segment 1 (0:13-03:13)   Both quatrains

Vocal Segment 2 (03:54-05:55)   Both tercets

Vocal Segment 3 (08:03-09:07)   *A la nue accablante tu*

Vocal Segment 4 (10:47-11:17)   *Basse de basalte et de laves*

Vocal Segment 5 (12:02-12.36)   Wordless vocalise on indistinct vowel

Vocal Segment 6 (15:13-15:49)   Wordless vocalise on indistinct vowel

Vocal Segment 7 (16:32-17:48)   *A même les échos esclaves*

Vocal Segment 8 (18:43-19:34)   *Par une trompe sans vertu*

As we have seen above, the first and second recording have the same five segments, and in the present version, segments 3, 4 and 7 are corresponding with segments 3-5 in the previous recordings:

1. Wordless, unaccompanied vocalise on *A*
2. Wordless, *accompanied* vocalise on *A*
3. *A la nue accablante tu*
4. *Basse de basalte et de laves*
5. *A même les échos esclaves*

The third recording has six major changes in the vocal segments:

- The first segment is now accompanied
- The two first segments now have text

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[8] Boulez, Pierre. *Pli Selon Pli, nr. 4 improvisiation III sur mallarmé "a la nue accablante tu"* Universal edition Ltd, London, 1963. New version 1982.

- There are two new segments, wordless, between the setting of the second and third verse
- The fourth verse of the poem is set in its own, new segment
- The voice appears at approximately 10:14, 13:12 and 13:21, just barely heard making soft wordless sounds that blend seamlessly with the ensemble

In the following, I will elaborate on the segments that are significantly rewritten, or new. Since the formal content is the same, segments 3, 4 and 7 will not be commented on separately, but the findings and comparison to previous recordings will be dealt with in the paragraph "Vocal character". When referring to the score, I will be using the rehearsal numbers, and mark them with fig. 1, 2, 3 and so on.

4.5.2 Vocal Segment 1 and 2
One substantial change in the composition that directly involves the singer is that a successive setting of the poem in its entirety replaces the vocalises in the two first segments.

A long tenor trombone note has been added to the harp intro. This is followed by the first verse, *A la nue,* accompanied by flutes. A four bar instrumental interlude in which cowbells are the most prominent audible component is heard before the setting of the remaining quatrains, verse 2-8 (fig. 2-8). Instrumental interlude with for instance xylophones (fig. 8-12). The setting of the tercets (fig. 12-14) are preceded by a similar but prolonged intro as the second vocalise, the flutter-tongued flutes.

This creates a dramatic new approach to the fragmented presentation of text in the first recordings and in the corresponding segments (3, 4 and 7) later in this version, where only the words of first three verses are included and presented in a far less coherent and straightforward way. Here, the words are stretched out and syllables ornamented to some extent like in the setting of the poem in the other segments, but the text appear as a connected statement because there are virtually no rests or pauses in the soprano part. She is heard continuously until the poem is finished, except for the two instrumental interludes mentioned above, and this causes the impression, according to Arnold Whittall, that this passage "retains the fluid contours of the original vocalise" (Whittall 2004:74).

This compositional choice seems to be in a limbo between convention and invention, and between semantic and material meaning. The prolonged syllables, which seem to obscure the semantic meaning, are in contrast to the setting of text to words in a continuous fashion. The latter resembles the way one would traditionally do it if the purpose was to convey the thematic meaning or the story in the text. Additionally, the instrumentation goes in and out of the role of accompaniment. Whittall comments on the flutes providing "homogeneity of texture", but also "heterophonically doubling and elaborating vocal pitches" (ibid.:74). I find that the flutes change significantly from the setting of the first to the second quatrain. Boulez seems to organize the ensemble's overall interactions with the soprano according to the four sections of the sonnet, and he seems to increase the number of instruments, textures and sonorities chronologically:

First quatrain	[Flutes, long held notes]	(fig 2-6)
Second quatrain	[Flutes, more vigorous]	(fig 6-8)
First tercet	[Flutes, celli, harps, single sounds]	(fig 12)
Second tercet	[Full ensemble, fragmented]	(fig 13)

When the first line of the sonnet appears again in segment 3 (fig 21), Arnold Whittall calls it a possible "ghostly model of the da capo aria" (Whittall 2004:73). In addition to these references to or commentary on standardized forms, it seems to me as if the poem is being initially presented, as if for the sake of reproducing it or telling the whole story before picking it apart and exploring the pieces.

4.5.3 Vocal Segments 5 and 6

Segments 5 and 6 contain wordless song on an indistinctive vowel. The voice does not appear to have a leading role in these segments, it rather blends in as one of the instruments. Schäfer sings long, held sustained notes, with extensive use of glissando, explicitly noted in the score, page 48-50 and 64-67. The ensemble is functioning as a mirror or echo, repeating the sopranos gestures and pitches. Segment 5 is dominated by sustained sliding notes in cello and flutes, while the ensemble in segment 6 has a more contrasting character with short, abrupt sounds in claves, bongos, xylophones and cowbells. As opposed to the intense, compact and urgent nature of the wordless segments in the previous recordings, these stand out as soft and

contemplative. They give the impression of being interludes or commentaries, rather than presenting a narrative.

4.5.4 Vocal Segment 8

This segment is a setting the fourth line of the poem, which seems to continue the pattern from segments 3, 4 and 7, where the words and/or syllables appear as autonomous units. The two syllables in the semantically important word, *vertu* are entirely disconnected and separated by a short instrumental interlude with celli as the most prominent instruments. This increases the overall sense of a degradation of the importance of semantic meaning, in accordance with the rest of the work.

1. Par
2. u-
3. une
4. trompe
5. sans
6. ver-
7. tu

The segment is preceded by a celesta intro. A flute that is not noted in the score is playing a held E from the beginning of the measure, doubling the E5 the soprano enters with towards the end of the measure, and then following her down to an F4 (fig 46). It is interesting how the apparent intro creates a sense of a forward movement, which stops in its tracks once the disintegrated setting of the text enters the soundscape.

4.5.5 Vocal performance

Albeit major changes in the form, from an auditory perspective, I find that the greatest difference compared with the two other recordings is in the character of the soprano's performance. My first impression when I heard Schäfer's version was that her style resembles what you would expect from a performance of a Romantic lied, and in her most intense moments, a late Romantic opera aria. In general, her performance seems more *conventional and traditional*, meaning that it is in line with a more bel canto performance ideal of the tonal classical canon, as opposed to the distant modernist approach that we have seen demonstrated and explained previously. In the following, the words "traditional" and "conventional" will be

used with those connotations.

Schäfer's voice sounds free-flowing, as opposed to the more contained sound of the two other singers, and particularly stands in great contrast to the withheld control of Halina Lukomska. This is especially audible in the sound of Schäfer's vibrato, which is if flowing more freely and sonorously than in the other two recordings. The contrast to Bryn-Julson is the consistency in sonority and vibrato. The seemingly haphazard and unpredictable flexibility of Bryn-Julson can also no doubt be called free in comparison to the contained Lukomska, but in an entirely different way. The freedom in Schäfer's voice is a freedom of excess. Her sound is potent with energy; it sounds like there are endless reserves left in her voice.

Schäfer's legato leaves an impression of forward movement. By connecting the notes more closely, thus creating a continuous movement, the auditory experience is rather that the music moves, ever so slightly, forward in time. As mentioned, her sonority is even and engaged through the whole performance, like Lukomska, where Bryn-Julson is experimenting and playing around with different sonorities and vocal expressions.

Another notable difference is Schäfer's phrasing. Her crescendos/decrescendos are very gradual and dramatic, with great dynamic contrast between the softest and loudest note. She shapes her phrases in a more traditional way, in accordance with the "phrase arching" mentioned earlier. In Arnold Whittall's words, there is a "constant shading of dynamics" in the vocal part of the score (Whittall 2004:74). However, these dynamic marks are often within phrases, and Schäfer seems to shape the phrases as a whole in addition to these marks. Additionally, she makes the dynamics *her own,* so to speak; the variations sound like spontaneous choices. Her vocal style seems more flexible and elastic, and she makes a myriad of variations within each note, especially the longer held ones. She makes micro adjustments and plays with timbre, dynamics, force, as she slims down, thickens and stretches each note as if it was made of rubber.

I also find that she has a more speech-like pronunciation of the words. Her vocal style seems more immediate and spontaneous, in accordance with more conventional performance of music with text, such as a lied or an opera aria; allowing for the meaning of the text or the specific words to in a sense dictate, or maybe rather inspire, the way to sing them. As a singer, one is often instructed to "tell the story", convey the meaning of the words, and let

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that guide their pronunciation, and it seems that she is doing this to a certain degree, at least to a larger extent than the other two singers.

This accentuates the words' semantic meaning, or more diffusely, it might also create the sensation of conveyance of some semiotic meaning, of an underlying, thematic message. It is obviously impossible to know whether this is Schäfer's intention, if she is actually thinking about some meaning of the words as she sings them, but the auditory result, nevertheless, creates the *impression* that the *thematic meaning* of the words is important, both in a semantic and semiotic sense. This interpretational choice seems to pull in the opposite direction of Boulez's fragmented setting of the text, which I have argued is an attempt to deconstruct the semantic meaning of the words, or at least to place more emphasis on material qualities. I will continue the discussion of the implication of these choices in the next chapter.

As a whole, Schäfer's performance comes across as more spontaneous, emotional and directly addressed to the listener than the other two, and all the dynamic variation and flexible expressivity stands out as a contrast to their distance and relative monotony.

4.6 A note on other differences

According to Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, there is an ongoing process of change within modernist performance ideals, and the 1981 recording is "stylistically in between" the first and last recording (Leech-Wilkinson 2009:794). He is referring to a passage in the first movement "Don", and he is not talking particularly about the vocal performance, but I find it to be to some extent applicable to the vocal performance. The level of expressivity could be said to be in a middle position. Bryn-Julson allows for a freer interpretation, but she does not sound as uninhibited as Christine Schäfer. However, I would say her seemingly haphazard, flexible sonority is an idiosyncratic aesthetic approach, and unaffected by a supposed evolutionary development between the three recordings. Christine Schäfer and Lukomska have in common an evenness throughout their registers, despite their very different timbres and sonorities.

According to Whittall, Boulez "gives no instructions concerning vocal expression", except dynamics and rhythmical flexibility (Whittall 2004:74). However, as an instruction to the glissando parts in the setting of the second verse, *Basse et basalt et de laves*, (fig 27), it is

noted in the score to "sing practically without vibrato" (bottom of page 42). I do not know whether this also was indicated in the withdrawn score, but there is a trace of glissando in all three performances of this sequence (segment 4 in all three recordings). The performances are drastically dissimilar. Lukumska's glissando is limited to occurring between certain notes within the whole notated interval, and one can hear several separate tones in her ascent and descent. Bryn-Julson has longer slides, and Schäfer is almost evenly gradual in the whole passage.

I regard it as relevant to pay some attention to vocal technique, although the physicality of the human voice is not within the frame of my analysis. It seems to me that the connection between the aesthetic intention and the audible outcome, in atonal, serial music in general, and this work in particular, would fall completely apart without a highly technically skilled singer. Although this of course can be said of any (art) music, I will argue that in the preceding (late) Romantic era and in music with a more obvious emotional meaning, a genuine heartfelt interpretation can to some extent compensate for technical inadequacy, or at least, the two elements can have a closer to equal status. In this music, however, when emotion or affect is toned down or absent, or at least when that is the goal, technical brilliance seems to be a necessary condition. Such technical skills would naturally also have massive impact on the aesthetic outcome, but as far as I can tell, the vocal technique of all performers are close to impeccable, and I do not find reason to blame any variation in the performances on technical abilities or the lack thereof.

However, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson claims the serialist composers and their pointillist music represented new ground for performers, and that they gradually learned how to do it (Leech-Wilkinson 2009:793). This might be part of the explanation for the variations in the performances. For instance, in the third vocal segment, the setting of *A la nue* (the same segment in all recordings), all three singers sing a different note in the second measure. It sounds like Lukomska is singing an E4 or possibly a D4, but it is barely audible, due to the softness and short duration of the sung note. Bryn-Julson sings a D#5. In the official score, the note in question is a G5 (fig. 21), which is also the note Schäfer sings. This could indicate that some adjustment to what appeared to be extreme demands of performers has occurred in between the first and second recording. The fact that it is lowered to a G5 in the new score could suggest that Boulez has adapted to the singer's feedback; according to Leech-Wilkinson, many of the changes in Boulez's writing is a result of what he has heard in

performance (Leech-Wilkinson 2009:795).

Another important aspect to keep in mind is that singers' instruments are inseparable from their bodies. You cannot lend anyone your instrument and see if the idiosyncrasy in your performance was partly due to particularities of your instrument. The interpretation is therefore inextricable from the instrument, so to speak. Some ostensibly interpretational choices might be physical characteristic of the singer's instrument: this would for instance be true for timbre.

As mentioned above, it is more than probable that recording technology has had an impact on the experienced differences between the three performances. One such aspect might be the overall impression that Schäfer's version appears fuller and with a richer timbre and sonority. This might be the result of the modern recording equipment available in 2001 picking up detail and nuance to a much larger extent than what was possible in 1969 and probably also in 1982. Not to mention the producer's choice of the placement of the soprano part in the mix. However, as mentioned in chapter 2, studying recordings as such is a completely different matter. I do believe that my findings are relevant nevertheless, as the sonority and vibrato is in stylistic coherence with the other idiosyncratic interpretational traits, such as phrasing and pronunciation, which would not be affected by recording.

It seems established at this point that the performative qualities in Mallarmé's poem and in Boulez's music are maintained in the vocal performances of Halina Lukomska and Phyllis Bryn-Julson. They both sing in a fashion that places more importance on material qualities and sonorous textures than on musical phrasing and rhetorical coherence, and on the semantic, narrative or thematic meaning of the words. Christine Schäfer, on the other hand, has a more conventional and shapely approach. In the next chapter, I will look at the connection between their choices and the aesthetic character of the work, elaborate on the listener's experience and on some discourses surrounding musical meaning.

5 Findings

5.1 The performer's role in a performative work

As we have seen, Mallarmé and Boulez seem to have an element of performativity in their "shared vision" of how to create a work of art. An important part of this vision is the anonymity of the author/composer. What then, about the performer? I have claimed that Halina Lukomska's performance in some respects comes across as monotonous. Is this a result of a desired *anonymity* of the performer? Presupposing that the task of the work is to present a labyrinth of potential meaning, a framework of material reality, it is a plausible assumption that the performer is expected to take a step back, and simply act as a vehicle for the music, presenting the material sounds without adding personal traits and traditional or fashionable stylistic characteristics. If a work of art comes into being not on the drawing board, not while writing the music, but while the structures and possibilities are being lined up, presented, and then unfold in performance, the performer's role would be to present the *material qualities* of the music, not a conveyance of thematic content of the music or the poem. Analogue to the mentioned possible misconception that Boulez had idealistic or aesthetic preferences for the austere and schematic approach to composition, the perceived distant, unemotional expression of the performer might not be an aesthetic performance ideal, but an artistic choice, based on an idea of how art should be created. It remains unclear whether or not this is Boulez's conscious view or expressed instruction to his performers. As observed by Arnold Whittall and presented above, Boulez has very few instructions to his singers noted in the score. Nevertheless, extending the idea of the "anonymous" creator all the way to the performer seems like a valuable train of thought when analyzing this particular performance of Boulez's music.

There are of course several problems with this idea. First of all, a "neutral expression" is in itself self-contradictory. A "neutral" expression or interpretation is per definition a specific expression or interpretation, hence, an anonymous performance would be almost, if not entirely, impossible to achieve. In order for a performer to produce even a single tone, she is faced with numerous inevitable choices that have to be made. Whenever a musical sound is produced, performed, and heard, it cannot avoid having a certain volume, quality, energy, resonance and sonority, and all these specifics will have impact on the auditory outcome. Contrary to the immediate listening experience, when looking (listening) closer, several

aspects of the performance of Halina Lukomska are not at all neutral. Her vocal technique is clearly within the parameters of the Western tradition of classical music, in terms of registration, and placement of the tone. The vibrato-filled head-resonance is a very specific characteristic in the traditional, tonal classical repertoire. The distant, cerebral approach to performance is, as we have seen, a stylistic trend of the time period, and it therefore places itself within a very specific context right from the outset. No sound is pronounced in a cultural or historical vacuum, there will always be a complex context, and paradoxically perhaps, if anonymity was the goal, in retrospect, Lukomska's attempted "neutral" expression stands out as typical of an era.

However, the *pursuit* of a neutral expression could maybe be connected to ideal of the anonymous performer. Perhaps one could argue that being *as neutral as possible*, by for instance avoiding the most stereotype traits of specific genres, limiting the most poignant or ornate personal characteristics can be said to constitute, or at least help enable, the performative work.

How is this different from the idea of *Werktreue*? If the performer's role is *not* to add any personal conviction or flair, it sounds very much like the criticized authoritarian relationship between composer and performer, and between the score and performance. I would say that in the definition of anonymity that I am here ascribing to Lukomska, and other, hypothetical, performers of *performative* works, the difference is the *reasons* for the desired anonymity. As I understand it, in the *Werktreue* tradition, the idea is that the composer has a message or artistic vision that the performer shall simply present. In our case, it is not presupposed that the score is the work, and that the performance is a representation. The performer and the composer are equally anonymous, merely providing opportunity for a multitude of meanings to emerge. The composer does his part by subjecting his composition to patterns that generate a material cut off from his personal background, experience and culture, and the performer tries to utter the sounds as neutrally as possible. Inevitably, a small hierarchy remains, since the composer's creation comes before the performance, but if his aim is to create something that transcends his personal idea, then I would say that the performer and composer are to a larger degree in the same boat.

5.2 Materiality

Will the performer then be reduced to a computer, a sinus tone? If the performer is left with only singing the notes, can she not add anything personal? As I see it, the answer to that depends on *what* you add. I would say that there are two kinds of interpretation when it comes to singing a text with music. Let us call them the *external* and the *internal* kind. The external interpretation would be the stylistic traits, the markers of a genre, placement of emphasis on words, phrasing, dynamics, diction, the placement of the sound – where and how the singer chooses to let the tone resonate, and to what extent the tone is "let loose" or "set free". These elements are mainly a matter of style, or musical genre. The internal kind would be the *quality of the sound*, but not in the mere physical sense; whether the sound is full or thin, has body and sonority or is narrow and pinched would be in the external department. The internal interpretation I would describe as whether the sound gives a sense of being grounded, of coming from the body, having a core – or if the tone has what one in vocal technique might call *support*, as in being supported by a solid, controlled breath. There is obviously not a clean break between the two, and they might influence one another, but I would say that the internal kind can be executed in an engaged manner, even if the external interpretation is minimal.

Roland Barthes elaborates on similar questions in "The Grain of the Voice". He advocates that the musical meaning in song should come from the body (Barthes 1985:274). As far as I understand, he wants the expression to be immediate and almost primal – intuitive and not calculated. He compares the vocal endeavors of baritones Charles Panzéra and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, and argues that they respectively sing with and without this *grain* in their voices. Barthes refers to his student Julia Kristeva's terms *pheno-song* and *geno-song*, where the first is representative for the "thought out" or planned expression, and the second for the bodily expression (Barthes 1985:269).

According to Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, Fischer-Dieskau is part of a post-world war II turn in vocal interpretation, away from pathos and sentimentality, towards a more rational and intellectual approach (Leech-Wilkinson 2006:254). As I understand it, Barthes finds the vocal *grain* incompatible with this distant, sober approach, but at the same time, he also despises affect. His main agenda seems not to be the intellectual versus the emotional, but rather any kind of involvement of what he calls the "soul" – the interpretation of the mind, versus a direct, unfiltered *physical* interpretation of the body, which he finds and appreciates in

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Panzéra's singing. Barthes links this to the linguistic concept of *signifier and signified*, and argues that the bodily constituted sound produced by the singer, shall be a *signifier*, a sound-image, meaning the material sound, and not the *signified*, as a symbol of something else (Barthes 1985:271ff). I find this to be analogous to what I have called *internal* and *external* interpretation, that the internal interpretation is similar to geno-song, while the external interpretation would be a form of pheno-song.

Additionally, Barthes states that, geno-song – the signifier – *is* writing" (ibid.:274). He appraises a "music-language whose function is to prevent the singer from being expressive" (ibid.:275). In his analysis of Schumann's piano piece *Kreisleriana*, he calls an apparent contrast, or rather what would be called a contrast in structural music analysis, a simple "bifurcation". He questions whether the body knows such a rhetorical move. I read him thus: The body cannot reason, rationalize, systemize, only perceive physical realities, and will therefore not perceive a contrast, because this would require intellectual involvement. Rather, the body simply experiences two different things happening at the same time, two different paths or patterns. His demand for the artist is to not put this through his intellect and portray a contrast, but let the body hammer out the two patterns as pure sound. Subsequently, he states that "[i]nterpretation is […] to reveal the network of accents beneath the tonal, rhythmic melodic rhetoric. The accent is the music's truth, in relation to which all interpretation declares itself" (ibid.:303). I read this as directly analogous to the Boulezian and Mallarméan artistic idea of composition or writing of poetry as *creating a labyrinth,* or structure, from which infinite possible meanings can arise and create realities, or art that is not mimesis, as discussed in chapter 2.

Although Barthes dislikes the cultivated interpretation of Fischer-Dieskau, and despite the fact that I have earlier in this thesis compared the tradition Fischer-Dieskau is a part of to the modernist performance ideals applicable to Halina Lukomska, I dare say that the latter's performance is well within Barthes's preferred parameters. I find that the idea of the grain is very adequate to describe the indescribable *expression* in Lukomska's performance – without giving the impression of conveying thematic meaning, she produces a strong sound that *wants something.* There is a core – or grain, if you will – in her performance.

In other words: Despite the anonymous performer's role as a *co-creator*, who facilitates the sounds and structures from which meanings can arise, her internal interpretation can be very

active. The toned down external interpretation does not mean that the performer cannot be *engaged, committed, present* and *communicative*. On the contrary, I would argue that this is as important as in any other musical style. Barthes says himself that if the audience paid more attention to the "aesthetic enjoyment", we would have "attached less importance to the break with tonality" (Barthes 1985:277). From that I find that the monotonous anonymity in the performers' *external* interpretation is perfectly compatible with a possible listener's experience of musical meaning, if the performer has a strong and engaged *internal* interpretation – a projection of sound that is manifested in the body.

5.3 Different performance – different work?

If we constitute the thesis presented in *the performative turn*, that each performance is a work in its own right, what is new in the "new works" of each recording? What happens with a performative work when the performer is not *anonymous*? I have argued that Halina Lukomska's performance seems to be in line with the idea of the performative work, in which a performer should, as the composer, take a step back and try not to influence the performance with stereotypical genre traits or a too personalized vocal style. I found the major difference in Bryn-Julson's performance to be that she is experimenting to a greater extent with the material qualities in the music and in her own voice and thus creates a more varied and diverse performance. However, this increased expressivity appears fragmented and disconnected, and it does not cause an increased sense of conveying a narrative. I do not perceive her performance as more directed at an audience or less disconnected than Lukomska. I have also argued that Christine Schäfer sings the vocal part almost as if it were a Romantic lied, and that her performance seems outreaching and communicative. Does the latter version disturb the openness of the labyrinth?

As I understand it, a presupposition for the musical work as a *performative generator of meaning* is that the material qualities of the work are emphasized. This means that:
- The sounds of the letters, phonemes and syllables are more important than the semantic meanings of the words
- Each note is important as an individual sound, rather than its placement in a phrase
- The structures of the work are more important as such, rather than creating a narrative or connection between them
- The music is a sound image in *space*, rather than a forward-moving gesture in *time*

All of these features are somewhat downplayed in the vocal performance of the latter recording. Schäfer establishes a sense of narrative and coherence by arching the phrases, she creates forward movement by connecting the notes, and emphasizes the thematic meaning of the words by pronouncing them in a more speech-like fashion.

The interesting thing in this case, of course, is that Boulez himself has made the changes in the score that facilitate this: Instead of the long vocalises in the beginning of the movement from recordings 1 and 2, he sets the entire poem as one, connected episode (recording 3, 0:10-3:59). Boulez has also chosen and conducted, and probably to some extent instructed, all three singers. It seems unlikely that a stronger emphasis on the thematic or literal meaning of the words would compromise the very artistic idea he strives for.

One explanation for the change might be a change in performance ideals. Daniel Leech-Wilkinson has observed a gradual softening in the performance of modernist music, as shown above. Erling Guldbrandsen has demonstrated a shift in Boulez's composition as Boulez started conducting the large (more) tonal works of the canon, towards allowing more of his personal taste and more expressivity in the more Romantic sense in his later works (Guldbrandsen 2006:144).

If a musical work is supposed to be an abundance of possible meanings, I suppose the references to Romantic vocal tradition can be considered a level of meaning of its own. Additionally, if we consider my aforementioned separation between *internal* and *external* interpretation, we might find that these interpretational changes are of less significance. I would say that all the described features in Schäfer's approach are examples of *external* interpretation. Considering the fact that anonymity is almost impossible to obtain for a performer, as explained above, and at best will be just an attempt to sound *as anonymous as possible*, the external interpretation might not be of such high importance. This brings us back to Roland Barthes's *grain* and *body*. If I read him correctly, he says that the external interpretation is either of secondary importance, or dictated by the internal interpretation. Musical meaning is created when the vocal sound has a solid core, when the musical expression is constituted in the body, when sound as a physical object, as *materiality,* comes out of the performer. It comes without filter, and without applied, superficial or calculated *external* interpretation.

By this I mean that although Lukomska's and Bryn-Julson's *external* interpretations seem uncommunicative and distant, their *internal* interpretation can be engaged and deeply involved. In the case of Schäfer, I would say that her external stylistic traits might be of less consequence. Whether her performance produces material meaning, then, which in turn can generate a labyrinth, a vehicle for infinite possibilities, will depend on her internal interpretation, if her bodily involvement transcends her more or less conscious choice to not sing "neutrally", or rather, in a historically informed, modernist style.

5.4 Enter the listener[9]

If we constitute that the purpose of the work is to create new simultaneous realities, facilitated by an anonymous composer and, if possible, by an anonymous performer, *where* exactly are these realities to take place? I would argue that the most plausible answer to that question is that they take place *within the listener.* As I have argued above, elements of *the performative turn* are in many respects applicable to Boulez's ideas of creating music, and this implicit involvement of the listener appears to be one of them. If the artistic idea is to construct new realities and open-ended structures, this occurs to me as an *invitation* to the listener to experience what happens in the merge between what is being presented to him and his own memories, expectations and cultural background. Daniel Leech-Wilkinson also attributes the listener the task of forming musical meaning, when he talks about how Boulez's pointillist compositional style caused a close to pointillist performance, and Leech-Wilkinson states that "listeners were made to make connections where they could" (Leech-Wilkinson 2009:793).

This is in stark contrast to Susan McClary's more general and sweeping criticism of "the avant-garde" composers and their alleged disregard for the audiences' meanings and experiences. At least when using Boulez as a representative, McClary's straw man arguments miss their target. Boulez's goal was not, it seems, to create "difficult" music to purposefully only address the initiated inner circle. His compositional ideals did not emerge from viewing his music as elevated above the listener and beyond social context. The purpose was compositional freedom, and he just wanted the starting point to be beyond his own context. Along those lines, then, I would further argue that the same goes for the seemingly uninviting

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[9] Paragraph title is borrowed from Steven Feld article "Ch. 2: Communication, Music and Speech About Music" (Feld 1994:85).

modernist performance ideal. Hence, I would suggest that Lukomska's austere execution should not be interpreted as the result of some conscious effort to shut out the uninitiated and elevate music above the ignorant common masses, but to release the artistic expression from the boundaries of tradition. If one subscribes to the artistic idea of Mallarmé and Boulez that the art work is a labyrinth, modernist music on the contrary invites the listener all the way in, to maybe the most important of all musical purposes: to create the meaning.

5.5 Redefining *absolute music*

As shown above, Susan McClary accuses her postwar modernist straw man of viewing music as an entity with *immanent meaning*, which develops in an evolutionary fashion along a historical trajectory. As I understand her, she criticizes them for upholding the very system of hegemony against which their "avant-gardism" was a protest; in which Real Music, a position formerly held by the classical canon, stands against All Other Music. By insisting that their music is the only Music, they simply cement the system and take over the throne themselves.

I would argue that the idea of the anonymous composer calls for an altered definition of absolute music. There is a difference between viewing music as an almost magical entity that has immanent thematic meaning and seeing music as a tool to generate thematic meaning by setting up patterns of sounds. It seems to me that the idea of absolute music which McClary criticizes, is of the first kind: A *personified* music, with an inner life and a will of its own, along with the alleged Romantic ideal that music came from some sort of a divinity, channeled through the composer, leaving the performer as a simple microphone stand. This criticism makes valid points if aimed at music as such as an autonomous entity, or at the musical work as floating abstract objects in Lydia Goehr's musical museum, as referred to earlier. However, in a *concrete* sense, with music as a material quality, it makes perfect sense to talk about music as something that has value of its own; as *sound*, as a sensory object, as texture and as material. The anonymous composer does not step aside so that the "true, divine, symbolic" meaning of music can shine through, he creates *structures of sound* that are not based on memory, tradition or cultural heritage, in order to facilitate an infinite number of possibilities.

It seems like the dichotomy between the views that music has either an *immanent* or a *social*/*extra-musical* meaning is not based on actual incapability then, at least not in Boulez's music. By working with sound as materiality, to create something that is detached from

tradition and from the composer's personal experience, I would argue that Boulez *per definition acknowledges that music has social meaning, by wishing to free himself of it.* Social and immanent meaning seem to me to exist in a symbiotic coexistence; music as material, as sound, has concrete *immanent* meaning. What the listener makes of this, based on his or her unique listening situation, made up of presuppositions, cultural background and current emotional state, pertains to the *social* meaning.

I think, from a listener's perspective, one way of experiencing musical meaning in vocal music is from a certain quality in a performer's voice. This might be experienced as if the performer is "grounded", or present, but it is generally a difficult sensation to describe. I find Roland Barthes' term *grain* to be excellent at describing this intangible phenomenon, and it might also be applicable to other instruments, particularly if we merge his two terms *grain* and *body*. What is the ethereal quality that makes a performance into a spectacular listening experience? What is that sensation of power in Mstislav Rostropovich's bow-strokes? The unbreakable string of tension that unites the impeccable non-legato of Glenn Gould's immortal Goldberg-variations? Or Halina Lukomska's persistent, compelling dedication? Earlier in this thesis, I have called it a sense of *urgency* in the performer's delivery, but I perceive the *grain-body* term to be more accurate. There are of course innumerable factors at play here, not to mention the music itself, as in the combination of tones and textures, and of course the listener's starting point. Nevertheless, I find that the *grain* is an adequate description of what one as a listener would experience as meaningful or communicative in a performer's efforts.

In "The Lure of the Sublime", Susan McClary claims quite rigidly that music only has meaning if it is engaging, dramatic, emotional or recognizable, but I would say that if a performer has *grain* or *body* in the Barthesian sense, this could be a way to experience musical meaning that does not initially have those qualities or other forms of extra-musical meaning.

Closing remarks

As we have seen earlier, Nicholas Cook asks for a new epistemological approach to performance, based on the appreciation of performance as a work in its own right. What is the epistemological and ontological status of performance as a musical work? I have sought to find answers to this question by discussing the three particular vocal performances of "Improvisation III". I have also endeavored to demonstrate possible ways to experience musical meaning in music that does not appeal to familiarity, rhetoric, emotion or other established or intuitive factors, and where the performers are seemingly detached and aloof.

Perhaps these questions intersect in my theft and merge of the Barthesian terms *grain* and *body*. Barthes addresses these qualities in relation to classical tonal compositions (i.e. Schubert's *Kreisleriana* and various lieder sung by Fischer-Dieskau and Panzera), but I perceive the idea to be similar to Erika Fischer-Lichte's material qualities in the experimental performance piece *Lips of Thomas*.

The ontological status of performance, then, is *materiality*. The performer's role is to provide the performance with *grain* and *body*, and thus, the materiality is not *sound* as in mere mechanical physics, but as in a human, organic, living *matter* being brought forth. The epistemological status would be the listener's reception and experience of this materiality, and the emergence of the new realities that are being created in his or her interpretation and aesthetic appreciation. Could this epistemological approach be capable of bridging the gap between genres and musical conventions, by giving listeners an experience of musical meaning that transcends such boundaries?

Thoughts on the future

Is there hope for modernist music's relevance in the commercialized public sphere? Susan McClary wonders whether it might be too late to "salvage classical music" altogether (McClary 2015:26). She thinks that some damage was already done when music was allegedly reduced to science in the postwar years, for instance because the "museum-oriented enterprises" of classical music failed to capture listeners, and gave popular music the upper hand in influencing new generations since the opera houses and concert halls continued to "cater to nineteenth century tastes" (ibid.:25f).

Notwithstanding how certain corners of the music scene rightfully can be accused of bourgeoisie conservative attitudes – think only of the playing-it-beyond-safe repertoire of the Viennese Philharmonic Annual New Year's Concert, not to mention their alleged conservative employment traditions[10] – considering the abundance of styles within contemporary classical music, merges with other genres and initiatives to play rock concerts in opera houses and classical music in night clubs, one can hardly argue that classical music as a whole needs to reinvent itself. My thought is that perhaps the *musical discourse* to some extent is what is lagging behind. In my personal experience, I find that modernist and contemporary music is still often described as "new" and "strange" and the "other" kind of music, in virtually all public arenas where music is talked about – I have even encountered this in my own studies in the Bachelor program at the Department of Musicology. The exception is often to be found within the contemporary music scene itself. I find that for instance the Oslo-based Ultima Contemporary Music Festival is quite consistent in their programs and promotion in calling all music simply "music" (except, paradoxically, in the festival's title).[11] As we have seen in this thesis, texts and discourses, too, can have a performative effect: they constitute realities. Perhaps the modernist music discourse has facilitated the perceived strangeness or otherness, instead of merely describing a strangeness or otherness immanent in Modernism's aesthetics.

The gender aspect

As mentioned earlier, McClary adds an element of gender to the cerebral/sublime versus the emotional/beautiful in her discussions on postwar Modernism. *Pli selon pli* could be a textbook example of the hierarchy between the omnipotent male composer and/or conductor instructing the subdued female performer. Likewise, the serialist composition technique could be perceived as the rational and masculine composition controlling and taming the sensual female voice. Instead, these three performances serve as a deconstruction of that dichotomy, because the three female singers demonstrate a strong independence and individuality that shapes each version as a work in its own right.

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[10] For more on the employment controversy, see for instance this article: http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/features/all-white-on-the-night-why-does-the-world-famous-vienna-philharmonic-feature-so-few-women-and-ethnic-1915666.html

[11] This is their website: http://ultima.no/en/

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