An improvisatory approach to nineteenth-century music

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Chapter 2. Commonplacing[55]

2.1 Introduction: An improvisatory approach

In 2013, David Dolan, John Sloboda, Henrik Jeldtoft Jensen, Björn Crüts and Eugene Feygelson presented the results of their ground-breaking interdisciplinary research about the impacts of adopting an improvisatory approach to the performance of classical chamber music. EEG measurements were carried out both on musicians and on their audience while the same music was performed either with or without an improvisatory approach. The measurements showed considerable differences; in the words of the researchers, the data provided '*prima facie* evidence that improvised performances of the classical repertoire can heighten musical quality and audience engagement'.[56] By 'musical quality' the authors understood 'a state of heightened listening or attunement during the improvised mode, as evidenced by (...) rhythmic flexibility and [the] ability to give musical space to the other players who may have been extemporising notes or leading a rubato'.[57] It was found that 'the presence of an improvisatory state of mind in performance results in greater degrees of engaged listening (subjective feedback) and synchrony of brain activity (objective feedback) between performers and listeners'.[58]

A follow-up from 2018 with an even more interdisciplinary set-up, in part by the same researchers, led to a similar conclusion: 'In a group setting, such as a live concert, our evidence suggests that [an improvisatory] state of mind is communicable between performers and audience thus contributing to a heightened quality of shared experience.'[59] The authors conclude that 'there is a strong suggestion both from the audience responses (of "more musically convincing") and also from the critical listening of the musicians, that the improvised performances were not only more impactful, but had a higher artistic quality'.[60]

The findings of these research projects strongly support an assumption that underlies the present study as a whole: that an improvisatory approach is not just something that may be presumed in historical situations of music-making, but that matters today. When a pianist plays a (new) cadenza,

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[55] Sections 2.1-2.3 are based on an earlier essay: 'Commonplacing: on historically inspired improvisation and music theory'. In: Aydintan, M. & Edler, F. & Graybill, R. & Krämer, L. (eds.): *Gegliederte Zeit. 15. Jahreskongress der Gesellschaft für Musiktheorie Berlin 2015*. Hildesheim, 2020; 500-510.

[56] Dolan, D. & Sloboda, J. & Jensen, H.J. & Crüts, B. & Feygelson, E.: 'The improvisatory approach to classical music performance: An empirical investigation into its characteristics and impact.' *Music Performance Research*, Vol. 6 (2013); 2.

[57] Dolan, D. & Sloboda, J. & Jensen, H.J. & Crüts, B. & Feygelson, E.: op. cit., 32.

[58] Dolan, D. & Sloboda, J. & Jensen, H.J. & Crüts, B. & Feygelson, E.: op. cit., 31.

[59] Dolan, D. & Jensen, H. J. & Mediano, P.A.M. & Molina-Solana, M. & Rajpal, H. & Rosas, F. & Sloboda, J.: The Improvisational State of Mind: A Multidisciplinary Study of an Improvisatory Approach to Classical Music Repertoire Performance'. *Frontiers in Psychology,* Vol. 9 (September, 2018); 1.

[60] Dolan, D. & Jensen, H. J. & Mediano, P.A.M. & Molina-Solana, M. & Rajpal, H. & Rosas, F. & Sloboda, J.: op. cit., 19.

it may be impossible for listeners to decide whether it was premeditated or actually invented 'as it is being performed' (→ chapter 1.2), as Daniel Gottlob Türk remarked in 1789;[61] however, whether the cadenza is played in an improvisatory mode or not is picked up (and appreciated) by the audience, then as well as nowadays. In the articles of Dolan and his colleagues the idea of an improvisatory approach is described in rather general terms, using qualities such as the amount of risk-taking. The present study aims to flesh out the phenomenon in the field of nineteenth-century music. At the end of chapter 1, I briefly discussed it in a dual sense, namely as an approach to scores and to music-making itself. In the present chapter I will develop a conceptual framework that provides an entry into both aspects. This framework, a musical application of the rhetorical concept *locus communis*, will be used to describe and analyse improvisatory aspects of music-making. In the next section (2.2), this concept will be explained, first in connection with improvisatory creation. In section 2.3, I subsequently turn towards the dialogue between musicians and scores and show how *loci communes* have an important role there as well.

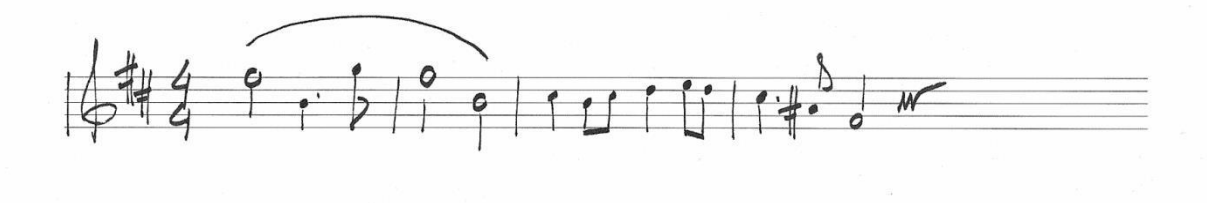
2.2 Loci communes

A student's improvisation

An example from my own teaching practice may serve as an upbeat to the introduction of the concept 'locus communis'. The Royal Conservatoire in The Hague has been offering electives on 'classical' improvisation since over 15 years. In June 2014, a one semester improvisation course was concluded with a group session during which all students presented one or more improvisations in different combinations. This course was intended for third year Bachelor students in classical music (non-keyboard players and singers), and the programme consisted of different types of historically inspired group and duo improvisations. Since this was an introductory course, the stylistic focus remained rather open: the lessons aimed to remove mental barriers and to stir the students' musical imagination, instead of imposing style-based restrictions.

During the course, the students were trained with exercises intended to enhance their ability to both recognise and imagine concrete musical structures (melodic models, standard harmonic progressions such as cadences and well-known sequences) and to translate the imagined sounds to a musical instrument (including the voice). Shortly before the final presentation, the students were provided with a brief 'incipit', a beginning of a melody, most often in the form of an antecedent. An oboe player received the following theme, which was given the title 'Lied ohne Worte' on the assignment sheet:

[61] Türk, D.G.: *Clavierschule oder Anweisung zum Clavierspielen für Lehrer und Lernende*. Leipzig, 1789; 313.



Example 2.2.1

The assignment was to start a 'free' improvisation with this incipit, accompanied by me as an instructor. That is about all that was agreed upon in advance: apart from the incipit, both melody and accompaniment were improvised. The session was recorded with a cell phone.

[2.2 #1 improvised Lied ohne Worte]

It should be noted that historical evidence of two or more musicians improvising together is extremely scarce during the period considered in this study. The point of this exam assignment therefore was not to re-enact some imagined historical practice, but to 'say something new in an old language' – at least, a first attempt in that direction. The oboe player had virtually no experience with this type of improvising before he came to the course, and this theme was new to him. Nevertheless, the music on the recording sounds more or less 'right' in terms of the 'common practice period': there are no real clashes, and the form seems to be in balance as well. On the basis of similar experiences in classroom and on stage it can be said that this type of result is not an exception. How is this actually possible? How can two players produce something in a style that is based upon classical harmony, without any prior agreement about the course of the music?

Guiding principles

Indeed, to many score-dependent classical musicians a joint improvisation like the one on the recording may seem to be a matter of telepathy – or luck. This idea is based on the assumption that, when there is no score to play from, the musician has no guidelines whatsoever. This assumption, however, is not correct. As soon as an improviser (or composer) decides to express something musically, there are all sorts of factors guiding him, which together form a kind of referential framework. In other words: each musical game has its rules. In 'idiomatic' improvisation such rules are closely connected with what we call a musical style. In the aforementioned lesson a couple of hints was already made on the assignment sheet. First of all, the added title ('Lied ohne Worte') designates a genre. The implications are far-reaching (→ chapter 12): it evokes the early-nineteenth-century style of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, and it suggests a certain character and texture (a gentle singing melody in moderate tempo with a clearly separate accompaniment). Even though many 'songs without words' of Mendelssohn (the name giver of the genre) are actually more diverse than that, I believe that it is still this cliché that is suggested by the title. With it come certain melodic gestures,

and even a melody that is generally built in four-bar phrases; the title also evokes a certain form (a ternary form will be likely, with the middle section in a contrasting key, usually the dominant or the relative major / minor). On a more detailed level, the given opening phrase (the incipit) can easily be seen as the first half of a classical period, implying a next phrase that opens symmetrically and then either closes in the home key or modulates. All of these factors are musical conventions that are connected with the suggested title and the character and style of the given theme.

Of course, the piano accompaniment itself was also strongly guiding the oboe player. This is because tonal harmony tends to follow specific patterns, among other things depending on, as William Caplin calls it,[62] the formal function of a passage; put (too) simply: whether one is at the beginning, the middle or the end of a section. As I mentioned above, familiarity with such patterns had been addressed in the preceding lessons. But exactly which harmonic progressions were chosen, and how they were arranged, depended on the possibilities offered by the melody of the oboe player. His melodic gestures created expectations as well, resulting in me choosing for one of the harmonic options available at a specific moment. In this way the improvisation really was an ongoing process of give and take.

A free tonal duo improvisation[63] such as the one in the example may be compared with a conversation: there is usually one person who takes the initiative, although this initiative may change continuously between the improvisers.[64] The success of the enterprise depends on an important principle: a certain level of shared musical expectation. The 'follower' should not only be able to react quickly to the initiative of the 'leader'; he should also know what his fellow might do next. For the musicians to be able to play together, even improvised music, despite being 'unforeseen' (→ chapter 1.2) and unplanned, needs a certain amount of predictability. This predictability can be found in the rules of the musical game: in factors that guide the improvisers, such as the ones described above. The reverse is also true: when the improvisers do not play according to the guiding factors, they change the rules of the game. There might be very good artistic reasons to do so, but the new game will be a different one.

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[62] Cf. Caplin, W.E.: *Classical Form*. New York, 1998.

[63] In the context of this study: tonal improvisations in which all factors (melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, formal) are decided on the spot.

[64] This metaphor should not be pushed: of course, a difference with a verbal conversation is that in music, it is more usual that individuals perform simultaneously – a situation that is usually avoided in talking. A commonplace reference is Goethe's famous description of a string quartet in a letter to Carl Friedrich Zelter from 9 November, 1829: 'Man hört vier vernünftige Leute sich untereinander unterhalten' [one hears four reasonable people talking together] (Geiger, L. (ed.): *Briefwechsel zwischen Goethe und Zelter*, Band 3). Leipzig, 1902; 194).
In his teaching, David Dolan (→ chapter 1.2 and section 2.1) often compares this way of improvising with dancing together. Both metaphors express the subtlety of the process; just like between dancing and conversation partners, the communication between improvisers takes place through more channels than could be mentioned in the necessarily simplified account in this chapter. For instance, for the oboist to pick up a specific harmonic pattern, it is not just the chords and the way they are arranged that matter, but also the musical expression in the playing of the pianist.

The guiding principles exist on many levels, and not only in extempore creations but in composed music as well. They are musical 'commonplaces': musical conventions and inclinations (forms, phrases, patterns, textures, etc.) that are generally recognised and shared between musicians and listeners within a specific stylistic domain. Unfortunately, the word 'commonplace' (a literal sixteenth-century translation of the Latin *locus communis*, originally a term from rhetoric) gained a pejorative connotation during the Enlightenment, both in English and in many other modern languages. The Latin term remained in use alongside its translations; in German, the equivalent *Gemeinplatz* even did not occur until the eighteenth century with Christoph Martin Wieland, who used it both in a neutral and in a disapproving sense.[65] All the same, 'commonplacing', i.e. writing striking passages from books, facts, recipes, etc., in a 'commonplace-book', became extremely popular in seventeenth-century Europe, and remained so until into the twentieth century.

To avoid the hint of triviality, I here propose the original term *loci communes* (singular: *locus communis*) for these musical guiding factors.[66] Without loci communes, the oboe player and the pianist would not be able to cooperate, but more important, neither listeners nor performers would have the feeling of 'understanding' the music because there would hardly be any shared musical expectation.[67]

Locus communis as a rhetorical concept

In rhetoric,[68] 'locus', 'locus communis' and 'topos' have been treated as synonyms since Renaissance.[69] Already in Antiquity, the spectrum of possible meanings was wide and confusing. In Cicero and Quintilian, the term 'locus' refers to an imaginary 'place' where an orator could find arguments for the defence of the accused (such as 'the past of the accused'). Quintilian, who explicitly rejects using the word for what would be called a 'commonplace' (in the negative sense) today, writes that specific arguments can be found at a certain 'location', just as wild animals occur in a specific habitat.[70] It is Quintilian's explanation that this study will fall back on. Humanist 'commonplace-books' as mentioned above were also based on this understanding of the term: memorable fragments, quotations, etc., were collected and classified into 'loci communes'.[71] Classical loci could occur at

[65] Coenen, H.G.: 'Locus communis'. In: Ueding, G. (ed.): *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, Band 5. Tübingen, 2001; column 409.

[66] Jean-Pierre Bartoli and Jeanne Roudet use the French equivalent 'lieu commun' in a similar way; they equally regret its pejorative meaning, and for this reason confine themselves to the more neutral term 'lieux'. Bartoli, J.-P. & Roudet, J.: *L'Essor du romantisme: La fantaisie pour clavier de Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach à Franz Liszt.* Paris, 2013; 321.

[67] Cf. Huron, D.: *Sweet Anticipation*. Cambridge (MA), 2006; especially 203-218. Huron uses the term 'schema'; however, see below for Robert Gjerdingen's more specific application of this term.

[68] The author expresses his gratitude to Casper de Jonge for his many valuable suggestions concerning rhetoric.

[69] Coenen, H.G.: op. cit., col. 398.

[70] Quintilian: *Institutio oratoria*, V.10.20-21.

[71] Coenen, H.G.: op. cit., col 407.

different levels of generality: the locus 'the past of the accused' for instance could be subdivided into 'lower level' loci like 'past actions' and 'past sayings'. The term was even used at the lowest level of concrete, explicitly formulated single arguments.[72] The adjective *communis* originally indicated a more general category of locus, as opposed to the more specific *loci proprii.*[73] In this study, I will often use 'locus' for 'locus communis', for brevity's sake.

Early musical applications

The term was already employed musically in the context of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century application of classical rhetorical concepts to music. The seventeenth-century German music theorist Joachim Thuringus compared melodic formulas and their variants in polyphonic music, such as *clausulae* (cadences), with loci communes from rhetoric.[74] The composer and theorist Johann David Heinichen writes that to the 'angebohrnen guten natürlichen Fantasie' [innate, good and natural *Fantasie*] (i.e.: to somebody with a talent for musical invention), 'loci topici' (a then common but tautological term) serve as a source for 'geschickte Invention[es]' [clever musical ideas];[75] they belong to the *inventio*, the first stage of creation, both in rhetoric and in its musical counterpart, *musica poetica*.[76] Johann Mattheson also regards loci as sources of invention (*Erfindungs-Quellen*).[77] Thus a musical locus is a 'place' (or guiding principle) that gives cause for (or invites) concrete musical ideas on a more detailed level. Like Thuringus, Mattheson mentions the cadence, but also many other examples of loci. Though the strong similarity between verbal rhetoric and music that Baroque authors saw had faded by the end of the eighteenth century, several rhetorical concepts can be discerned in nineteenth-century music as well. 'Locus communis' is one of them; as in classical rhetoric, the concept can exist on many levels, several examples of which were mentioned in the discussion of the improvised piece for oboe and piano.

More recently, the Greek equivalent *topos* has become a popular term in music theory. Originally used in literary theory, it became the subject of an entire 'topic theory' in musicology, initiated by Leonard Ratner.[78] However, 'topos' is often used today in a way that connects music to an extramusical meaning (→ section 2.3). As Nicolas McKay writes, musical topoi are 'familiar, expressive, rhetorical gestures encoded in referential musical patterns'.[79] Already in the 1960's, this

[72] Coenen, H.G.: op.cit., col. 399.
[73] Ibidem.
[74] Thuringus, J.: *Opusculum bipartitum de primordiis musicis* (1624); cited in: Krones, H.: 'Musikalische Figurenlehre'. In: Ueding, G. (ed.): *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, Band 5. Tübingen, 2001; col. 1576.
[75] Heinichen, J.D.: *Der Generalbaß in der Composition.* Dresden, 1728; 30.
[76] Bartel, D.: *Handbuch der musikalischen Figurenlehre*. Laaber, 2004; 70-71.
[77] Mattheson, J.: *Der vollkommene Capellmeister.* Hamburg, 1739; 124.
[78] Ratner, L. G.: *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style*. New York, 1980.
[79] Cf. McKay, N.: 'On Topics Today'. *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Musiktheorie*, 4. Jahrgang (2007). Hildesheim, 2009; 159-183.

way of assigning meaning to music occurred in musicology:[80] the Dutch musicologist Frits Noske writes about the aria *Se vuol ballare* from Mozart's opera *Le Nozze di Figaro*, which is written in the 'aristocratic' minuet rhythm. This aria is sung by a lower-ranking servant, which induced Noske to interpret the use of the minuet here as a 'social weapon'.[81] In contrast to the way 'topos' is used in modern musicology, the concept 'locus communis', applied to music as described above, is intrinsically musical: it describes a structural aspect of music as a language.[82]

Examples of loci communes in the student improvisation

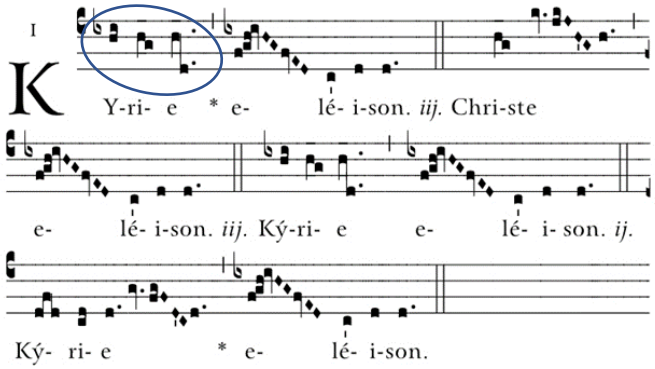
Such musical loci are too manifold to make a comprehensive enumeration. With respect to the recorded improvised *Lied ohne Worte*, loci on the levels of musical genre, texture and form were already mentioned. Also on a more detailed level, there are many harmonic and melodic formulas or clichés in this recorded piece that can be regarded as such. Though any attempt at classification may seem forced, the traditional subdivision into (a) melodic, (b) rhythmic and (c) harmonic aspects might still be helpful.

a. The *melos* of the incipit, for instance, has a melodic feature that is so common in melodies in the Dorian and minor modes that it can be called trans-stylistic. This melodic locus can be described as a gestural movement that starts on the fifth tone of the minor or Dorian mode, and drops directly to the tonic. It is a 'source of invention' that gives rise to many concrete melodic manifestations and from which this melody also springs. Its expression may be heightened by making the fifth longer, or ornamenting it with neighbour tones. The latter occurs, for instance, in the beginning of the eleventh Gregorian *Kyrie: Orbis factor*:

[80] Hermann Kretzschmar's musical hermeneutics may be seen as an earlier representative of this line of thinking. According to Kretzschmar, the task of musical hermeneutics was 'die Affekte aus den Tönen zu lösen und das Gerippe ihrer Entwicklung in Worten zu geben' [to free the affects from the tones and to render in words the framework of their development]; quoted in: Grimm H.: 'Hermann Kretzschmar: Restitution der Affektenlehre als wissenschaftliche Grundlegung musikalischer Hermeneutik'. In: Gerhard, A. (ed.): *Musikwissenschaft — eine verspätete Disziplin?*. Stuttgart, 2000; 87.

[81] Noske, F.: *The Signifier and the Signified.* The Hague, 1977; 34. Noske wrote this passage already in 1968 and did not yet use the term 'topos' as such here.

[82] A possible objection against the proposed application of the term 'locus communis' might be that in rhetoric, it is related to the meaning of a text, whereas in music it concerns a structural aspect. However, the same argument would apply to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century musical rhetoric in general. In fact it only holds when the referential quality of language is transposed to music, in other words: when musical sounds would have the option to 'mean' something in the same way language does. This is a position that is not taken in this study.



Example 2.2.2: Kyrie XI 'Orbis factor' (beginning)

In the incipit of the improvisation, the motif is repeated, ornamented only the second time with an incomplete upper neighbour tone. Completely unadorned it appears in the famous oboe solo from Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*, a conscious hint in the assignment, given the shared key and instrumentation.

Example 2.2.3: P.I. Tchaikovsky: Oboe theme from 'Swan Lake' (beginning) [Act I, Finale]

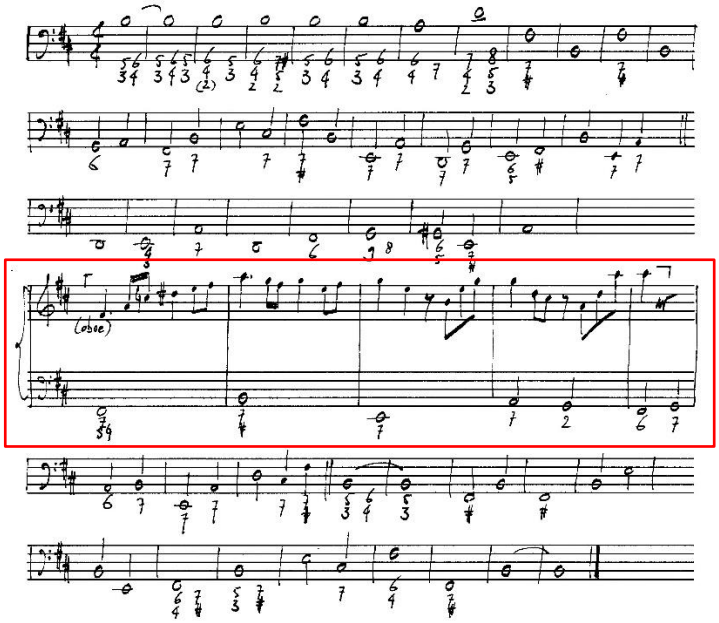
b. Mattheson gives an initial impetus to the idea of a rhythmical locus by showing how a rhythmic principle (equal quarter notes) may lead to melodic invention.[83] Clearer examples from Baroque music might be variation cycles, where each variation clearly springs from a rhythmical motivation (e.g. in Arcangelo Corelli's variations on *La Folia* in the violin sonata op. 5 no. 12). Separating out rhythmical loci might be relatively problematic in a lyrical Romantic style where rhythmic definition seems to be subordinate to the melodic flow. On the level of metre, however, the organisation of the music in regular portions of four or eight pulses, often arranged in pairs, is definitely a convention that strongly directs the musical development. For the shape of a melody, this metric locus is extremely important.

c. The importance of harmonic loci and their interaction with the melodic path was already mentioned above in the discussion of the interplay between the two musicians on the recording. Classical harmony tends to follow variants of specific formulas that, in combination with metric patterns, yield a strong sense of expectation.

Harmonic loci can be conveyed in the form of a figured bass reduction. The advantage of this rendering over conventional staff notation is that a figured bass provides the reader with essential information (as far as the harmony is concerned), while it leaves open many possible variants

[83] Mattheson, J.: op. cit., 125.

regarding voice leading. The harmony of the student improvisation with which section 2.2 started can in this way be 'described' in the form of a figured bass:



Example 2.2.4

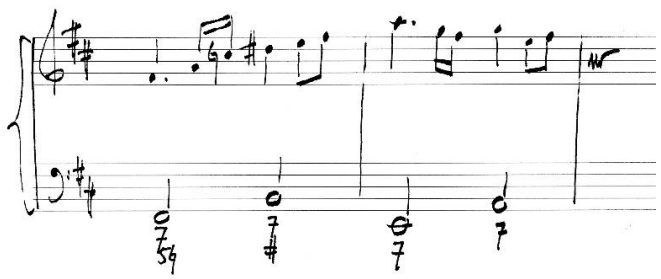
Easily recognisable in the melody of the bass line are the metric organisation in groups of four bars (eight pulses), and harmonic loci such as cadential patterns and the long pedal on b in the first six bars, a trans-stylistic opening convention in tonal music.

The red box highlights a passage (with the oboe part added) where the piano part was leading because it was based upon a strong harmonic locus. It starts with a half diminished seventh chord: in this style a harmonic tell-tale sign, that creates the expectation of a falling fifth progression[84] (the locus communis); the oboe player catches it but apparently expected a timing that is twice as fast (which would be equally possible on the basis of the harmonic rhythm before).

[2.2 #2 Improvised Lied ohne Worte (fragment)]

Specifically, the oboist might have expected something like this:

[84] To be specific, in this style it can only be interpreted as a second degree (II^7) in minor, creating the expectation of at least a II – V – I -cadence, which because of its localisation on the second degree of the contextual major key might be continued as a falling fifth-sequence until the tonic (in this case D major) is arrived at; in Roman numeral symbols: (II^7 – V^7)→ II – V^7 – I.



Example 2.2.5

The accompaniment indeed starts with the falling fifth formula, but instantly adjusting the timing would have sounded like a mistake. The oboist discovers the different timing after a few beats – resulting in a slight clash, which is, however, acceptable within the field of possible dissonances: the d# can be interpreted as an appoggiatura, just like the a in the next bar.

Admittedly, this is a reconstruction after the event that is to a certain extent speculative. One might object that the oboe player perhaps wanted to arpeggiate a diminished seventh chord in the first bar, and only too late realised that a half diminished seventh was sounding in the piano (resulting in a clash between d# and e). On the other hand, the latter interpretation would make the continuation with the relatively strong ascending passing note e a bit unusual. Then again, the oboist might just as well have been searching for tones that would fit; this would, however, not be in contradiction with the idea of loci communes producing musical expectation.

Musical gestures and schemata

In the preceding section I discussed the various categories of loci that existed already in antiquity. A similar view can be found with Mattheson, and the application of the term in this study also shows different levels, ranging from very general loci to very specific ones. Moreover, the importance of loci for musical expectation was emphasised. While more general loci, such as those on the level of musical form, provoke rather abstract expectations with regard to the course a piece of music will take, the more specific ones likewise create concrete expectations concerning musical content, and therefore are more closely connected with musical expression. Formulas such as the falling fifth-sequence as analysed above have an expressive value, which seems to be located in the combination of the harmonies and the melodic power of the voices (notably when dissonances are involved). They are like intramusical gestures.[85] The shape of a phrase, a harmonic pattern, a rhythmic development: they all create a concrete sense of expectation and seem to have a 'direction' (to use a common spatial metaphor). Because of this expressive potential, which more general loci communes on the level of genre ('Lied ohne Worte') or form ('ternary form') hardly possess, if at all, it seems appropriate to distinguish musical gestures as a sub-category of loci communes.

[85] The word 'gesture' is used here as a metaphor for a musical passage, not as a bodily movement.

The interplay between melodic and harmonic elements as noted in the previous example clearly connects with an important music-theoretical topic in recent years: the rediscovery of the *partimento* tradition. In Robert Gjerdingen's influential book about *partimento*, *Music in the Galant Style*,[86] so-called *schemata* (specific harmony / voice-leading situations) play a role, comparable to the abovementioned harmonic gestures; in his book, the function of the *schemata* is compared with the figures of an ice-skater, or the standard roles in the *Commedia dell'Arte*. What makes his ideas so interesting in view of the topic in question is that also the functioning of Gjerdingen's *schemata* depends on a common ground, shared between musicians and listeners. Gjerdingen even states that the suggested *schemata* are hard to appreciate by a modern interpreter. Ironically, he is referring to a repertoire (the Italian galant music from the later eighteenth century) that many modern listeners would describe as sounding rather easy and predictable! A music-lover today tends to perceive this music in a somewhat general and undifferentiated way, not appreciating detailed intricacies because it all sounds perfectly traditional – sometimes even commonplace. In the words of Gjerdingen: 'Whereas casual observers of ice-skating competitions may see only a variety of glides, spins, and jumps, a connoisseur sees salchows, axels, lutzes, and camels.'[87] This may indeed be a problem with many loci from the past: often we are even not aware of their existence. A second point of interest is that Gjerdingen writes about schemata from the point of view of the creator of music; they are, Gjerdingen writes, elements of a galant musical etiquette, and the musician supposedly was to be judged according to his ability and inventiveness in handling them. Gjerdingen's book gave birth to a new field of music-analytical research that encompasses later music as well. However, since the relation between nineteenth-century teaching and the eighteenth-century Italian *partimento* pedagogy is under debate, Gjerdingen's schemata will be applied to nineteenth-century music with caution in this study (→ chapter 9).

Defining loci communes and consciously applying them in improvisations or compositions can be a way to acquire actively a musical language. Structural and formal loci, for instance, will play an important part in chapter 12, where the significance of musical genres will be discussed. Gestural loci represent the syntactical level of musical language, as it were, and they will occur throughout this study. In classical rhetoric, the word *schema* originally means the outward appearance of something; the Latin synonym is *figura* (→ chapter 3).[88] Gjerdingen's use of this term is appropriate for the concrete musical figures he applies it to, but it will be understood in this study as a 'locus proprius', a special case within the more generic category 'locus'. Stripped of their specific voice leading, many schemata coincide with harmonic loci communes such as the ones that are described in chapter 9.5.

[86] Gjerdingen, R.O.: *Music in the Galant Style*. New York, 2007.
[87] Gjerdingen, R.O.: op. cit., 7.
[88] Bartel, D.: op. cit., 13.

Loci communes and premeditation

In the previous section I have adapted a concept from classical rhetoric that was applied musically already in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to music from the nineteenth century. I proposed 'locus communis', a term that for Mattheson belonged to the stage of *inventio*, as an appropriate term for intramusical factors that guide musical creation.

There might seem to be a contradiction between the idea of inventing music 'on the spot' on the one hand, and the fact that loci are necessarily pre-existing structures on the other hand. Doesn't the application of loci imply that also improvised music is always to a certain extent 'prepared'? I think that this is an assumption that springs from an understanding of music which, in John Cage's words, 'enjoys the sound acting' (→ chapter 1.3): an essentially modern view on music in which any sound can potentially serve as musical material. Against the background of the emancipation of pure sound and the resulting almost total (imagined) freedom, loci may indeed seem to represent previously made musical choices and decisions. However, as I emphasised in chapter 1.3, the music discussed in this study should not be seen as an enclosed subset vis-à-vis the universal sound world, a historical 'not yet' that is still awaiting future sailing into an endless sea of possibilities; rather its language-like character shows a radically different approach to what music is. Instead of joining a modernist narrative that sees music history as a development in which gradually more and more is 'allowed', it will be fruitful to acknowledge that it may better be understood as a process of change, in which things also got lost over time.

Being language-like should therefore not be seen as a limitation in any sense, and not as a manifestation of 'preparedness' either. An orator who improvises a speech cannot be said to be restricted by the language he uses, and it would be strange to claim that he did not really invent it on the spot just because the grammatical structure of the language was a given – though obviously, the speaker has to know this language, and in that sense needs to be prepared. Or, to use another metaphor: in a game of chess the players 'improvise' within the frame of the rules, but it would be foolish to suggest that the rules are premeditated and therefore make their work any easier. Even pre-existing models such as chess openings do not make the game less improvisatory; on the contrary, they allow the players to launch the game into deeper waters. Similarly, musical loci represent a frame that makes improvisation possible. Seeing them as premeditated content at best applies to 'commonplaces' in a pejorative sense; in reality loci challenge the musician because it is his task to come up 'on the spot' with music that understandably uses a musical language.

These considerations in the first place concern 'historically inspired improvisation', the subject of part 3 of this study. The question remains how loci can be relevant for musical re-creation as well,[89] notably how they may help to define an improvisatory approach to scores. It was argued in chapter 1 that such an approach is at odds with the *Urtext*-paradigm which implies a reading of scores that is immovable and literal. Apparently approaching a score in an improvisatory way means that it is being read less literally and more flexibly. On the other hand the concept of a 'dialogue' (→ chapter 1, *passim*) suggests that this does not imply a total and arbitrary freedom in working with a score. In the remainder of this chapter, I will address score interpretation specifically in order to show how also an improvisatory approach to scores can be based upon loci communes.

2.3 In dialogue with scores

The score as a prescriptive and descriptive text

In chapter 1.4 I already argued that 'classical music' is essentially a modern musical practice. It is a popular view that performances of classical music are like time machines that connect us with the days of the composer.[90] However, regarding a performance of an early composition as repeating an event from the past is misleading. Assumed unbroken performance traditions are in reality often 'invented traditions' (Eric Hobsbawm). This study draws on the idea that a score and a performance are two different things. It is the scores themselves that possibly can be seen as a connection with the past, or even may produce what the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga called a 'historical sensation', as I argued earlier;[91] what musicians do with them is quite a different matter. Thus 'classical music' is present-day music-making on the basis of musical texts (namely scores) from the past.[92] Scores are the *raison d'être* of classical music as a present-day practice; improvisation in classical music is in the first place an aspect of our relationship with the musical texts of (mostly) dead composers. The reason why musicians may be interested in historical forms of improvisation at all is, I believe, not so much their curiosity about history; rather their interest enhances and enriches their relation with scores that keep being performed.

[89] 'Recreation' is used here as opposed to 'reproduction': a pair of concepts that (imperfectly) expresses the idea that a performance of a score can be less or more 'creative'. Unlike 'reproduction', 'recreation' contains the aspect of what Bruce Ellis Benson's calls 'reworking' (→ chapter 1.2).

[90] This idea is at least suggested by CD titles such as 'A Venetian vespers' or 'Music at the court of …'; the phenomenon is also seen in the well-known teacher-student pedigrees that connect e.g. a modern pianist with celebrities like Chopin or Liszt. The latter hugely contributed to such development of legends by claiming that as a boy, he received the so-called 'Weihekuss' [hallowing kiss] from Beethoven.

[91] Cf. Mooiman, B.: 'Theorie en praktijk – of andersom? Een persoonlijke visie.' In: Dutch Journal of Music Theory, Vol. 14 (February 2009); 22.

[92] Cf. Taruskin, R.: *Text and Act.* New York, 1995; e.g. 12-13.

In the context of this research – nineteenth-century Western art music – a score is seen as a musical text which fixes sounding music by representing it in signs.[93] This description may seem to be problematic: which sounding music? How can sounding music be fixed on a piece of paper? In what sense can a static sign represent something that happens in time? In his book *Musicking* Christopher Small writes:

> Music is performance, and pieces, or works, of music, whether on the smallest or the grandest scale, whether written down or not, exist in order to give performers something to perform. Unperformed, only the instructions for performance exist.[94]

I argue that for the common practice era, this view of the purpose of a score is too limited. Indeed, a score may prescribe future music-making when a performer reads the score as a set of performance instructions that should be obeyed: in that sense, a score can be seen as a prescriptive text. Some notational forms are even prescriptive by nature. Tablature notation, for instance, represents an action instead of a sound: it needs the instrument as a link between sign and sound. In addition, the notation for transposing wind instruments and for *scordatura* on string instruments primarily prescribes an action (namely a finger arrangement). Generally, it is the *Urtext*-paradigm that tends to emphasise the prescriptive side of a score, even when it is not a matter of transposing instruments. For instance, it is quite normal in today's musical practice for a conductor to ask his ensemble (or a teacher his student) to start a crescendo precisely on the note under which the composer notated the word, with the motivation that this is what the composer requires. By contrast I argue that a traditional score usually not only prescribes, but also describes (and in this way represents) music: just as one may scribble down a tune that one hears somewhere,[95] so a composer may commit to paper music he imagines at a certain moment. This idea of a dual purpose of scores will be fundamental to this study. As I mentioned above, I argue that the purely prescriptive understanding of scores fits in with the *Urtext*-paradigm: the score tells the performer what to do. A descriptive understanding of a score, by contrast, does not allow for such an imperative claim. It gives the score a more autonomous quality, independent from any possible performances, and puts score and performer on an equal level, thus making possible a dialogue between the two.

The score as an object

Unlike sounding or imagined music, a score is a static object. Seen in this way, the score forms a time vacuum in between two processes. The first process is the music happening in the imagination of the

[93] This does not exclude e.g. *Augenmusik*: the fact that the score represents sounding music does not prevent it from gaining a certain aesthetic autonomy itself.
[94] Small, Chr.: *Musicking*. Middletown, 1998; 218.
[95] To use a term applied by Rudolf Frisius: the score as a *Hörprotokoll* [listening protocol] (*Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Sachteil 4. Kassel, 1996; col. 539).

composer. What distinguishes composers from improvisers is the fact that they do not perform immediately the music they imagine, but rather store it: that can be in memory (for instance, when somebody thinks out a tune that he consciously fixes in his memory), but usually the storing happens in musical notation. The score comes in place of the (immediate) performance; in a way it records the imagined music, and to a composer it can serve as an extension of his memory, enabling him to review passages and to combine fragments that were not initially invented at the same time.[96] By fixing his music in a score, the composer postpones the performance – in some cases, there might never be a performance at all – and makes it possible for the music to be performed by others. For this, a transformation is needed from a process in time (the imagined music) to something that is 'timeless' (the musical notation). It is a reduction in which the time-dimension disappears – quite similar to what happens when a playwright writes a text.

The second process is that of a performer making music on basis of this score. The representation on paper of the music, as previously imagined by the composer, is translated into actual sounding music. The dimension of time, which got lost in the transformation process from imagined music to score, has to be added anew. This simple truth is the origin of endless discussions about interpretation. Regardless how precisely the composer tried to notate his music, the mere fact that the missing time component makes a score something essentially different from music-as-event will always force performers to make their own interpretation. A score is like footprints of an animal: an experienced reader can gather a lot of information from them, but interpretation will always be necessary because the footprints only describe a process; they don't duplicate it.[97]

It should not be forgotten that it is not necessary to actually make music from a score in order to return from signs on paper to music as a process in time. The same transformation already takes place when somebody reads the score and imagines the sounding music in the proper tempo, and thus makes the music sound 'in his head'. 'Du mußt es so weit bringen, daß du eine Musik auf dem Papier verstehst' [you should become able to understand a piece of music, merely on reading it], Robert Schumann wrote in his *Musikalische Haus- und Lebens-Regeln*.[98] Indeed, a score (like a text) is only timeless in its capacity as a visible collection of graphic symbols; when the collection of symbols is

[96] The Dutch improviser / composer Guus Janssen even goes so far as to claim that a composer cheats: when he has a bad day during the composition process, nobody will notice when the piece is finished.

[97] The music theorist and composer David Lewin once expressed a similar idea: 'Once the music *has been* composed, it becomes a wholly different phenomenon for the composer. It becomes a *trace* or a *record* of past activities. The record has special values and meanings for performers, listeners, and critics, but for the composer *as* composer-of-the-piece, the trace means precisely what the sight of ski tracks on the hill behind means to a downhill skier who has navigated a treacherous slope, or what a photograph of yourself on the Eiffel Tower means to you if you have just returned from your first trip to Paris. Not just the level of meaning but the *kind* of meaning is the same in all three cases: "That was me. I was there."' Lewin, D.: 'Music Theory, Phenomenology, and Modes of Perception.' In: Music Perception, vol. 3, no. 4 (Summer 1986); 376. Thanks to Michiel Schuijer for pointing out this text to me.

[98] Schumann, R.: *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker*, Band 4. Leipzig, 1854; 295.

not seen as an aesthetic object on its own, but as a representation of sounding music, the only way to grasp their meaning is by reading them, which automatically brings in time. I am stressing this because music analysis sometimes tends to ignore this by treating different spots within a musical composition as if they are simultaneous events; one could say that in reality much music analysis is score analysis, i.e., analysis of a text. In this respect, a well-known metaphor like comparing a Bruckner symphony with a timeless artefact like a cathedral is telling. The possible objection that any perception of a static object such as a score or a cathedral happens in time and therefore can be called 'performative' as well, does not hold here: music-as-event is coupled with what I called a 'timeline' (→ chapter 1.4) that is inalienable and essentially different from the much more flexible period of time one needs to observe a building or a text on paper. When I look at a painting or a building, I am free to deviate from the viewing direction the artwork may suggest to me, and to use less or more time to take it in. Similarly, I may glance criss-cross through a score, skipping pages and returning to earlier spots. In order to enjoy music-as-event, however, I am bound to the speed and the specific order in which this musical 'story' unfolds. (For a continuation of this discussion, see chapter 14.)

Small mockingly quotes an anecdote about Johannes Brahms, 'who once refused an invitation to attend a performance of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, saying he would sooner stay home and read it'.[99] Though Small's disapproval of Brahms' attitude is understandable in respect of the point of view he defends in his book (namely that music is performance), I still think that the remarks of Schumann and Brahms make perfect sense.

Interpreting scores

The essential difference between music-as-a-score and music-as-event has very interesting consequences. One of them is that the distance between the timeless score and the music as imagined at the time of composing tends to get larger in the course of time. Musicologist Robert Philip gives many examples of composers who had the opportunity to authorise different recordings of the same composition over a longer period of time, with notable differences in interpretation as a result.[100] Some composers simply forgot with the years how precisely they originally imagined their music! In his 1981 essay *Stimme und Sprache*, Gadamer described this distance between author and text in literature: 'Es liegt (...) im Wesen von Literatur, dass das Werk sich sosehr von seinem Schöpfer gelöst hat, dass der Dichter bestenfalls ein guter, nie ein privilegierter Interpret seiner selber ist.' [101] [It belongs (...) to the essence of literature that a work has freed itself from its creator to such an extent, that the author is at the most a good interpreter of himself, but never a privileged one.]

[99] Small, Chr.: op. cit., 5.
[100] Philip, R.: *Performing Music in the Age of Recording*. New Haven, 2004; especially 177 ff.
[101] Gadamer, H.G.: 'Stimme und Sprache'. In: *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 8 (Ästhetik und Poetik). Tübingen, 1993; 267 (my italics).

Nonetheless, many musicians aim to perform from a score 'according to the intentions of the composer'. It would be too easy to dismiss this ideal as naïve and superficial, as might be expected on basis of what was written above; rather, it probably shows the tendency of the performer to identify with the 'inventor' of the music he is playing. To the player or singer the music feels like their own music, and at the same time they are usually convinced that they perform according to the 'intentions of the composer', which therefore in the eyes of the performer serve as a legitimation. It is telling that most musicians tend to fully agree with what they see as the 'composer's intentions': it will be hard to find classical performers who knowingly distance themselves from (what they see as) the composer's intentions with a score because they prefer their own version! At the same time performers tend to feel (or imagine) a unique and personal relationship with the composer, and to find it hard to value different interpretations by others. It is a confusing and slightly irrational territory; also the popular self-image of a musician as a transferor of the music rather describes his psychological state than the process of music-making itself.

Though it is common in the field of 'classical' music to see the inability of a score to give a complete and encompassing description of music (Gustav Mahler: 'Das Beste in der Musik steht nicht in den Noten') as something to be regretted, on second thoughts it is a blessing. Without the necessity of continuous interpretation, there would be no classical music. The missing time dimension in a score makes it possible to keep the music alive for many generations to come. This is not at all a plea for 'do as you please' with musical scores from the past: there definitely also is something like respect for a musical work. It is precisely this combination of freedom and respect that is described by the term 'dialogue'. Being in dialogue with a score means: playing with the score, improvising with it. Once more quoting Gadamer, here writing about the art of acting and reproducing 'real speaking':

> [Auf der Theaterbühne] ist es in der Tat wahr, dass der echte Schauspieler wirklich »spricht«, obwohl ihm sein Text vorgeschrieben ist, und der schlechte Schauspieler nicht – (...) man wird nie das Gefühl ganz los, dass er das nächste Wort schon kennt, wenn er spricht. (...) Der echte Schauspieler reproduziert ein echtes Sprechen, so dass man darüber vergisst, dass es ihm vorgeschrieben ist. *Tatsächlich gehört daher die Improvisationskunst zum echten Schauspieler* (...).[102]
>
> [On the theatre stage it is indeed true that the genuine actor truly 'speaks', though his text is prescribed, and the bad actor doesn't – (...) one never quite gets rid of the feeling that he already knows the next word when he speaks. (...) The true actor reproduces real speaking, which makes you forget that it was prescribed to him. *As a matter of fact, the art of improvising therefore belongs to the true actor* (...).]

An important difference between verbal and musical texts is in the idea of meaning, which is connected to one of the most important musical debates (or rather, minefields) during the nineteenth

[102] Gadamer, H.G.: op. cit., 265 (my italics).

century. Though it is not my intention to get entangled in the twentieth- and twenty-first-century successors of this debate, the concept of meaning cannot be ignored when a score is to be seen as a partner in an imaginary dialogue, rather than as an instructor or commander. In the next section I will therefore focus on the meaning of scores. Like above, a score will be understood as having both a descriptive and a prescriptive function.

A music-theoretical theory of meaning

One thing that the 'true actor' from Gadamer's text surely possesses is a firm idea about the meaning of his text. This person could not make the audience forget that he speaks a text written by somebody else if he does not understand it. He is able to speak a text as if it is his own – and maybe, to him it even feels as though it is. A similar state of identification is what a good musician strives for. When a musical performer wants to perform from a score, it has to 'mean' something to him. Philosophically, the idea of musical meaning is a much disputed one. It is not likely, however, that an 'average' performer, learning a new composition, will be helped too much by the extensive music-philosophical and theoretical debates about meaning in music that have been taking place in the past decennia. In such debates, much confusion is caused, in my view, by speaking about 'music' in general terms, as if the score, as notated by the composer, is exactly coinciding with (or at least seamlessly connected with) the 'music' as it sounds. As will be obvious by now, I think that this is an error because there is a fundamental difference between score, a composer's intentions, and performance. In this chapter, I will by contrast propose a music-theoretical approach to musical meaning (as opposed to a more philosophical approach). Starting from a musician's acute need for a feeling of understanding when confronted with a score, I intend to focus on meaning as it appears in the dialogue between the musician and the score.

This is not to deny that there are more views on musical meaning that deserve to be acknowledged. From the point of view of a listener, for instance, the focus will probably not be on the score, but on music-as-event; it is not uncommon that music-as-event arouses extra-musical associations in listeners. In this sense, it is possible to say that 'music' may refer to something extra-musical: music-as-event can be a 'signifier'. It is an understanding of musical meaning that primarily belongs to the fields of psychology and philosophy. When, for instance, Beethoven is depicting the *Erwachen heiterer Gefühle bei der Ankunft auf dem Lande* in the first movement of his Sixth Symphony, his words (added as a description above the score) are about this type of meaning. From the point of view of a musician, however – for instance, the conductor who performs Beethoven's piece from the score – there is first of all the question of what the score itself 'means' to him, or, continuing the metaphor of a dialogue, how it 'speaks' to him. I argue that, to the musician, the latter type of meaning is much more crucial: one can very well perform Beethoven's symphony without thinking of the countryside around Vienna, but without an understanding of the score the music will still

sound dead, regardless the beautiful pictures or feelings of joy the musician might imagine. This type of meaning, I argue, primarily belongs to the field of music theory.[103]

The next section focuses on the latter type of meaning in the context of an improvisatory approach. It explores the question of what exactly a score describes and prescribes, and the related question regarding the space for extempore decisions that a performer in dialogue with it may use. As I will show, this space includes aspects of musical notation that are often understood today as 'unambiguous' (→ chapter 1.2); even seemingly exact notation may contain intrinsic uncertainties.

The notation as such

On the most basic level, the signs in a score indicate aspects (parameters) of sound. The traditional Western music notation can represent the pitch, the duration and – less precisely – the dynamics and tone colour. Traditionally, the parameters of pitch and duration are seen as 'structural' features of music. Other parameters, such as dynamics, tempo, tone colour, etc., are supposed to belong to the 'performance' aspect. This view became the basis of modern music analysis.[104]

As many musicians know, the precision of the notation tends to vary according to the tradition within which a score was written: the neumes of the ninth century, for example, were mnemonic signs, used as an aid to memorise existing melodies.[105] Until the development of staff notation, these signs could hardly be prescriptive, at least as far as the mentioned parameters are concerned. Or, to take a more contemporary example: a graphic score often even doesn't intend to prescribe exactly the parameters of pitch and duration. However, such variants are all beyond the scope of this research. As for the well-known staff notation, exactly the fact that it seems to be much more precise can cause pitfalls for the interpreter because it may prompt literalism. The different parameters that can be represented in this type of notation (pitch, duration and dynamics / tone colour) will here be dealt with separately.

a. Pitch

Staff notation is based upon the diatonic system, which makes it unsuitable for the notation of microtones. It is not unthinkable that the development of staff notation by Guido of Arezzo allowed musical scribes to notate only approximately the pitch of the already existing (i.e., remembered) Gregorian melodies, which possibly contained microtones; if that is true, the score offered a much simplified description of the pitches of the actual music. When the same score was used later prescriptively in a different musical environment, this simplification probably tended to be forgotten

[103] One might say that Beethoven's titles are a descriptive feature of this score.

[104] Danuser, H.: *Musikalische Interpretation* (Handbuch der Musikwissenschaft, Band 11). Laaber, 1997; 4. It is a view that is not without problems because the separation of parameters itself is an abstraction: in the sounding music they cannot be isolated, for a tone with a pitch always has a duration, a loudness and a colour as well.

[105] The 'existence' of a melody that has not been notated exactly means that it is remembered by people who know it.

– with 'pure' diatonic new music as a result. The (im)possibilities of musical notation tend to influence the creating of new music as well as the recreation of already existing music.

Within the diatonic system, temperament (notably of keyboard instruments) has varied considerably through the ages. When we consider the temperament to be an essential part of the music as it sounded in the composer's imagination, this fact can make a rather large difference for later performances. For instance, if a score was notated during an era when mean tone temperament was prevalent, the prescriptive understanding of this score can cause quite different effects when the used temperament is not the same. This might be the case when the performance happens many years after the process of composing (a possibility that must have been hard to imagine for musicians living before the end of the eighteenth century). In this way, a chromatic line or a specific chord in a piece by Sweelinck or a contemporary composer can sound very different when played in equal temperament. It has to be said that one could argue about the question how crucial the temperament is for the effect that the music has on a listener. An equally possible view is to understand the score as representing some abstract imaginary music, a music that, at the moment of composition, was not imagined in every sounding detail but which needed 'materialisation' in the actual performance.[106] For singers and instruments that allow for subtle nuances of intonation, the notated pitch very often is not exactly the same as the sounding one. Even in an environment that uses equal temperament, adjustments of intonation happen constantly and almost automatically, generally speaking guided by the desire for well-tuned triads. For instance, when an arrangement of a sixteenth-century keyboard fantasia is performed by voices a cappella, it will most likely not sound in mean tone temperament! How essential, then, is the use of this temperament?

The idea that the score represents music as it actually sounded at the time of composition sometimes seems to be assumed implicitly, also in H.I.P.[107] In the light of what was written above about descriptive and prescriptive functions of a score, this is a problematic view that in fact inverts

[106] This idea resonates with the following words by Theodor Adorno: 'Der ganze Reichtum des musikalischen Gefüges, in dessen Integration seine [= Bachs] Kraft eigentlich besteht, muß von der Aufführung zur Evidenz erhoben werden, anstatt daß man der Fülle ein starres, in sich unbewegtes Einerlei entgegensetzt, den nichtigen Schein einer Einheit, die das Mannigfaltige, das sie bewältigen soll, ignoriert.' (Adorno, T.W.: *Prismen* [*Gesammelte Schriften*, Band 10.1]. Frankfurt am Main, 1977; 145.)
[The entire richness of the musical texture, the integration of which was the source of Bach's power, must be placed in prominence by the performance instead of being sacrificed to a rigid, immobile monotony, the spurious semblance of unity that ignores the multiplicity it should embody and surmount.] (Samuel and Shierry Weber, trans.; in: Adorno, T.W.: *Prisms*. Cambridge, Mass., 1981; 145.) Thanks to Marcel Cobussen for bringing this connection to my attention. An interesting variant of this view is the idea that the idea that, up to the eighteenth century, compositions (notably the ones for organ) mainly served as examples for improvised music. (Cf. Fidom, H.: 'Improvisation: the emancipation of an ancient musical skill.' In: Peeters, P. (ed.): *The Haarlem Essays*. Bonn, 2014; 357-358).

[107] It is quite possible to link this strong emphasis on the actual sound to a development in twentieth-century composition which also focused upon the sound *an sich* (e.g. Varèse, post-war serialism, Cage, electronic music) – another indication that even H.I.P. is an essentially modern practice.

the matter. The only thing that a score can try to describe is music as imagined by a composer, unless somebody instantly notates music he just heard, as happened in the nineteenth century with e.g. folk tunes. Any performance from the score, even when it happens immediately after the score has been finished, and even when the performer is the composer himself, is necessarily an interpretation. To equate such a contemporary performance with the intentions of the composer is to deny the (literally) timeless character of the score.

So far only the notation of pitches in relation with each other has been discussed. However, the actual pitch level is also an issue. Not until 1859 was concert pitch settled in France at 435 Hz for A4. It is certain that before 1800, concert pitches could differ a lot between cities. Even in 1850, a piano builder like John Broadwood still used very different pitches for concert instruments and for pianos at home.[108] Present-day performers on period instruments generally use standardised pitches like 415 Hz for (a lot of) Baroque repertoire and 430 Hz for music from the classical and early Romantic periods.[109] Though these pitches are based upon averages of the actual historical local concert pitches, the current standardisation seems to be a modern invention that is more convenient for today's musicians and instrument builders than that it is historically justifiable.

To summarise, the relationship between pitch as it sounds in practice and its representation in the score is a topic requiring much more investigation. In the past 60 years or so, a lot of attention has been paid to different temperaments and the changing of the concert pitch. An almost unknown area in classical music is the expressive use of intonation, like the blue note in jazz. We so much aim to play 'in tune' that this possibility seems to be forgotten altogether. The idea that the development of playing in tune (very much connected to the upcoming recording industry) probably also meant a certain loss of intonation as a tool of expression, should not be excluded. One famous musician who consciously applied 'expressive intonation' is Pablo Casals.[110] Other pitch-related properties of music that cannot be described properly in musical notation are the use of vibrato and the application of *portamenti*. The conclusion is justified that even in nineteenth-century scores, the notation of pitch is a simplification. The problem is that this simplification is hidden: just like in a picture with very few image pixels, or in a graph based on distant measurement points, the reader cannot see what information is being concealed.

[108] Swenson, E. E.: *The History of Musical Pitch in Tuning the Pianoforte.* http://www.mozartpiano.com/articles/pitch.php

[109] Cf. Haynes, B.: *The Story of 'A'.* Lanham, Maryland, 2002.

[110] Hind O'Malley, P.: 'Cellist Pablo Casals on expressive intonation.' In: The Strad, October 1983. https://www.thestrad.com/1434.article .

b. Duration

The notation of rhythm in a musical score is usually even less precise than the notation of pitch. The complex medieval mensural notation system provided a number of different possibilities of subdivision of the pulse, of which in the now conventional music notation only one – a dual division on all levels – remains. The process of simplification, as described above in the hypothetically lost notation of quarter tones in a diatonic system, definitely also applies here: the notational system supposes a regular beat (*tactus*) that can be subdivided only in a limited number of ways. Any irregularity is hard to notate. A rhythm that is not supported by the notation is apt to disappear when scores become a primary vehicle of spreading music. Only as late as halfway through the twentieth century does one encounter more complex and additive rhythms – very much to the expense of the readability and the comprehensibility of the scores. The speed of the pulse cannot be shown in the shape of the notes and has to be described in additional text.

There are many examples in the history of Western music testifying to the lack of precision of rhythmic notation: from the *notes inégales* in French Baroque music and the preface to Frescobaldi's *Toccate* to the proper 'swing feel' in jazz music. But also on a smaller scale, a performance that would do mathematical justice to the notated rhythm in almost any score would not only sound boring, but even inhuman and dead. The largest differences between several performances of a musical score are in the interpretation of the notated duration, which can be the subject of extempore decisions. Chapter 7 discusses improvisatory timing in great detail.

One area that deserves special attention is articulation. Being derived from speech, in music the term refers to the way how two tones are connected, and especially how long a possible gap in between two tones may last. Usually articulation reduces the length of a tone to a certain degree, as shown in the shape of the note: from nothing (as in *legato*) to most of its length (*staccatissimo*). Probably the only example of articulation adding time to the note length is the 'over-legato' as it occurs in keyboard music.

Articulation can only be notated in additional signs. The amount of articulation symbols used in scores grew with the increase of precision in notation. Baroque treatises started to give explanations of the signs (e.g. telling the reader that the staccato-dot meant that the length of the respective tone should be reduced by half of its value). Most confusion is generally caused by the slur, which can have very different meanings: it can mean legato (e.g. for a wind player indicating two or more tones to be played with only one attack), but also be a prescription for the bowing on a string instrument (not always indicating legato), an indication of phrasing (mainly after 1800), or (for singers) of

different notes belonging to a single syllable of a word.[111] (In this study, articulation is primarily discussed in chapter 5.)

The preceding discussion on duration has focused only on the relative durations of tones; but since the invention of the metronome around 1820 it is also possible to determine exactly the speed of the musical pulse. As is well-known, this did not mean the end of discussions about the proper tempo: in fact, composers adding metronome marks to their music (starting with Beethoven) only increased the quarrels. Maybe it can safely be said that the metronome indications in scores describe the tempo the composers intended when they wrote down the music they heard (imagined), but that the prescriptive value is more limited.[112] Many anecdotes about composers toning down the importance of following exactly metronome marks in their scores (up to nowadays) testify to this. Besides, tempo fluctuation within a piece seems to be an intrinsic part of many styles, even though modern performances often ignore this. Early recordings, such as the recorded performances of music of Schumann and Brahms by former students of Clara Schumann, show that the tempo fluctuations within movements could be very large.[113]

To summarise, not only the notation of pitch, but also rhythmic notation can in many scores be seen as a simplification. Deviating from (or rather: bringing to life) this abstracted rhythm fits very well an improvisational approach, and will be an important topic in chapter 7.

c. Dynamics and tone colour

Neither the dynamics nor the colour of the tone can be expressed in the musical notes; this information always has to be mentioned separately, often in words. This makes the indication of the dynamic level or the colour of the tone a relative matter: *sotto voce* only has a meaning in relation to the sound in other passages, and even dynamics are indicated in relation to the instrument or the room. Unlike pitch and duration, this parameter cannot be represented in absolute terms. So far no score has ever indicated the dynamic level in decibels... It is exactly the vagueness of this parameter that leaves room for improvisation. Chapters 4 and 5 will further develop this aspect.

Recognising loci communes[114]

In the previous section, the focus has primarily been on what can and cannot be represented precisely in a traditional score in Western art music. So far, a basic level of meaning in a score has been

[111] The strict adherence to legato touch as a matter of principle in organ playing, as demanded by Charles-Marie Widor and many organists after him, must be seen as an exception within the field of all musical instruments and singing.

[112] Even the descriptive value is not beyond doubt, as any musician who ever tried to determine his favourite metronome speed for a specific piece can testify: the chosen metronome mark may feel less right the next day.

[113] Cf. The Pupils of Clara Schumann. Pearl Gemm CDS 99049.

[114] This section makes use of ideas that were formulated earlier in: Mooiman, B: *Sporen in het zand. Visie op het theorieonderwijs aan het Koninklijk Conservatorium te Den Haag.* Unpublished, 2003.

investigated that concerns the reading itself of the score – in other words, coupling the representation to what is directly represented, especially the pitch and length of a tone. This involves the meaning of the individual signs in the score. Musical imagination plays a vital role in this process. As a reader of a verbal text can imagine the sound of a word before he actually speaks it, so the reader of a musical text (a score) should be able to imagine the sound before performing it. Even for some accomplished musicians this is not an easy task at all. And just as it is conceivable that a reader of a verbal text knows how to pronounce the words without necessarily understanding the meaning of them, so a musician may play or sing what is written and still not know what this music wants to tell – which leads towards a second level of meaning in a score that could be termed 'syntactical'.

The traditional view on the development of scores says that notation gradually became more precise and encompassing; often Gustav Mahler's work is mentioned as a peak in this development from indicative towards explicit scores. An underlying assumption is that, once an aspect of music could be notated, the 'meaning' of its notational signs was beyond discussion. I think, however, that this is a view with an *Urtext*-paradigm bias. An improvisatory approach to a score includes more than just making use of its incompleteness. By contrast I argue that even the so-called precisely notated aspects in reality have always been simplifications – and I hope to show that nineteenth-century musicians were aware of this. The view that is defended in this study revolves around a process of appropriation that leads to a situation of 'ownership', conveyed as 'knowing the musical language' of the composition. This may very well mean that a performer occasionally deviates from explicit prescriptions in the score, but at the same time remains true to 'the idea' of the piece.

The type of meaning that matters here, the 'idea', has to do with the musical units and patterns that are formed by the isolated sounds as represented by dots on the paper. Making sense of what may come across as a disconnected multiplicity comes down to recognising the guiding principles. Attaching meaning to a score is recognising loci communes in the musical structures that are represented in the signs on the paper. The musician reads the score, imagines the sounding result, and at the same time links patterns in the notated music to loci communes which he already knows by experience, or which in another way resonate with what is familiar to him. A certain familiarity is thus crucial for an interpretational dialogue: interpretation starts with recognition. Recognition leads towards ownership: to the musician, the piece starts to feel like 'his' music. When he doesn't recognise anything, the score doesn't mean anything to him; it even becomes very hard to play and remember.[115] Moreover, a listener who is unfamiliar with a locus communis feels as though he is not

[115] Interestingly, in such cases it turns out indeed to be very hard to memorise the music, or even to be able to play it at all (when the score is complex to read) - which also shows that learning a piece for an important part means memorising it...

understanding the music (think of the many music lovers asking for courses that explain modern music to them); when a locus communis is not known by anyone it is no longer a commonplace.[116]

As was mentioned above, these loci can be so manifold that an exhausting description would be a futile enterprise. Crucial for this study is the assumption that they belong to the *inventio*, and therefore to musical creation. Whether a new piece of music is carefully designed and written down in a score, or produced on the spot: loci communes are the guiding factors that channel the musical flow. From the point of view of a performer, they work in two directions: they may guide the improviser creating new music, and conversely they can be the 'patterns' that make the score meaningful to the interpreter. They are carriers of musical meaning in the aforementioned sense because they convey musical expectation. The sense of meaning they produce provides the background against which an improvisatory approach to scores can operate; according to the style, they allow the performer to add ornamentation or apply *tempo rubato* without falling into arbitrariness. Loci enable the performer to identify with a composition.

If a locus communis is a shared structure, a common musical expression, then it must function in a specific situation of music-making – in other words, it must be shared by performers and listeners alike. This makes it part of the context of a score, or borrowing from Gadamer, it belongs to its horizon. When the distance between the reader and the score increases – in time or culturally – the horizon of the reader starts to move away from the horizon of the score. As a consequence, eventually a locus communis may no longer be recognised, as in Gjerdingen's ice-skating metaphor. Or the reverse might happen: the reader of a score thinks he recognises a locus that is common to him and his contemporaries, but would have been unthinkable within the horizon of the score (at the time of composition); this happens for instance when people discern a 'jazzy' rhythm in scores of Johann Sebastian Bach.

A counterexample

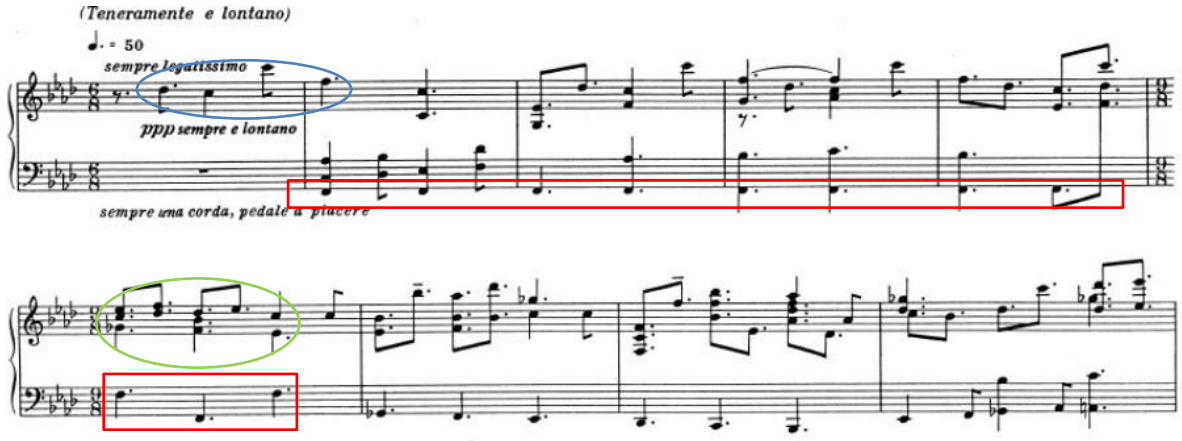
More concrete examples of loci communes in nineteenth-century music will appear throughout this study. In order to show that the notion of loci becomes much more problematic and complicated in the second half of the twentieth century, I will finish this chapter by making a comparison with a score from that period which confuses by its selective and disconnected use of loci. In 1965, Luciano Berio composed a short piano piece called 'Wasserklavier'. Its overtly classical features induce commentators to describe it in terms of a Romantic piano piece. The publisher Universal Edition for instance recommends the composition as 'the perfect encore to any piano recital':

[116] The philosopher Matthias Vogel defines the understanding of music by a listener as 'nachvollziehen' [understanding by following / participating]. Vogel, M.: 'Nachvollzug und die Erfahrung musikalischen Sinns'. In: Becker, A. & Vogel, M. (eds.): *Musikalischer Sinn: Beiträge zu einer Philosophie der Musik.* Frankfurt am Main, 2007; 327.

> But although it is tonal music, using motifs from Brahms' Op. 117 and Schubert's Op. 142, the ending remains somehow unresolved – perhaps with a question mark or leaving the impression that the music could continue ...[117]

The website of AllMusic.com quotes Seth Brodsky, to whom the piece

> almost sounds as if it could have been created by a nineteenth century composer, perhaps someone living exactly between Schubert and Brahms. Indeed, in its compound duple barcarolle rhythms (with rubato pre-installed) and melancholic, wafting minor mode, it carries an air of Chopin and the sentiment of Schumann.[118]



Example 2.3.1: L. Berio: Wasserklavier (beginning) [Published in UE33013 "6 Encores"]

The alleged use of motifs from Brahms' op. 117 no. 2 and Schubert's op. 142 no. 1, however, has little to do with the 'meaning of the score' as discussed in this chapter. It is true that a performer recognises some loci from tonal music in Berio's score, like the barcarolle rhythm Brodsky refers to, and of course the clear f minor tonality throughout the composition. Moreover, Berio writes almost exclusively third-based chords. Together with the requested tender touch ('teneramente'), the necessarily quite 'pedally' sound and Berio's own references to Schubert and Brahms, these loci apparently suffice to make a 'classical' impression. However, a closer look reveals that some very crucial nineteenth-century loci are missing. The texture is quite different from the usual melody-with-accompaniment that we tend to find in a 'barcarolle'. The upper voice could be interpreted as the main melody, and indeed the opening motif (blue oval) hints at a Romantic idiom, but the melody as such escapes any locus that would correspond with a barcarolle or any other similar type

[117] https://www.universaledition.com/composers-and-works/luciano-berio-54/works/wasserklavier-5768
[118] https://www.allmusic.com/composition/wasserklavier-for-1-or-2-pianos-mc0002405663

of piece. Most disorienting is the harmony. Though the chords based on thirds in a clearly tonal environment may sound vaguely familiar, functional harmony is almost absent in this composition. Yes, the piece starts with a long pedal on F in the bass (red box), just as the improvised *Lied ohne Worte* at the beginning of this chapter, but the characteristic accompanying harmonic patterns on top of it are not there. The common thread in the harmony of 'Wasserklavier' is rather located in Berio's use of parallel harmony, resulting in an utterly (neo-)modal treatment of the minor scale that is often coloured with a flat second tone (green oval, one example out of many). It is a type of harmony that has a stronger connection with Debussy than with Schubert, Chopin, Schumann or Brahms.

The result of all this is a score in which one may recognise some nineteenth-century loci, but without much of a stylistic connection. A performer who is familiar with other pieces by Berio will recognise loci that are typical for his work, like very fast grace notes and arpeggios (not in the example), but there are also passages that seem to escape any convention. I think that this piece, with all its allusions to much earlier music, nonetheless shows typical features of modernism in music: a strong emphasis on originality, of a composer's oeuvre, but also of every single composition. The mixing of disparate loci can also be seen as an early example of musical postmodernism. Often an almost compulsive urge towards originality is presented as a heritage of Romanticism. This may be true in an ideological sense, but it is a fact that within the 'Romantic' period on which this study focuses, composed music was generally still firmly rooted in a stylistic common ground (→ chapter 12). The development of avoiding any shared conventions is really something that emerged in the twentieth century, especially after World War II. When a score does not rely on self-evident loci, the performer has no other option than trying to do as precisely as possible what is written. Modernism therefore may be considered to have made a major contribution to the development of the *Urtext*-paradigm. Referring to Gadamer's image, one could say that the *Urtext*-paradigm is part of the horizon of a modernist score: it is an 'authentic' way to perform Berio, Stockhausen or Boulez. Such scores indeed may be taken prescriptively, and an improvisatory approach will be out of place here. What has happened, though, is that the same paradigm started to be applied to the approach of nineteenth-century and older scores. This study intends to show an alternative to this attitude.