Mediating from within: metaxical amplification as an alternative sonic environment for classical music performance
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Citation

MEDIATING FROM WITHIN: METAXICAL AMPLIFICATION AS AN ALTERNATIVE SONIC ENVIRONMENT FOR CLASSICAL MUSIC PERFORMANCE

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van
de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,
op gezag van rector magnificus prof.dr.ir H. Bijl,
volgens besluit van het college voor promoties
te verdedigen op 17 november 2022
klokke 11:15 uur

door

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geboren te São Paulo, Brazilië
in 1981

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Dit proefschrift is geschreven als een gedeeltelijke vervulling van de vereisten voor het doctoraatsprogramma docARTES. De overblijvende vereiste bestaat uit een demonstratie van de onderzoeksresultaten in de vorm van een artistieke presentatie. Het docARTES programma is georganiseerd door het Orpheus Instituut te Gent.

This text is a partial version of the dissertation. The complete version includes audio and visual examples discussed in the dissertation, as well as sound collages and documentation from artistic projects developed during the research trajectory. It is published online in the Research Catalogue and can be accessed through the following link:
https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1700328/1700720

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Acknowledgments

I start this dissertation during a stay in Palermo, Sicily. In front of my hotel, the Collegio Santa Maria della Sapienza. From the locals I learn that it first stood on a much smaller square. After wartime bombings in 1943, though, its ruins spread over a much larger area, and as youngsters found playfields among the fallen stones and passersby rest under the shadows of the ruins, a larger square was formed, known today as Piazza Maggione. From the window of my room, I do not see the ruined building, I see through it: off the shattered windows, the reflection of the sun rays. Amidst the crumbled stones, the straight trunks of trees. In the form of graffitis and wild grass, the present bouncing on decrepit walls. Around the static edifice, the wind blowing, frenetic, people moving, in haste. Movement and stand-still coexisting, interacting, interdependent. From this perspective, the ruins, although at the centre of the square, are not the centre of the square but rather the lens through which I perceive the life around it. What happens with classical music when one refuses, for a moment, to consider its performance traditions, and instead lets it endure the present in new contexts and less protected conditions? It might collapse, like the Collegio, but can its ruins, also like the Collegio's, enliven and illuminate the landscape that surrounds them?[1]

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[1] Note from my research diary, 2 September 2018.

Introduction

In May 1798, scientists and music professors gathered at the Jardin des Plantes in Paris for an orchestra and choir concert featuring two unusual guests: Hanz and Marguerite, an elephant couple from India, newly arrived in the French capital. The concert was a scientific experiment whose purpose was to ascertain whether creatures that had never been exposed to music would react to it in the same way as humans did. Reporting on the experiment, the journal *Décade Philosophique* (cf. Johnson 1995, 130) describes the behaviour of the elephants as follows:

> Hardly had the first chords been heard when Hanz and Marguerite stopped eating; soon they ran to the site from where the sounds emanated. This trap door open above their heads, these instruments of strange forms whose extremities they could scarcely make out, these men who seemed suspended in air, the invisible harmony they tried to touch with their trunks, the silence of the spectators, the immobility of their cornac – everything at first seemed for them a subject of curiosity, surprise, and apprehension. [...] But these initial movements of apprehension gradually diminished as they saw that everything around them remained calm. Then, yielding to the sensations of the music without the slightest hint of fear, they at last shut out all sounds apart from the music.

It would seem that, while Hanz and Marguerite were first disquieted by the music, the calmness of the environment appeased them and they soon became absorbed in the music, ignoring the world around them. From a scientific viewpoint, the soundness of this interpretation is questionable, since one cannot in fact know how the elephants interpreted the situation. To be able to say with any degree of certainty that the elephants were calmed by the sounds of the music it would be necessary to conduct many similar experiments. The claim that the elephants had to 'shut out all sounds' that did not belong to the music is purely fanciful and impossible to prove, especially given the scientific means available at that time. Rather than what was going on in the brains of elephants, the conclusion drawn from the experiment is suggestive of what was going on in the brains of the scientists and musical authorities in charge of the experiment. In other words, while the experiment may lack scientific consistency, the way it was interpreted reflects certain expectations towards the music and its ability to spellbind the listener. More broadly, it reflects the belief that the more one can abstract oneself from everything but the object being focused on, the more clearly one is able to perceive this object.

The context in which this experiment was realised, helps explain why this way of thinking about listening imposed itself over the centuries, persisting to this day as an ideal mode of engaging with classical music. The musicians and music professors that participated in the experiment belonged to the Paris Conservatoire, which had opened its doors three years earlier. The first of its kind in Europe, the Conservatoire established

precepts for musical education and for the conservation of classical music heritage that are still followed today in institutions worldwide. It was also the period in which public concerts started gaining in popularity in European and North American capitals. Although many forms of concerts had coexisted since the 18th century and continue to do so today, a generic format emerged which I call here the 'classical concert'. The classical concert is based on the notion of autonomous listening, that is a form of listening focused only on the music. Music, in this context, became the source of an artistic experience based on a significant encounter between an individual listener and a musical work. Along with the notion of autonomous listening, the idea that musical works require a background of silence in order to be performed and heard adequately became widespread. This idea manifested itself practically in the way that concerts and also the recording industry, exclude or make discrete everything that might divert attention away from the music. Against a background of silence, the music seems more immediately accessible, and is also preserved from interruptions that disrupt its temporal coherence. In short, in such protected conditions it feels like musical works appear to the listener, within certain limits, in their 'original state', that is, as the acoustic realisation of musical ideas once produced in and by a composer's mind.

Combining my professional experience as a curator and as a performer of classical and contemporary music, the goal of this dissertation is to highlight the connections between attention and silence, to investigate how silence contributes to the performance of classical music, and then to propose an alternative mode of performance based on what I call *metaxical amplification*. The concept of metaxical amplification, in which the performance of classical works coexists with other sounds, is inspired by the Ancient Greek notion of metaxy, that which is in-between. Aristotle used the term to indicate the mediating field between the perceived object and the perceiving sense, such as for instance air, or skin. In my performances, the metaxy refers to the environment of performance. It specifically refers to sound-producing elements, such as the action of the instrument, the creaking of floors, the breathing of the performer, or the steps of the audience, which are amplified by electronic means. During my research, I have tested metaxical amplification in two performances. *touchez des yeux* was realised at the De Bijloke Muziekcentrum in Ghent in 2018. *Interferences* was presented at the Escola Superior de Música e Artes in Porto in 2019. These two performances lay the ground for a reflection on how the inclusion of environmental sounds in the performance of classical works in a concert hall affects attention, and how this modifies the practice of the performer and their relationship with musical works.

Context and theoretical background

This research problematises the activity of mediating classical music and the conditions in which this music is presented. By doing so, it approaches classical and contemporary music production and literature on music performance, history and concert practice from a curatorial perspective. Still largely absent from music discourse, the curatorial approach is interesting in that it combines a wealth of

discourses to better understand the relationship between artistic production and presentation. Indeed, multidisciplinary by nature, curatorial discourses integrate elements from different disciplines to discuss and illuminate issues that are common to various art forms. The curatorial perspective I offer here is largely inspired by post-structural thinking and its concern with reflecting on and deconstructing self-evident assumptions, discourses and habits of a practice, along the premise that what seems obvious, or natural, is in fact a construction motivated by many historical, ideological, and/or subjective factors, not seldom concealing or supporting power disbalances and ambiguities. Next to references to philosophers such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, whose attitudes towards historical analyses iinfluenced my reading of the historical evolution of silence practices since the 19th century, I make use of concepts from music philosophy, performance and theatre studies, and theories derived from or inspired by post-structuralism. Thus, authors like Richard Schechner, Marcel Cobussen, Nicholas Cook and Erika Fischer-Lichte are important for this study because their analyses consider the performance situation as an artistic event in its own right. This opens for a much more serious discussion on the different elements which 'make' a performance than is the case in studies which see performance only as the representation of an artwork. Anthropology, sociology, and media theory have also been central to the shaping of my reflections. For example, anthropologist Anna Tsing's take on the assemblage as an open gathering of heterogenous elements not submitted to a common purpose or discourse has been a useful conceptual tool to approach and analyse performance situations. The same can be said for the notion of 'transitivity' by media-archaeologist Wolfgang Ernst, consisting of a reflection on the role of communication media in relation to a context rather than purely in function of the message to be transmitted. Additionally, considering the commonalities between different art forms, I have drawn on artistic examples from theatre and the visual arts, and I have used these to critically discuss my own musical creation and experiences as well as recent musical productions by artists such as Ari Benjamin Meyers, Catherine Lamb, Lucia D'Errico, Paul Craenen, MusicExperiment21, and the Ictus Ensemble.

By grounding existing discourses on musical performance practice in a curatorial discourse, this research reflects my background as a performer but also as a curator.[2]

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[2] Noteworthy in respect to my curatorial activities are the artistic projects that I developed for Ensemble neoN, including the latest release *neoN: Niblock/Lamb* (Hubro Music 2016), and the collaboration with noise musicians Lasse Marhaug and the Far East Network, Fractured Times: A Reunion of Strangers (2022), as well as the four-year project *Impossible Situations* conceived by Duo Hellqvist/Amaral, culminating in the book *Impossible Situations: Concerts in the Making* (Amaral, Hellqvist and Hannesdóttir 2021), including texts on musical programming and production, composer and performer collaboration, and working with scenography and electronic technology. Before this research but also relevant for this study were my tenures as a communication officer and curator in the Norwegian New Music Asssociation Ny Musikk, between 2010-2012, and as knowledge coordinator at the Oslo Ultima Contemporary Music Festival between 2012-2016, where I was responsible for the content and realisation of the festival's outreach activities, among them Ultima Remake and the Ultima Academy. Ultima Remake was an outreach programme for secondary school students, who listened to 'contemporary classics' from the 20th century, discussing the social and political background of the work in the light of their personal experiences, and using their reflection as a point of departure to create their own artistic work. The Ultima Academy (UA) was a programme of lectures, talks and screenings that accompanied the musical productions of the Ultima Oslo Contemporary Music Festival, which UA looked at from within a broader socio-political perspective. By way of illustration**,** the 2014 edition of

Curatorship, or curating, is a term commonly used in the visual and performing arts to refer to the activity of mediating artworks and performance. Curators have long remained backstage in the art world, in charge of interpreting and documenting the artefacts of private or public art collections. However, especially after the 1970s, certain shifts occurring in the art scene have progressively added an important public, social and creative dimension to their curatorial role. After the second world war, new roles were sought for art within a society recovering from the social and political upheavals of the previous decades. Artists rebelled against the prevailing tradition of autonomous art, creating new forms of artistic expression no longer fixated on static canvasses, but on performance, unfinished processes and self-reflexive dialogues between people, contexts, ideas and a great variety of media. An example was Marcel Duchamp, whose work illuminated the relationship between the artwork and the context in which it is displayed, demonstrating that it was this context which defines what was or wasn't considered art. In the wake of Duchamp, context has become a theme in the visual arts and in the arts more broadly, leading to a new paradigm that sees artworks within a context, rather than as autonomous objects. Affected by this development, institutions grew increasingly aware of their social responsibility. Artists started questioning both their own political and ideological motives, and the nature of their relationship with their audiences. Curators became responsible for accommodating emerging art forms within and beyond traditional exhibition spaces, and for mediating between institutions, artists, audiences and society at large. Even though the notion of curatorship is first and foremost associated with institutional curating, it is increasingly considered an artistic practice (Glicenstein 2015). Over time, a feedback loop was established between the two professions, with the work of curators informing the work of artists and vice versa. This cross-pollination has led us today to speak of artists who work *like* curators, using strategies inspired by exhibition displays in their own artistic work. We also speak now of artists working *as* curators, using their artistic experience to curate art shows. Finally, we refer to curators working *like* and in some cases *as* artists, using strategies inspired by art to curate events at times considered as artworks.[3]

UA hosted the likes of political theorist Antonio Negri, pianist Ingfrid Nyhus, the Slovenian band Laibach, composer Simon Steen Andersen, and music sociologist Esteban Buch, in order to discuss concepts of power, ideology, ethics and cultural identity, and their connections with artistic practice. UA was targeted at artists, music professionals and the general audience. It sought to develop spaces in which discourse could be presented to a general audience and in the same experimental atmosphere as the concerts of the festival. In addition, I have been an advisor of *DEFRAGMENTATION – Curating contemporary music*, a project by the German Federal Cultural Foundation and the International Music Institute Darmstadt (IMD), the Donaueschingen Festival and MaerzMusik – Festival for Time Issues. This was a research project which sought to reconnect a New Music scene, one considered as fragmented, to a larger social discourse through four different research strands: gender and diversity, curation, technology and decolonisation. The outputs of the project included a conference and two publications, including my essay on the curatorial activity of contemporary music performers and ensembles (Amaral 2020b). Finally, I have also been teaching curatorial practices for master students in performance, music education and composition at the Royal Conservatoire The Hague (see Amaral 2021b), and in workshops such as Curatorial Experiments led by performing arts curator and dramaturg Florian Malzacher and myself in 2018, the purpose of which was to develop curatorial projects dealing directly with the content of the Summer Course for New Music in Darmstadt.

[3] For more details see Amaral (2021b); Glicenstein (2015); Ranchetti and Doubtfire (2015); Balzer (2014).

Nowadays, the term curating is used very loosely also outside of the arts to designate activities consisting in presenting content in an unusual or particularly thoughtful way. However, I have added to this definition in a text presenting a course I developed on curatorial practices for musicians at the Royal Conservatoire The Hague. What I have suggested is that curating becomes interesting as an artistic practice when it combines, in the activity of mediating music, a reflection on display, context, audiences, discourse and social engagement. Display refers to the spatial and temporal arrangement of media, musical or otherwise. Context points to the occasion, place or the social, historical and political circumstances in which an artwork or performance is presented. The notion of audiences touches upon reception and spectatorship, and it acknowledges the spectators as people with individual concerns, values, agency and needs rather than as an anonymous mass of eyes and ears. Discourse relates, roughly, to the way music is spoken of and the verbal or written material that accompanies musical presentations.[4] Lastly, social engagement may involve a concern with topical issues and the needs of a particular community, pedagogical initiatives, and/or gatekeeping. As I understand it, the term implies an awareness for the social, historical and political dynamics of the artistic field, and the way in which artistic work and mediation formats may contribute to reproducing or changing structures of power in society and art. This also includes being mindful of how collective memory, canons, and cultural heritage and traditions are constructed and preserved.

Such considerations have particular bearing for classical musicians, who work with history and music from the past. Crucial questions in this context may include what spaces, traditions and roles to maintain, which to expand or review, whether there are aspects of the past that remain unveiled, and how this music can be relevant today. As art theorist John Berger (1972, n.p.) affirms in a television documentary in which he questions assumptions about European paintings and the way we see them, 'our way of looking at paintings is less spontaneous than we think'. The same is valid for the way we listen. Art theorist Irit Rogoff (2013, n.p.) confirms that we take a great part of the infrastructures of art for granted without acknowledging the ideological implications that they carry with them:

> When we in the West, or in the industrialized, technologized countries, congratulate ourselves on having an infrastructure – functioning institutions, systems of classification and categorization, archives and traditions and professional training for these, funding and educational pathways, excellence criteria, impartial juries, and properly air conditioned auditoria with good acoustics, etc., we forget the degree to which these have become

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[4] A growing interest for discourse and research in the last decades has led curators and theorists like Irit Rogoff and Beatrice Bismarck (Bismarck and Rogoff 2014) to distinguish between *curating* and the *curatorial*. The first refers to the professional practice of staging an event, and thus also touches upon practical questions such as financing, public policies, production and PR. The second refers to the dramaturgy and realisation of a performance and indicates more sustained research into the unfolding of the event as a site of knowledge production. Although I do not make this distinction here, it is interesting to keep it in mind, for the curatorial is concerned with artistic processes and the interplay between creation, presentation and reflection, and is therefore very close to the field of artistic research.

protocols that bind and confine us in their demand to be conserved or in their demand to be resisted.

Part of the curatorial work consists indeed of understanding how certain musical environments such as the classical concert or recordings shape the way we listen, the practice of the musician, and how music is understood. We could call these the environment's 'sonic apparatuses', in reference to philosopher Michel Foucault's 'apparatuses' – constellations of practices, discourses, rituals, acoustics, and spatial and temporal arrangements.[5] Theoretician Jérôme Glicenstein (2019) explains the extent to which we are used to experiencing art within specific apparatuses which affect the way we perceive an artwork. For instance, recordings or concerts, have become so popular over the years that they have 'domesticated' our thinking about and/or the performance of classical works. We are so used to the way we hear and experience these works in recordings and concerts, that we have trouble accepting or imagining other ways of experiencing or performing music (ibid, 90).

An example that I will discuss further in Chapter One, concerns developments in the recording industry, specifically hi-fi reproduction technologies. These have made it possible to drastically reduce both background noise and technical imperfections. By doing so, they have enlarged the gulf between music and environmental noise, and affected patterns of expectation for live performances, which are now expected to be as noise-free as recordings. The same applies to the way musicians perform, since the possibility of editing away technical imperfections makes them increasingly mindful of mistakes in live performances. This ideal is so far removed from the acoustic reality and possibilities of live performances that it causes a good deal of frustration for both performers and audiences. Regarding this last point, Robert Philip (2004, 24) writes in his comprehensive analysis of the impact of recording technologies on classical music performance, that '[o]nce a musician has had the experience of listening to playbacks and adjusted to them, it is not possible to go back to a state of innocence'.[6] Addressing

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[5] Foucault introduced the concept of 'apparatus' (in French, *dispositif*) in the late 1970s in his book *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*. It describes how specific social arrangements such as the panopticon and disciplinarian institutions of the modern age structured knowledge and power, imposing a certain conduct on groups of individuals. More generally, the term apparatus used in the Foucauldian sense indicates particular spatial arrangements and the relations deriving from these arrangements, generally mirroring and/or responding to social concerns, with the effect of either confirming a given social order or transforming existing social codes, roles and perceptual schemes (Glicenstein 2019).

[6] A pertinent example is pianist Max Pauer (1866-1945). Belonging to the first generation of recorded musicians, when Pauer listened to his own recordings for the first time, he was shocked by the technical irregularities they revealed: 'When I listened to the first record of my own playing, I heard things which seemed unbelievable to me. Was I, after years of public performance, actually making mistakes that I would be the first to condemn in any one of my pupils?' (cf. Barth 2018, 152). When Pauer started recording, he was already an established pianist, which means that the way he played – full of mistakes, if we are to believe him – was still perfectly accepted in the concert halls of the late 19th century. Recalling my own first experiences with recording my performances, I ask myself how and if Pauer altered his playing after such a disturbing experience. In my case, I bought my first minidisc recorder in the late 1990s, when these devices were still very new. I was horrified by what I heard, as it all seemed so loud and so devoid of dynamic nuances. For years, I worked to create more

the ways recordings influence performance, composer Michel Chion (1994, 103) points out that this absorption of the real by the mediatised makes us think of live performances in terms of 'loss and distortions of reality' instead of as the real thing. Also, the more hi-fi the recording technology, the more capable it is not only of picking up musical tones and the tiniest noises – such as sounds from the electronic circuitry or the performer's breathing – but also of eradicating those noises. One of the consequences of this eradication is that human presence is increasingly felt less in recordings, and music sounds like it is coming from outer space (see Chapter 1). The intended recorded material becomes overly sharp, and the human factor increasingly absent. The overall result is a musical experience bordering on the 'uncanny', to use a term from robotics referring to the emotional response elicited when there is too much resemblance between a robot and a person, causing a strange feeling between suspicion, aversion, and fear about whether humankind can distinguish itself from a machine (Rimini Protokoll 2019). Philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1994 [1992]) criticises vehemently what he considers to be a contemporary obsession with high fidelity. What Baudrillard suggests is that recording technologies, in their search for perfection, have not evolved in the direction of a 'more cogent' musical experience, as once predicted by Glenn Gould (1966, n.p.). Instead, they rather extrapolate the idea of cogency to the point of making music something beyond or even less than real. 'We are all obsessed with high fidelity', Baudrillard (1994 [1992], 5) writes, 'with the quality of musical "reproduction". At the consoles of our stereos, armed with our tuners, our amplifiers and our speakers, we mix, adjust settings and multiply tracks in pursuit of a flawless sound. Is this still music? Where is the high fidelity threshold beyond which music disappears as such?' So, while recordings were at first there ideally to capture a sound, now they have become 'teachers', conditioning our musical experience in general. Even within the concert hall, they lower our thresholds of tolerance for noise and mistakes. And if we are to believe Baudrillard, the concern with eradicating unwanted sound has perhaps gone so far that we risk losing sight of music itself.

Interestingly, however, the same recording industry which has made us mindful of noise, is now becoming the agent of an important change in the way we listen. Since the first Walkman appeared in the late 1970s, portable technologies have been making it increasingly common to listen to classical music outside of its traditional venues, through headphones, and in environments that are distinctly noisy. Unlike what one might expect, this new listening habit doesn't seem to have affected sales of classical music. On the contrary, the growing number of playlists including recordings of classical music in streaming services like Spotify, which is often used on portable devices, indicates that there might be a space for classical music within urban noise

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contrasts in my playing, playing ever so softly, recording myself again, and practicing even more softly. This cannot have been entirely bad for me, since working on dynamic nuances makes for a richer register of expression, but I later discovered that the sensitivity of these first 'home' devices was extremely limited and could not possibly render what I actually did on stage. This, combined with my total ignorance about room acoustics and where to place the recorder, made me wonder whether I could have spared myself so much worry, and found better ways to spend my practicing time.

(Roberts 2020; Gillam 2022). Also particularly relevant is the way one listens with such portable devices. Even though the availability of noise-cancelling headphones in the last two decades facilitates the acoustic immersion in music, one still relates to the music in a more fragmented mode, since it is interrupted by myriads of unexpected things and situations that we encounter along the way. As a result, we might become less sensitive to the temporal structure of a musical work in its totality, but more attentive to its microstructures or to the sounds themselves. Also, music heard through portable devices belongs nowhere and anywhere at the same time – there is seldom something specific to consolidate its symbolic meaning, as is the case with liturgical music, or with music performed in the legitimising and reverential context of the concert hall. Hence, we start imagining new functions and possibilities for music in general, including classical masterworks. Rather than focusing on whether we listen well or listen musically, there is a wider acceptance for different modes of listening, and researchers have been looking at how these modes have evolved in relation to specific needs and contexts (Liliestam 2013; Dibben 2001; Stockfelt 2006; Herbert 2018).

I put stress on the notions of gatekeeping and the sonic apparatus, because they are particularly relevant to my present research and very timely to the extent to which they relate to a much-discussed crisis of attention in contemporary society and its resonances in the classical music field. Supposedly, this crisis is connected to a 'deficiency of attention' or a decline in the ability to pay attention – attention understood here as a one-to-one relation from a subject to an object in which the subject 'detaches' this object from its context in order to infer something about the object and learn something from this inference. This so-called crisis of attention – critically discussed by, among others, media theorist Yves Citoon (2017), sociologist Tiziana Terranova (2017), and art critic Jonathan Crary (2001) – is often said to be due to certain transformations in the larger social environment that affect the structure of our attention. Before discussing these transformations, it is necessary to consider the historical character of the mode of attention that is supposedly in decline. This historical mode of attention is the way in which attention, as I have shown through the example of the elephants Hanz and Marguerite, is usually conceptualised in the classical concert. Looking back in history, Crary (2001 [1999], 1-2) connects the value attributed to sustained attention to a general focus on productivity in the period around and after the Industrial Revolution, which manifested itself at both a social and individual level as a 'remaking of human subjectivity'. This 'remaking' consisted of the mobilisation of the individual within a rationalised capitalist society in which the disciplining of attention signified increased productivity and control of economic flow. Next to this, it consisted of the involvement of individuals, the bourgeoisie in particular, in a process of self-emancipation affecting both educational and aesthetic spheres, where sustained attentiveness and effort were promoted as a condition for excellence, self-improvement, creativity and psychological emancipation. To 'produce oneself' by accumulating knowledge through sustained attention to cultural objects such as music, novels or the visual arts was indeed considered important for maintaining a social position or for climbing the social ladder.

Consistently, new practices and norms of attention developed in schools, factories – as caricatured by Charlie Chaplin in *Modern Times* – and art institutions as disciplinary tools aimed at sharpening attention to the object or task at hand. In these contexts, the absorbed and conscious engagement with one or a few activities became a desired and trainable skill. Foucault (1977, 35), referring to this period as the 'age of disciplines', notes how an 'art of the human body' became explicitly mobilised throughout the fabric of an increasingly disciplined society, characterised by strict reforms in education, among other areas. In line with current political and economic interests, this 'art' consisted in achieving maximum effectivity from the body (turning the body into an 'aptitude') and making it socially productive in a rationalised reality. Considering this within the context of the classical concert, partakers became hyperattentive to the music not only out of interest for the music itself, but also because focus was one of the driving forces of society at the time.[7] In a concert situation, sustained attention was facilitated by the implementation of what media theorists today refer to as the principle of the 'excluded middle' (Alloa 2020, 148). This supposes that all the media involved in the transmission of a message, the message here being the musical work, should disappear in the act of communication. All sounds extraneous to the work should be either silenced, suppressed or made discreet. The specific structuring of attention in the concert hall corresponds to the appearance of other, similar environments in the urban landscape of the late 18th and 19th centuries, such as museums and public libraries. According to Crary (2001 [1999]), the proliferation of what one could refer to in rough terms as 'attentive environments' can be seen as a symptom of how this general concern with attention then affected various aspects of life.

Reflecting on the rationalisation of attention in different domains of life, Crary (ibid, 1-2) points to its consequences for future generations, including my own:

> The ways in which we intently listen to, look at, or concentrate on anything have a deeply historical character. Whether it is how we behave in front of the luminous screen of a computer or how we experience a performance in an opera house, how we accomplish certain productive, creative, or pedagogical tasks or how we more passively perform routine activities like driving a car or watching television, we are in a dimension of contemporary experience that requires that we effectively cancel out or exclude from consciousness much of our immediate environment. I am interested in how Western modernity since the nineteenth century has demanded that individuals define and shape themselves in terms of a capacity for "paying attention," that is, for a disengagement from a broader field of attraction, whether visual or auditory, for the sake of isolating or focusing on a reduced number of stimuli. That our lives are so thoroughly a patchwork of such disconnected states is not a "natural" condition but rather the product of a dense and powerful remaking of human subjectivity in the West over the last 150 years.

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[7] As attention becomes associated with the self-emancipation of the bourgeois, so too do silent practices in general, since they are conducive to an attentive attitude. Thus, still today, in sociological studies such as Ori Schwarz's (2015, 216-218), loudness tends to be associated with the uneducated and the poor, whereas quietness is associated with a sense of privacy and civility cultivated by higher social classes.

Over time, such harnessing of attention has been integrated into the *habitus*. A concept much used to discuss the interplay between individual behaviour, social practices and the structured environment, habitus was coined by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. He used it to designate a system of dispositions that determine to a large extent what activities, phenomena and environments we choose to engage with and how we engage with them (Bourdieu 1977, 82-83).[8] Habitus is formed in specific social conditions, in and through practical experiences, and in distinct spheres such as the family, school, work, groups of friends and mass culture. Marcel Mauss (1973 [1936]) thought along similar lines when he described bodily techniques as a series of purposeful actions assembled by society for the individual and passed on from generation to generation through education or imitation. Bodily techniques turn our bodies into social instruments and living archives of social memory. It is not easy to get rid of such techniques, for behind even the most commonplace bodily technique such as walking or attentive listening lies a sophisticated assemblage of social, physiological and psychological relations.[9] Neuroscientists such as Chris Holdgraf (2016, n.p.) confirm that due to the neural plasticity of the brain, individuals can, with time, learn to effectively orient themselves in a sonic landscape by disengaging certain sounds from a noisy background, especially in relation to 'targeted sounds', and in order to infer meaning. This explains psychoacoustic phenomena such as the 'cocktail party effect' – roughly, the ability to identify anything speech-like in a noisy environment. A further example is how individuals, in the process of adapting to sound technologies, have developed special listening skills for separating music or speech from noise in technologically-mediated sound, skills which Jonathan Sterne (cf. Bailie 2017, 91) designates as 'audile techniques'. In sum, not only are individuals supposed to focus, they are trained to do so, even in unfavourable conditions.

Yet, despite this extensive conditioning, Crary (2001 [1999], 1-2), as quoted above, speaks of a growing 'social crisis of subjective disintegration' today, characterised by the fact that we pay less and less attention in the 'sustained' sense. There is a widespread belief that the development of internet, file sharing, the abundance of information, hypermediatisation, increased 'screen time' and other factors make it difficult for individuals today to pay attention in a focused manner. A glance at the plays directed by Frank Castorf at the Berliner Volksbühne during the 1990s and early 2000s illustrates

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[8] Habitus in the words of Bourdieu (1977, 82-83) is that which determines our principles of action, perception and reflection, producing specific behaviours and lifestyles: it is 'a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks, thanks to analogical transfers of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems'. Sociologist Maria da Graça Jacinto Setton (2002, 63, my translation), stresses the social dimension of habitus, noting how it expresses 'the constant and reciprocal exchange between the objective world and the subjective world of individualities'.

[9] Mauss (1973[1936], 71) illustrates the tenacity of our bodily techniques with the example of swimming: 'Our generation has witnessed a complete change in technique: we have seen the breaststroke with the head out of the water replaced by the different sorts of crawl. Moreover, the habit of swallowing water and spitting it out again has gone. In my day swimmers thought of themselves as a kind of steam-boat. It was stupid, but in fact I still do this: I cannot get rid of my technique'.

Crary's point. Castorf was part of the first generation of artists concerned with the plethora of information circulating in the media and in the then burgeoning virtual world. He explored these phenomena by cluttering up the stage with all sorts of objects that obstructed the view, challenging the spectator who would want to see everything by inciting them to 'work' to see anything. This proliferation of objects on stage caused confusion and overload in the spectators, who could not assimilate all these impulses or make sense of how they belonged to the overall story of the play. This challenged the kind of attention suggested by the usual mode of engaging with a play (or a musical work), in which the individual is transported to a parallel universe, becoming partly oblivious to the outside world. Instead, the form of hyper-stimulation staged by Castorf and the transitioning between various objects interrupted the mental processes that would allow the spectator to synthesise their experience. Theatre theorist Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006, 89), referring more generally to the lack of apparent causality in plays such as Castorf's, speaks of a 'helpless focusing of perception', and a 'search for traces', preceding a process of meaning-making that is perpetually postponed: one wants to understand, but there is always a new element emerging that prevents one from doing so.

While socialisation agents (e.g. schools, family, religion and workplace) in the late 18th and 19th century were relatively homogeneous, operating under similar principles and forms of discipline, today the field of socialisation is hybrid and diverse. Different instances of socialisation coexist, with multiple contrasting projects and a greater circularity of values and identity references and configurations. Media particularly produce models and dispositions that are sometimes very different from what one learns at home or at school. The influence of these distinct socialisation agents gives rise to new experiences, cultural values and identitarian references, and makes our habitus broader and more flexible. According to sociologist Maria da Graça Jacinto Setton (2002), this makes the 21st-century habitus a flexible system, 'adaptable to the stimuli of the modern world'. Especially true of today's diversity of references, is how the habitus becomes less sedimented; we have become more interested in different things, but it is more difficult or less interesting to engage with practices that consolidate over time through much repetition. Along the same lines, sociologist Cas Wouters (1998) identifies a transformation of our basic personality into something more malleable, craving diversity, less formal or interested in hegemonic and disciplining practices. Such changes in the individual's capacity of paying attention has repercussions in various fields. As educator Maryanne Wolf (2018, n.p.) notices, the confrontation with massive amounts of information and stimuli makes us lose what she calls 'cognitive patience', so that the ability to immerse ourselves in something is now a thing of the past. As she explains:

> Perhaps you have already noticed how the quality of your attention has changed the more
> you read on screens and digital devices. Perhaps you have felt a pang of something subtle
> that is missing when you seek to immerse yourself in a once-favorite book. Like a phantom
> limb, you remember who you were as a reader but cannot summon that 'attentive ghost' with

the joy you once felt in being transported somewhere outside the self. It is more difficult still with children, whose attention is continuously distracted and flooded by stimuli that will never be consolidated in their reservoirs of knowledge. This means that the very basis of their capacity to draw analogies and inferences when they read will be less and less developed. Young reading brains are evolving without a ripple of concern from most people, even though more and more of our youths are not reading other than what is required, and often not even that: "tl; dr" (too long; didn't read).

The difficulty of processing large amounts of information as well as the loss of cognitive capacities as described by Wolff, such as the ability to perform deeper comprehension and reflection tasks, together produce a subject whose capacity for paying attention is inferior to the wealth of information that consumes this attention. In terms of the market, the new media and technological affordances that Wolff refers to have been heavily exploited for financial profit. Terranova (2012, 7) warns against the mechanisms of this 'economy of attention', where attention is being managed as a currency and as a valuable but scarce resource. What is at stake is how to orient the attention of the users, how to make them focus, and how to make them consume or pay attention to this rather than that.

In the field of classical music, but also of contemporary music, practitioners are faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, there is the practice of performance and mediation that is constructed to a great extent upon the principle of sustained attention to and absorption in the musical work. On the other hand, there is a contemporary reality in which, as it seems, it has become increasingly difficult to concentrate. What are the consequences of these developments for the reception and practice of classical music? An object of much debate is how the way classical music is traditionally heard, in concerts or in the privacy of the home through hi-fi systems, seems to be at odds with today's lifestyle (Abbing 2006; Rebstock 2011; Burland and Pitts 2014; Brown and Novak-Leonard 2011; Gembris 2011; Idema 2012). In these discussions, sociologist Martin Tröndle stands out as one of the most present voices. For Tröndle (2011, 27), the defining element for the success of the classical concert in the last two hundred years has been its ability to mobilise the attention of the audience towards the musical event. Instances of this mobilisation of attention include creating a sensation of acoustic and physical intimacy, centralising the ear of the listener on the performer, or through the crystallisation of a particular expectational structure based on familiar rituals and repertoire. This format does not do well in a society where inattention and lack of formality seem to have become the habitual mode, leading Tröndle (ibid, 14) to speak of a 'crisis of the classical concert'. The behavioural conventions associated with high art would seem to be particularly dissuasive: young people today are used to a different type of socialisation with live music; for them, the formal rituals of the classical concert are both unfamiliar and rebarbative. It has also been argued that individuals become increasingly used to 'multilistening' (as in multitasking) and to the multiple perspectives arising from listening to music through portable technologies, in different environments or inserted in curated playlists. These are all forms of engagement with media that make us more receptive to a diversity of content, but simultaneously more resistant to one-

dimensional modes of transmission (Herbert 2018; Elsaesser 2017). Cultural historian and musicologist Ola Stockfelt (2006, 89-90) confirms how media have made us accustomed to hearing music in the most varied and acoustically messy environments, but also in different positions, and while doing all sorts of things: walking, showering, driving, being in the cinema or in the bathtub, climbing mountains, and so on, making the idea of an ideal listening space and mode more abstract.

In this context, absorbed and synthetic listening aimed at the auditory reconstruction of a work have become less interesting than more serendipitous forms that do not follow one direction. Without 'proper' attention to the music, however, it is claimed that there can also be no structural engagement with the composition being performed, which might compromise the comprehension of its complexities. Yet, as I describe in Chapter One, the classical music industry is constructed upon this very form of appreciation and understanding of the musical work. As philosopher Lydia Goehr (1992, 18) rightly remarks, since the 19th century it has all revolved around an understanding of the work, understood as an abstract and ideal identity which the performance realises in sound: 'There were concerts of works, reviews of works, scores of works, musicological and aesthetic theory based on works and so on'. Goehr (ibid, 2) has expanded upon how musical works have progressively acquired metaphysical importance as 'original and unique products of a special creative activity', objects that allow listeners to develop their ever-expanding sensibility. Music became the works that we listen to, that we play in concerts, that we talk about, that we surrender to. Musical works became 'things' we have come to know and cultivate, that we respect as if they are living beings (Abbate 2004, 517). Thus, listening became a moral obligation towards the work. Musicologist Lars Liliestam (2013) and music psychologist Ruth Herbert (2018) have done relevant work in categorising different modes of listening. What they found is that music-theoretical discourse is still profoundly marked by what Herbert calls an 'insidious influence of autonomy'. Despite an increasing awareness for the new ways of listening as mentioned above, there remained the persistent idea that listening should be oriented towards a structural understanding of the musical work only, without regard for a larger context or the situatedness of the performance and/or the listening event. Liliestam notes, not without bitterness, that modes of listening other than those dedicated to the comprehension of the work, are often described in the literature as inferior, irresponsible or superficial. The 'right' way of listening to classical music is the focused, concentrated and absorbed mode. Any deviation from this mode, any distraction, would mean that we are not actually listening to the music: '[C]oncentrated listening is implicitly seen as an ideal, […] listening is of a poorer quality if you do something else at the same time as you listen to music' (ibid, 5).With attention being so important for some musicians and scholars that it provokes this type of judgement, it is no surprise to see debates on attention occupying the field.

Nevertheless, as with all transformations, responses from the field diverge. Some insist musicians insist on focus. Just recently, I saw pianist and composer Frederic Rzewski refusing to start a performance because of the noise the air-conditioning system was

making. Others conceive performances that place extra focus on deep attention. This was the case in Marina Abramović's performance *A Different Way of Hearing,* where spectators were first supposed to attend a preparatory workshop. This included meditation and long moments of silence meant to 'rinse the ears' from everyday sounds before they attended the concert. This took place in the company of a personal supervisor, who ensured that attendees handed in their electronic devices at the reception and remained silent during the entire seven-hour concert. Abramović conceived this project in reaction to the superficial and scripted way live classical music is listened to today, a mode of listening enhanced, or provoked by our hectic lifestyle ('the tempo of life, thoughts, stress or smartphones'). In the announcement of the project, Abramović (2019) writes, '[How] can listening to music take place as an authentic, moving, profound, and transcendental experience? […] In the midst of our busy lives, can we transform how we experience music?'

Yet another strategy is to capture the attention of concertgoers by attracting them to the music indirectly, through a more intense experience of that which surrounds the music. Theatre director and curator Matthias Rebstock (2011), for example, proposes different solutions: 'auratising' the performer, for instance by cultivating stardom (ibid, 144); using visualisation techniques to enhance focus on the auditive through sight (ibid, 148); using technology to enhance proximity to the performer or to boost particular basses and other elements likely to have a direct impact on the listener's body (ibid, 147); or staging the listening experience by presenting concerts at unusual hours and places, using special scenography and listening in unusual positions. He gives the example of concerts in swimming pools or planetariums, or the late-night concerts at the Berliner Radialsystem where the audience can lie down to listen instead of sitting still (ibid).[10] When conceiving these strategies, Rebstock was much inspired by the writing of literary theorist Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht, who in *Production of Presence* (2004) expressed concern for our obsession with content and the interpretation of this content – a message, a book or an artwork. This concern can make us forget the physical affection that the world can have on us. Rebstock wants to revive the conditions for such affection. The strategies he proposes aim to 'produce presence' (ibid, 146), meaning they make the listener feel physically implicated and maximise their attention not only toward the music but also toward the event as a whole. Rebstock's ideas are not without interest for my own work in the sense that they explore physical situatedness and the material impact of the performance environment. However, although various aspects of performance become more prominent in the examples that he gives, they continue to function as a support for the musical works.

While artists like Rebstock or Abramović seek to recover and intensify attention to the music, others explore distraction and what I will for now call 'inattention' as a creative resource. Indeed, since the desperation or perplexity of the Castorf generation, we have become more used to a downpour of media and to a hyperventilating reality. Many

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[10] More examples of unorthodox concert situations and experimental formats can be found in Amaral (2021b).

artists embrace this new reality, in which it becomes increasingly difficult to pay attention in a traditional sense. This is not because they necessarily enjoy or approve of these transformations, but because, when faced with a situation that seems irreversible, it seems to them, as it does to me, that it is more productive to try to understand and deal with new modes of attention than it is to resist them by sticking to the old. Take distraction, for instance. Defined in the Online Etymology Dictionary (Harper, n.d.) as 'the drawing away of the mind from one point or course to another or others', distraction is commonly and negatively considered to be the 'reverse' of attention. It precludes real contact or relationships with someone or something, as well as the effort necessary to synthesise complex data and sequences of events into a coherent whole. Therefore, distraction is often associated with superficiality and a kind of defeat – the subject gives in to the many forces that claim their attention, unable to recentre themselves (hence the 'subjective disintegration' of which Crary speaks).[11] Seen differently, however, one could also think about distraction as a form of resistance. As Citton (2018, n.p.) suggests, resistance can be seen as a contemporary way of 'renouncing the authority of the imposed message'. Here, the imposed message is the undisputed way in which sustained attention is commonly considered as something important and good, but also the hegemony of the message itself, whose coherence is taken for granted and never questioned. Besides, at a perceptual level, although distraction eludes synthesis, it may facilitate the making of connections, since the distracted individual will engage with objects or events that someone absorbed in the contemplation of one object would not be able to hear or see. Returning to Castorf, this impossibility of focusing, counter to the 'habitual mode', can activate the imagination in unexpected ways. So Lehmann (2006, 84) notes about the mental activity of the spectator in front of multiple stimuli and chaotic stages:

> The human sensory apparatus does not easily tolerate disconnectedness. When deprived of connections, it seeks out its own, becomes "active", its imagination going "wild" – and what then "occurs to it" are similarities, correlations and correspondences, however far-fetched these may be. The search for traces of connection is accompanied by a helpless focusing of perception on the things offered (maybe they will at some moment reveal their secret).

What also seems to be gained, in addition to new connections and despite the helplessness of the individual as the mind transitions rapidly from one sign to the next, is a form of intensity and presence. Lehmann (ibid, 83) speaks of 'the density of intensive moments' – the sensation, so rarely felt, of being in the now, arising from the fact that each interruption to the individual's efforts to focus on one or the other sign, brings them back to the here and now where perception occurs. What distraction and inattention suggest, then, is that we find ourselves in an environment that is multi-layered, with many impulses to relate to; rather than being only disorientating, this can also be potentially rich and stimulating. Owing to how distraction can stimulate relation-

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[11] An often-cited figure in this context is the *flâneur* of the grand Parisian boulevards in the 19th century – someone 'who abandons himself to the phantasmagorias of the market', in the words of Walter Benjamin (1999, 14), surrendering to consumerism as they walk distractedly, waiting for the city to claim their attention.

making and physical situatedness, artists increasingly see distraction or variations thereof as legitimate and possibly productive modes of engaging with sound. This manifests itself in many artistic proposals to which I will return in Chapter Four, which are being conceived around notions of connectivity and presence rather than synthesis and structural understanding. These include the Rasch series by the artistic research programme *MusicExperiment 21* (ME21). Under the pretext of expanding the notion of the musical work, they included in their multimedia performances a variety of materials associated with a musical composition; the Kunsthalle for Music by Ari Benjamin Meyers, in which several works are performed as if in an art exhibition, simultaneously and in different corners of an art gallery; and the *Liquid Rooms* by Ensemble Ictus, which are informal performances of contemporary works on multiple stages during which the listener can go in and out of the concert hall as they please.

In my own work, concern with attention has from the start been connected with the problematisation of aspects of musical tradition. It is specifically concerned with the habit of performing musical works in closed environments free of noisy sounds – here defined as sounds considered extraneous to the composition being performed and thus potentially distracting, sounds typically unwanted in the concert hall. This concern arose from certain experiences and incidents that have made me reconsider noise as an opportunity, rather than as a disturbance to the attention of performer and listener. I am thinking particularly of a concert with soprano Ingeborg Dalheim in which we performed a duo for piano and voice by Helmut Lachenmann, *Got Lost*. In the middle of the piece, our performance was interrupted by the sounds of an electric guitar pouring in louder and louder onto our stage. *Got Lost* is a long and complex piece, and the passage we were playing at the time of the incident was particularly quiet. From the stage, we could feel the tension in the hall. In an unexplainable reflex, communicating almost if by telepathy, Ingeborg and I did not stop playing. Instead, we slowed down emphatically, listening intently as the distortion of the guitar filled our silences. Our performance became more plastic and reactive as we began playing 'in the moment', attentive to both the composition and these emergent sounds, and improvising with these sounds. There and then I savoured the interference, yet my rehearsed pianistic gestures appeared theatrical and overstated in this new situation, making me consider the distance between our carefully planned interpretation and the spontaneity of the guitar sounds as they entered the space. Sounds like these, emerging unexpectedly during the performance of classical music, are generally considered noise: disturbing, unwanted and uncontrollable, out of place in the universe of the musical work. Here, however, they brought freshness to our performance and a new freedom in relation to the music as notated in the musical score.

This made me reflect on my experience improvising with noise musicians or performing contemporary repertoire in which these same sounds are used as musical material, often in order to propose new perceptual experiences and/or as a means of opening the closed universe of the concert hall. An example is *prisma interius* by Catherine Lamb, which uses street sounds picked up by microphones and played back inside the performance

venue. Although I can control the volume of the playback and turn the speakers on and off as I perform this piece, I have no control of how these sounds will sound. I have no control of their sonic properties, nor can I predict how they will unfold. For me as a classically trained performer, who is both used to mastering my instrument and being able to imagine how the tones I play will sound, this lack of control is challenging. It is, however, also an opportunity to be more present and more open to the physical now of the performance. In this present mode I pay attention to both the musical work and the larger sonic environment I am in, rather than constantly evaluating what I play in relation to what I would have liked to play and to the tones and rhythms specified by the score.

When conceiving my metaxically amplified performances, I had such experiences in mind. I was looking to expand both my field of attention and the 'margins of indeterminacy' of my performance, through the surprise element introduced by sounds that I could not control. I was curious to see how this expansion would affect my approach to the work, which was sometimes too rigidly determined by the score, the codified situation, and by expectations I had towards my playing. Such expectations formed through years of engaging with performing conventions, and I often had trouble finding my own voice. I worry about this rigidity because as a performer, but also as a contemporary music curator, I have felt the limitations imposed by the models within which I was educated and in which my professional life unfolds. As an interpreter, I feel connected to and accountable for this legacy. As a musician and curator, I feel the need for dialogue with a broader contemporary context. But, in fact, these two perspectives and needs do not often overlap. I wondered what would happen with the two 'rocks' of my practice, the musical work and its attached performance traditions, when entering into dialogue with the noise of the environment instead of being protected by silence. In a sense, I was imagining a transgressive practice with its traditions corroded or transformed from within, as happens during marine transgressions, when the water of the sea rising naturally deforms the sediments on the seashores.[12]

For these reasons, I call the performances developed during this research 'grounded', in reference to a text by Gilles Deleuze in which he describes the innovative painting

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[12] Music historian Daniel Leech-Wilkinson also speaks of a transgression of the traditional performance practice. Leech-Wilkinson has in recent years become an important voice for young musicians seeking to liberate themselves from the weight of the Western classical music tradition. In the online publication *Challenging Performance* (2020, n.p.), he recognises mainstream performance practices as oppressive and obsolete, arguing for 'transgressive performances', which he describes as non-conforming to canonical norms and the expectations of the market: '[This online book is] about freeing performance from unnecessary rules and constraints and from much of the anxiety that comes with classical training and practice. The aim is to encourage performers to find many more ways (old and new) in which classical scores can make musical sense'. However, there is an important difference between my understanding of transgression and Leech-Wilkinson's, in the sense that the examples that he gives in the book are by performers who purposefully deconstruct or intervene with the score. I am not interested in making autonomous decisions as to how to modify my interpretation, but rather hoping instead that these decisions will happen through an encounter with the unknown, as represented by the sounds emerging from amplification.

technique of Caravaggio, who instead of painting upon a ground, used the paint contained in the ground to create his images. The idea of painting with the ground, although it clashes semantically with the marine metaphor, is actually close to it in the sense that it describes a form of affection between the elements of an ecosystem. As I will explain more thoroughly in Chapter Two, Caravaggio's technique seemed therefore to build a pertinent parallel with my intention of transforming my practice from within, performing with the sound of the environment rather than against it. In this study, these grounded performances become experimental situations where I explore how metaxical amplification, by reclaiming the noise and fluctuations of the performance environment instead of filtering them out, does the following: it destabilises the traditional centrality of the work and its representation; it challenges the autonomy and aesthetic self-sufficiency of the work; it proposes new functions for this work; and it changes the performer, who improvises and listens in and with the present as it entangles with musical interpretation.

Division of chapters, methods and documentation

To conclude this Introduction on a practical note, I divide this thesis into four parts. In the Chapter One, I consider the importance of a silent background for the performance of classical music from a historical and practical perspective. Based on musicological research, I look at how social codes and the cultural imaginary of the 19th century, as well as acoustic and technological developments, have contributed over time to the eradication of noise in the classical concert and on recordings. I also examine my own practice as a classical performer and testimonies by pianists and music teachers to understand why a silent background might be necessary for the construction of a musical interpretation.

Chapter Two deals with the performative potential – within the context of classical and contemporary composition – of environmental sounds traditionally considered as noise, that is as unwanted or disturbing sounds. I explain how my experience with these 'noisy' compositions inspired me to develop the notion of metaxical amplification. In the second part of the chapter, I describe the implementation of metaxical amplification in what I subsequently came to call grounded performances, discussing their motivation, outcomes and inconsistencies. A special highlight is given to the evolution from the first performance, *touchez des yeux*, to *Interferences*, presented a full year later.

Chapter Three continues with a reflection on my grounded performances. I focus on the way the juxtaposition of heterogenous sounds – environmental sounds and the acoustic realisation of the musical work – challenges attention, and with this also the mode of performance and listening discussed in Chapter One. Here, constructed interpretations, structural hearing and absorption, which I had previously presented as the foundations of my pianistic practice, are replaced by practices of improvisation, multiphonic listening and modulating forms of attention.

Finally, in Chapter Four, I discuss my personal attachment to tradition and to classical works as well as possible visions for the future of my practice. I explain first how my artistic work in this research started out quite conventionally, from the interpretation of musical works, and how this conventional practice evolved into an intervention in the environment of performance. Comparing my practice with the work of other musicians, but also with the use of text in theatrical stagings, I reflect upon how unconventional approaches to performance traditions may result in new ways of treating the musical score and of understanding the musical work. The realisation of the musical work is no longer considered the centre and purpose of the performance, but rather a pretext for more inclusive experiences. I conclude with a biographical note explaining the personal necessity of this study in my artistic trajectory, its limitations, and the new perspectives on my musical practice gained through this artistic research.

Methodologically speaking, the research and the account presented here evolve as a tight but achronological feedback loop between theoretical and artistic material, and my own artistic experiences and work. The research started with loose theoretical references and rough ideas about possible performance concepts and a desire to explore new relationships with musical works from the past. In 2018, these initial premises led to the creation of a first 'grounded performance', *touchez des yeux*. As I will explain in Chapter Two, rather than directly addressing the insights discussed in this dissertation, *touchez* featured ideas and choices pointing in several and often contradictory directions. *Interferences*, on the other hand, was conceived one year later as the result of a thorough reflection triggered by the analysis of *touchez*. This work first brought into focus the question of attention, motivating me to look back at past experiences as a performer and engage historically and theoretically with the significance of silence and sustained attention for the performance and reception of classical music as described in Chapter One. This in turn led to the crystallisation of the notion of metaxical amplification, and to insights about the consequences of such amplification for the understanding and function of the musical work. These insights induced a thorough engagement with the literature studied in the beginning of the research as well as with new references, spanning across several disciplines including cultural and media theory, sociology, theatre, the visual arts, musicology and philosophy. The engagement with literature served primarily to strengthen my findings and insights, whereas examples from recent musical performances and artworks from other fields were approached critically, either to draw comparisons with my own work or to offer new perspectives to the theoretical material.

This intricate process is mirrored in the documentation presented in this thesis. Even though it includes recordings of some of my earlier performances and works of other artists, the documentation of my grounded performances is scarce in the case of *touchez*, where it based mostly on photographs, and even inexistent in the case of *Interferences*. This was a conscious choice. In photographing the performance of *touchez*, Maarten de Vrieze didn't seek to give a global picture of the situation. Instead, he chose to register

what I would call 'footnote moments', elements such as cabling on the ground, heteroclite objects, the handrail of the stairs, a wrinkling of lips and ears almost imperceptible to the eye. Unaware of the scope of my research, he accidentally (or, more likely, influenced by what he heard) contributed to its making by providing me with documentation that reflected what I had set out to study, without me having already consciously identified what this was: the performance environment and its usually ignored details. In other words, studying the photographic documentation of the performance was as essential for the development of my research after *touchez* than the experience of the performance. I include it in the dissertation in order for the reader to follow this process and to better understand my subsequent choices and direction. A sound documentation, on the other hand, would hardly have been enlightening, since it was difficult, if not impossible, to properly document a performance as experiencing it was highly situational, depending on being in that space, and on walking from speaker to speaker in one's own pace.

When it comes to *Interferences*, the motivation not to include documentation was slightly different. The setting was straightforward, with the pianist on stage and the audience listening from the auditorium in a darkened room. There would not much to be seen in photographs that would differ from a conventional concert experience. Regarding sound, however, the situation would not have been so difficult to document. Showing the documentation here, however, would mean inviting the listener to look for correspondences between the documented material and the theoretical insights of this dissertation, to the detriment of the experience of the situation itself, which is at the very core of this study. It seemed more interesting to me then, to craft my written descriptions of the performance in such a way as to stimulate the listening imagination of the reader, rather than presenting documented material as evidence or proof. In a similar effort to awake the sonic imagination of the reader, I present in Chapter Two a sound collage made of fragments of recorded material from *touchez* attached to a slide show of the photographic documentation of the performance. Thus each photo has its own length and sound. The function of this collage is not to have the reader imagine how the performance could have been, but to propose a third artistic output to the thesis by translating the multiphonic situation described in Chapter Three to the reader, whose attention will hopefully be challenged by the coexistence of sounds and written words. This in order to prepare the reader for the theoretical reflection proposed in Chapter Four.

Finally, the insistence on photographic documentation also has its origins in my extensive collaboration with photographer Karen Stuke on *touchez,* described in detail in Chapter Two. Stuke works with pinhole photography, a technique that allows the photographer to capture multiple temporal layers in the same image. As is characteristic of pinhole photography, the longer the opening time of the shutter, the more light enters the camera, causing all that moves in a given situation to become fuzzy. For instance, in Stuke's photos of me performing Schubert, I can be seen vanishing behind the piano and the score. Observing these photos has made me extremely sensitive to the physical

environment of the performance, and to look at it from different perspectives. It was in many ways the beginning of the research as it is presented here, for it raised questions. If the pianist vanishes in a situation in which she is so incontestably present, the picture seems to ask: What are we actually seeing and listening to? What goes on when I perform?

I – Constructing Silence

Although the Cambridge dictionary defines silence as a period without any sound, silence as such does not really exist. As composer Pierre Schaeffer (2017 [1966], 74-75) recalls, '[t]he most profound silence is still a sound background like any other, and against it, the noise of my breathing and my heart stand out with unexpected solemnity'. Logically then, the environments in which I perform or listen to classical music are not silent either. This is evident in the case of the classical concert hall: apart from the music itself, there might be sounds produced by the audience and the musicians moving, coughing, grunting or breathing; there might be mechanical sounds produced by the instruments, such as bow crossings, guitar string squeaks, the beatings of an untuned piano, pedals pressed and released or piano hammers hitting the string; then there are ambient sounds, the sound of the ventilation, heating and light systems, the creaking of floors and chairs, electromagnetic interference from mobile phones and other transmission devices; if the doors or windows are open, or the space not properly isolated, there might be street sounds – rumbling from construction sites, cars passing by; when the concert is amplified, we might hear hisses, buzzes, electrical crackles, clicks and pops from the loudspeakers or audio feedback. In short, the classical concert environment is noisy, very noisy even. And yet, the history of the classical concert and the more recent history of the recording medium is marked by efforts to cleanse the acoustic environment, removing or minimising all sounds extraneous to the music in order to create a background of silence upon which music can shine undisturbed. How has silence come to be valued in classical performance as such an ideal background for the music?

This chapter examines how an environment free of sounds extraneous to the music – unwanted sounds: noise – may contribute to the reception and performance of classical music. The beginning of the chapter considers the historical developments in music reception since the appearance of the first public concerts in the Western world in the 18th century, including the establishment of new social codes and the emergence of a romantic aesthetics, and the later developments in the recording industry that cultivated music as an extraordinary experience. I show how this new musical experience was facilitated by silence, symbolically but also in practice, in particular in what concerns the interpretation, by the performer, and the access by the audience, to the temporally remote and closed universe of the musical work. Focusing particularly on the performer and drawing on my own experience, I argue, in what follows, that the mental activity traditionally required for the classical performer to be able to give a coherent interpretation of a musical work requires deep concentration and total absorption in the music, and that it unfolds best in environments that are sheltered and free of noise, and where our perception of time is reduced to the perception of the time of the music. The chapter ends with a chicken and the egg dilemma: does the music need silence or has it

become conditioned by silence? In attempting to answer this perhaps unanswerable question, this chapter paves the way for the subsequent chapters and the imagination of a practice freed from such absorption and silence.

Back in the 18th century, music-making, with few exceptions, was often integrated within other activities, such as court ceremonies, church liturgy, village dances and balls. With the appearance of the first so-called 'public concerts' (*concerts publics*) in France in the 1720s, music became the central event, and was heard by and for itself (Ledent 2008, 2). Concerts became known as 'spaces of realisation of autonomous music' (Heister 2003, 686). Still, in the beginning, concerts were not necessarily quiet. Music historian William Weber (1997, 678) reports about the babbly audiences of these events, which imitated the festive and social musical gatherings in the court and opera. Progressively, however, and especially in the Romantic period, there was a move towards a more restrained atmosphere and an ever-quieter environment. In this environment, perception was oriented in a particular way, maximising the attention of the performer and the spectator on the music. Although many types of concerts have coexisted since the 18th century and continue to do so today, this more sterile background became the standard mode of relating to music, still prevailing today in what I will call 'the classical concert'. [13, 14]

To understand the appearance of a silent background in the classical concert, it is necessary to examine in more detail the social, cultural and political landscape in Europe during the blossoming years of concert culture. When the first public concerts appeared, the continent was caught between two Revolutions, which historian Eric Hobsbawm (1996 [1962], 2) designates as 'the twin crater of a rather larger regional volcano'. The French Revolution had contributed to the emergence of democratic thought in various European nations, and of public cultural institutions disconnected from Church and Court, among which was the classical concert. 'In response to a shift in the political regime, the aesthetic regime invents new institutions and new figures', says sociologist David Ledent (2009, 1, my translation), reflecting on the establishment of the first public concerts in Paris, and how they were meant to function as a space of sharing beyond social boundaries, and ideological, religious and political arguments. Even though the public concert was originally envisioned as an 'open tribune' accessible by all citizens, it was soon claimed by the liberal bourgeois society, made rich by the rise of capitalist industry, which needed forms of leisure that would set it apart from both the aristocracy and the working class.

Partly, the new rituals developing in the concert hall, in particular the habit of being quiet and sitting still, can be attributed to new social codes emerging in bourgeois

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[13] The historical overview that follows is based on 'Musical Materiality: Concert Formats, Curatorial Concerns and Promiscuous Interactions' (Amaral 2021a), an essay written during this research trajectory.

[14] I use the term classical concert in reference to Martin Tröndle, whose book *Das Konzert* (2011), translated in English into *Classical Concert Studies* (2021), has contributed greatly to the music curatorial field.

society across social spheres and evolving around notions of *réussite*, sobriety and composure. As sociologist Norbert Elias points out (2000 [1939], 397-398), composure belongs to a rationalised body that is best understood against the background of a new industrial reality driven by the economic interests of the bourgeois. Faced with the need to foresee the intentions of others in order to better control them, and at the same time, with the necessity of concealing one's intentions and emotions from others in order to avoid being exploited by them, the bourgeois, as the aristocrats had done before them, relied on their composure – a conscious form of resistance against the spontaneous expression of emotions – as refuge and shield. Acting composedly within the concert hall, the rationalised body displays power, epitomising an individual who observes the world with a certain detachment, while simultaneously profoundly aware of the gaze of their fellow spectators.

Apart from issues of power, the interiorisation of emotions and the avoidance of visible and audible displays of appreciation represented, for the bourgeois, a way to harmonise egalitarian ideals and an autonomous sense of self. The concert in a growingly democratic society represented a particular entanglement of public and private: in this context, sitting still allowed one to dive deeper into one's own listening experience, and it was simultaneously a mark of respect for one another's individual experience (Ledent 2009, 7-8). At the same time, the control of the body expressed a new and reduced tolerance for the corporeal in line with the growing puritanism among the middle classes, in which the composed body as a moral symbol played an important part. Tellingly, William Weber (1997, 690) also explains that the ascetic concert hall behaviour from the mid-1800s onwards was a way of cleansing the musical space from the 'libertinage' of the aristocracy common in European theatres and operas throughout the 18th century, and possibly also to curb the sexualisation of musical experience, such as the 'brain fever' outbursts of the aroused young female spectators of Rossini's *Moise* (Stendhal 1992 [1824], 2).[15]

The widespread popularisation of a new concert etiquette also reflects a profound change in the attitude to art. Despite their dominating social position, the bourgeois found themselves entangled in the growing webs of capitalism and subjected to rational forms of control and bureaucracy which, albeit less oppressive than the ones they imposed on the workers, still impacted their sense of individual autonomy. Because of these constraints and restrictions, there was a need for spaces in which dreams and desires could be acted out. The concert, understood as a special activity separated from everyday life, offered a socially accepted form of acting out these desires momentarily,

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[15] For a general discussion on the puritan approach to the body in the 19th century see Corbin (2016b). Corbin argues that one of the reactions to the messiness of the industrial world was a vertiginous purification of many aspects of life in the 19th century. This purification included, for instance, the rise of a hygienist discourse promoting a clean body, fresh air and well-ventilated spaces (Corbin 2016b; Amaral 2021a); the invention of electricity and the idea that electricity could 'cleanse' communication, polluted air and the public space (Spiegel 1992, 110); or the depuration of mores that accompanied the rise of puritanism in bourgeois societies, such as Victorian England or Biedermeier Vienna (Hanson 1985; Scott 1994; Weber 1997).

through the music, even if only in the imagination. Ledent (2008, 4) emphasises how, while embodying the democratic ideals of the French Revolution, the concert also offered a refuge from the messiness and the transformations brought about by the Industrial Revolution: 'In this century which consecrates machinery and technical reasoning, the classical concert seems to draw a space of resistance to the reduction of man to a productive force'. Similarly, sociologist Max Weber suggests that these artistic 'spaces of resistance' would have a much more profound and symbolic function than that of a mere activity of leisure: 'Art was constituted into a cosmos of its own values, ever more conscious, more coherent, more autonomous. It has a function of interworldly liberation, whatever the definition of the term: liberation from the everyday and, above all, liberation from the growing pressure of theoretical and practical rationalism' (cf. Buch 2018, 4, my translation). Such liberation came through music, with romantic performances appealing to the listener's subconscious (Dorian 1966, 219), stirring memories and associations, and making one dream about personal freedom through the freedom of their imagination.

Even more than a space of dreams and resistance, concerts became an occasion for bourgeois individuals aspiring to personal autonomy to expand and cultivate their sense of self, as well as to compensate for a lost sense of spirituality in an increasingly secularised world. The late 18th and 19th centuries indeed saw a new image of the individual take shape, the 'person', understood as a being possessing self-knowledge, with access and interest for one's emotional life and psychology, and having an individual consciousness. Various factors explain the individual's ascension to what anthropologist Marcel Mauss (1985 [1938], 20-23) calls the 'category of person'; the category emerging was hugely influenced by democratisation, the political emancipation of the bourgeoisie, German Idealism and theological pursuits such as pietist worship, which emphasised personal morality and the sacred nature of the individual. This new self-consciousness, coupled with the bourgeois' social aspirations, became manifest in the ability of the individual to represent themselves. Individuals came to hold the double position of living their life and at the same time observing this life and themselves through their own personal mirrors, reflecting on aspirations, learning to 'perform' and to forge a sense of the person they would like to be.[16]

When it comes to art, this new self-consciousness translated into a hope and belief that art could teach people something deep about themselves. In this respect, the Idealist thoughts of Immanuel Kant were extremely influential. Kant believed that the contemplation of art could be a source of self-knowledge and moral elevation. Raised in a pietist context marked by inner discipline and strict moral values, Kant saw the contemplation of art as a combination of intellectual activity and an activity of the senses requiring introspection, effort, reflective judgment and disinterest, without practical

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[16] It was in this climate that US Senate member Henry Clay coined the expression 'self-made man' in 1842, illustrating the period's dream of social mobility and equality of opportunity – to be born 'from nothing and, through ardour, perseverance and self-cultivation, go 'from rag to riches' (Wyllie 1954, 210).

intentions or for mere sensual enjoyment: art should be enjoyed in and for itself. Kant (n.d. [1790], n.p.) writes in this respect:

> [B]eautiful art is a mode of representation which is purposive for itself, and which, although devoid of [definite, translator's note] purpose, yet furthers the culture of the mental powers in reference to social communication. The universal communicability of a pleasure carries with it in its very concept that the pleasure is not one of enjoyment, from mere sensation, but must be derived from reflection; and thus, aesthetical art, as the art of beauty, has for standard the reflective Judgement and not sensation.

In music, aesthetic contemplation would involve deep attention to the music and intellectual effort, practice and experience to access the depths of a musical work. Psychologist Gregory Gorelik (2016, 290) has sought to describe the effects of aesthetic contemplation on the individual as such:

> For those who have [them], these experiences of illumination and enlightenment are in a different epistemic category than everyday encounters with people, places, and objects. [They] are marked by the feeling that some fundamental truth or revelation was glimpsed, and such experiences are often followed by a change in [one's] perspective on life and the nature of reality.

Contemporary artists and thinkers continue to posit listening as an arduous but deeply rewarding experience. For instance, for composer Helmut Lachenmann (cf. Orning 2014, 291), to listen to music means to observe oneself 'by listening to the spiritual process that a piece of music represents, by following this process, remembering where one comes from […]'. Likewise, philosopher and musicophile Jean-Luc Nancy (2002, 25) describes listening as a form of knowledge, reporting that an engagement with the music that resonates with the listener is a 'straining toward the self' ('être tendu vers soi'), that is, toward a presence to self and an awareness of the self as a sentient being. In short, listening has become a symbolic act with its own rules – an existential experience and engagement that composer and artist-researcher Paul Craenen (2020, 20-21) has summarised pertinently:

> At the beginning of the 19th century, the practice of music rose rapidly from a subordinate and decorative art form to become the most prominent in bourgeois culture. This ascending status was accompanied by a growing awareness that music can review a reality that is inaccessible to language, although not without effort from the listener. Partly under the influence of 18th century idealism and the philosophical ideas of Immanuel Kant, in early-Romantic music, listening was discovered to be an activity, something that listeners had to do for themselves. That insight gave listeners opportunities for personal development, but also entailed responsibilities. Listening was elevated to a task and an art, with the distinction between experts and amateurs gaining in importance. At the end of the 19th century, silent listening in concert halls became standard practice […]. These developments can each be placed in their own cultural and historical context but first and foremost they are all expressions of a belief that music can provide a meaningful experience if the listener makes the effort to focus entirely on what is unfolding within the music itself.

The introduction of silence as a background for music in the classical concert must be understood in the light of this existential experience, connected to the imaginary of silence in the Romantic period. This is when silence was viewed as a promise and a condition for the most private but also the most elevating experiences involving communication with the self and with the world. Corbin (2016a) refers to a compendium of Romantic writers reflecting on the potent and timeless presence of silence, to poets like Baudelaire and Chateaubriand, as well as to religious and mystical authors for whom silence was an omen, the sign of a 'presence in the air' waiting to be revealed. This is also the way silence appears in the artistic sphere, where, equated with the biblical nothingness that precedes the genesis, it forms the beginning of artistic creation: the white canvas of the painter, or Blanchot's white page vertigo, which he describes as 'a dike of paper against an ocean of silence' (ibid, 119). In a concert, silence precedes the music, resounding directly from the composer's soul (Hunter 2005).

These romantic considerations on silence connect to the classical definition of communication. In its classical sense and considered within a context much broader than the musical, communication is regarded as the transmission of thoughts, ideas, events and consciousnesses that precede the communication and that should be transmitted, ideally, without any loss to their proper sense and meaning (Derrida 1972). In order to achieve this purpose, the medium transporting a message from a sender to a receiver should be able to deliver this message in the best possible and most immediate manner. This idea lies behind the development of most communication technologies, developed in a way such as to be as efficient and neutral as possible. In media theory, this understanding of the role of the medium is based on the notion and the intention of an 'excluded middle' (Alloa 2020, 148). The principle of the 'excluded middle' has entered media theory through the Aristotelian theory of the syllogism, where the term uniting the first and second proposition of the syllogism, the middle term or *meson*, becomes irrelevant for reasoning once the final deduction has been made, and is thus excluded from this reasoning.[17] Transposed to the context of communication, the principle of the 'excluded middle' presupposes that materialities should disappear in the act of communication so as to establish a direct contact between message and receiver. This would make sense when one considers, for example, that when one reads a book or watches television one is interested in the stories and the content that they tell or show, and not in the physical presence of those objects. To be able to focus on their content, these physical objects should remain unnoticed, or 'disappear' from one's perception. The disappearance of the book and television is what allows understanding the message or meaning they are conveying. Too present, the medium clouds the transmission, like

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[17] A syllogism is a form of deductive reasoning derived from two propositions. To better understand the role of the *meson* in the syllogism, let us look at the well-known example 'all men are mortal, Socrates is a man, hence Socrates is a mortal'. As Aristotle explains: 'If A is predicated of every B, and B of every C, A must be predicated of every C' (Aristotle 1995, 123). In the example of Socrates, manhood (B) is used as a term of passage between Socrates (C) and mortality (A); it is an operative term that highlights what is common between Socrates and mortality, establishing a direct relationship between the two terms. In this context, manhood has no function other than that of establishing this relationship, which is why it can disappear in the final proposition.

for instance when the pages of old books are stuck together, and we keep forgetting what we have just read in the process of unsticking them; or when signal interference affects the quality of the televised content so badly that instead of images, we see a frozen or pixelated screen.

Communication becomes complexified in artistic-interpretive practices, such as mainstream theatre or musical interpretation, due to their representational character. What representation means here is the practice of 'presenting again' an original idea that has been encoded or 'kept alive' through media such as musical notation, and that will be rekindled through communication (in music, through the performer's interpretation). As pianist and artist-researcher Paulo de Assis (2018, 11) articulates pertinently:

> With "representation," I am referring to the performance "of something, or, more precisely, to the performance of something "as" something, which implies the existence of something "original," prior to the performance, something that is then rendered perceptible through some sort of "representation" in the moment of the performance.

In other words, musical performance as a representation would consist in the acoustic rendition of something that is both exterior and anterior to it, that is, something that exists beyond the performance. This abstract and quasi-mystical notion of music as transcending time and space was central in the development of Romantic musical discourse. As musicologist Nicholas Cook (2001) explains, the musical work in its romantic definition is viewed as an imaginary object that somehow pre-exists the performance and which 'continues to exist long after the sounds have died away'. Performance, in this context, represented a promise of access to this (musical) beyond. Thus, in the same way that the television should 'disappear' from my perception so that I can watch the film, the media employed in the performance and the performance environment in general should not obstruct direct contact with the music: in acoustic terms, beyond the mediation of the music, they should be silent.

In what way does silence – silent media and a silent environment – contribute to direct contact with music? There is a sense, which I would qualify as 'spatial', in which the silencing of the media involved in the performance makes the listener and the performer feel that the music is physically closer to them, that is, that the sounds of the music come to them without obstruction. In this sense, silence must be understood as the absence of interferences which would disrupt the illusion of an unmediated sensuous experience of music. This possibility of an unmediated physical contact with the music has been realised in practice by certain innovations in instrumental technique, space acoustics and the making and tuning of musical instruments occurring since the 19th century, all of which are directed at the reduction of sounds extraneous to those of the music. These innovations were multiple. There was the popularisation of tuning systems that exterminated natural harmonics (considered out-of-tune) and the more homogenous and clear sound created by fine adjustment of instrument mechanics (Caznok 2015, 71). There were also developments in space acoustics, incipient at the time. These further

evolved to include the removal of background noise, complex isolation techniques and materials, and the construction of surfaces that eliminate excessive reverberation and reflection of sound to impart a feeling of intimate proximity. The aim of these innovations is that the music is heard clearly, as if told by the performer to each spectator directly and without interference, all the while keeping enough reverberation to make the listener feel immersed in the music.[18]

Next to the cleansing and adjusting of space acoustics, performers were challenged in matters of instrumental technique; for, as musicologist Mary Hunter (2005, 360) points out, it was important that music as the noblest of arts generated sounds as if they were produced 'by no human labor'. For performers, the thorough training of the body came to be considered and practiced in-and-of itself, on the grounds that the music can flow from it effortlessly. For this effect, pianists work relentlessly on etudes whose goal is to 'equalise' the ten fingers so that they can move about the keys with the same dexterity, and to train the pianist to bypass the mechanical noises of the piano, for instance by learning to pedal clearly and noiselessly. Hunter (ibid, 88) notes how the performing body was turned into a machine in the 19th century, 'with rectilinear grids upon which posture was mapped, and fiendish exercises devised to put the fingers in every conceivable configuration'. More poetically, Ledent (2008, 6) speaks of the promethean performer, their virtuosity as transcending all mechanisms and materialities. My own musical education is based on this notion of technical excellence: by learning to practice the work thoroughly at the instrument until technical difficulties are overcome, the work becomes second nature; as the work becomes part of my body, my body becomes the work. As an aspiring pianist I would obsess over and experiment with multifarious exercises to improve my own dexterity so that my fingers would become truly musical.

More extreme voices have also posited the visibility of the performer as a form of visual noise, the general idea being here that music should be conveyed to the listener 'immediately' and that this immediacy should not be obstructed by the visual presence of the performer (Goehr, 1996, 7-10). While there are many disagreeing views on the matter, excessive visibility continues to bother performers who would like the focus of their performance to be the music only. By the end of his soloist career, pianist Sviatoslav Richter (cf. Monsaingeon 1998, 108) refused to play in public unless he could play in complete darkness for his own concentration, but also to prevent the listener from being distracted from the work by the spectacle of his hands and face: 'That's why I now play in the dark, to empty my head of all non-essential thoughts and allow the listener to concentrate on the music rather than on the performer. What's the point of watching a pianist's hands or face, when they only express the efforts being expended on the piece?' Glenn Gould withdrew into the recording studio, in order, among other reasons, to be able to concentrate on the audible without being placed on display (Danuser 2015, 188).

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[18] For the norms and history of acoustics in classical concert halls see Boren (2018); Caznok (2015); Beranek (2008); Skålevik (2006).

Lastly, the audience – whose composure since the early (and not so early) years of the public concert was partly dictated by etiquette and social constraints – was and continues to be made silent by the means of explicit instructions. By ways of example, we read in the press announcement of a concert in Hanover, USA, in 1769, that the audience should maintain 'a becoming silence and decorum, during the performance' (Virginia Gazette 1769, n.p.); in Charleston in 1796, 'the greatest silence' was requested during the performance; until as late as 1940, the programs of the Berliner Singakademie specified that the audience should '[r]efrain from applause between the movements of a piece'; and at least until 1918, proper conduct was mandatory in concerts in Genf, with concert tickets stating that attendees should 'avoid demonstrations of approval or disapproval'.[19] Such 'collective behavioural control' (Tröndle 2021, 16) is still familiar to us today in a more contemporary form, as in announcements such as 'please switch off your cell phones'. Furthermore, the 19th century saw the appearance of a 'listening police' formed by music connoisseurs, writers and other specialists who through their articles and reviews took care that the contemplative attitude to music and musical works was made known and respected. William Weber (1997, 678) describes this as the emergence of an ideological discourse on 'listening as absorption'. This social vigilance is further enforced by the audience members themselves, who watch and correct each other with the typical 'shhs' that anyone having attended classical concerts will be familiar with.

The wish for immediacy in the form of acoustic and technical purity has been greatly explored and intensified by the recording industry. With the advent of sound reproduction technologies such as the phonograph in the late 19th century, it became possible to imagine voices coming 'out of nowhere' (Bünger 2009-2011, n.p.). Later, this illusion was cultivated in recordings of instrumental music that focused on the absolute and direct appearance of the pure tone. As composer Richard Beaudoin (2021, n.p.) elaborates in an essay concerning what he calls the habit of 'nullification' of noise of the recording industry,:

> The history of recording of notated music can be read as a search for methods to suppress sounds that are not dictated by the score. That history can be charted from wax cylinders to the noise reduction techniques invented by Dolby Laboratories, to the digitally manufactured "silence" that envelops modern studio releases.

Beaudoin describes how it has become common for record producers to use editing and restoration software to reduce mechanical noises – for instance the surface noise of screeching needles in old LPs –, instrumental sounds, corporeal noises, as well as to compensate for poor acoustics in recording situations. Software, such as, for example, iZotope's RX7, released in 2018, has become increasingly more precise. However, the the controversies regarding silence in recordings are from an earlier date. By ways of example, Beaudoin discusses the audible noise of Glenn Gould's piano chair in his 1965

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[19] All examples in Salmen (1988, 177ff.).

recording of Schönberg's *opus 19*. Consternated by the impossibility of removing this noise, producer Thomas Frost (1965, n.p.) writes apologetically on the back cover of the album that 'Glenn Gould refuses to give up his chair. Columbia Records refuses to give up Glenn Gould. And we hope that you, the consumer, will refuse to be discomforted by some audible creaks that are insignificant in light of the great music-making on this disc'.

Gould's fans love these creaks and similar noises for their historical charm and the human aura they impart to the recording. They are traces of Gould's presence, indicating that he had once physically 'been' there, in the somewhere where the recording was done (Sanden 2013, 10). Speaking about the 'humanising' and memorial function of these signs, Beaudoin (2021) refers to Roland Barthes, calling such interferences the recording's *puncta*:

> As audio evidence of Gould's corporeality these non-notated sounds inspire many of the same (often contradictory) reactions that Barthes experiences while looking at photographs: the chair creaks annoy, disturb, and break cultural agreements, while at the same time arousing sympathy, fascination, and a sense of intimate connection. As such, these sounds are exemplary audio *puncta*.

As Barthes (1981, 26) himself expounds, the *punctum* refers to the small details in photography, including technical glitches, that disrupt the *studium*, which is the factual investigation of the content or theme of the picture. *Puncta* are touching because they are in a way rather banal and familiar, they belong to anyone's everyday life; they are 'the accident that pricks me', thereby conferring an emotional reality to the image. However, although some listeners appreciate such contextual interferences, others deplore their presence, as we can read in Phil Gold's (n.d., n.p.) review of Franz Liszt's *Sonata in B Minor* for piano, in which we find a typical description of the annoyance caused by noisy recordings, compared with the pleasurable clarity of remastered historical recordings:

> The sound on this carefully restored set of Horowitz recordings from 1930 to 1951 is thin and lacking in any real sense of tonal color, but it is also mercifully clear and undistorted and relatively free of background and groove noise. This allows us to hear all the notes and gives us a hint of the sonority Horowitz must have produced at the height of his technical powers. What emerges is a highly cohesive overall framework on which to hang the various episodes. [...] Richter's 1965 live performance comes with much more than its fair share of coughing and other distracting noises, and his piano seems to be a little out of tune. Of the four recordings, [... this] is the performance which brings out the widest gamut of Liszt's vast canvas; how sad it is that the recording quality is so soft, to put it politely.

Over time, recordings also alter the way we listen, behave and perform in a live performance environment. Performance theorist Philip Auslander (2008 [1999], 10) remarks that while recordings were at first meant as a memory and complement, and then later as an emulation of the concert experience, they have progressively developed their own characteristics that are today emulated by the concert. As an example, the

obsession of neutrality of the recording industry ends up influencing our behaviour, making us need more silence. And music critic Alex Ross (2010, n.p.) argues that the silence between movements in a recording makes us more used to the lack of applause in concert, and more capable of conceiving a musical work as a totality. Mediatisation also influences our ideals of sound and acoustics, whereby live performances are miked today, not for listening convenience but to create the intimate effect we know from TV, films and recordings (Auslander 2008[1999], 36-37). In *Prospects of Recording* (1966), Glenn Gould alerted us to how recordings would dictate the evolution of concert hall acoustics:

> If we were to take an inventory of those musical predilections most characteristic of our generation, we would discover that almost every item on such a list could be attributed directly to the influence of the recording. So, if the first recordings tried to emulate the reverberant, cathedral-like sound of historical concert halls, successful experiments in the recording studio made us crave for a more intimate musical experience characterised by analytic clarity, immediacy, (almost) tactile proximity, direct and impartial presence. These characteristics are taken into consideration by acousticians today when designing new or renovating old concert halls.

Gould describes an evolution from a 'cavernously reverberant', church-like sound of the first concert halls, probably deriving from the reverential approach to music of the late 19th and early 20th century concert hall, to our current preference for more neutral acoustics; such 'neutral' acoustics place more weight on the technical perfection of the performance, since they are much more transparent - and as musicians say, 'unforgiving' - than reverberant halls. Bearing in mind that Gould's miking preferences are representative of the 'flat neutral' studio sound cultivated in the late 1970s and 80s, and that we have since seen a swing back to a more reverberant aesthetic, the ideal of acoustic perfection and sound purity developed through recordings such as Gould's continues nonetheless to haunt today's performers. I say haunt because the transparency offered by recording media intensifies an already existing obsession with technical perfection: in a recording studio, the microphone works as a magnifying lens, making mistakes seem huge that would seem insignificant in the ephemerality of live performance. As a result, musicians become increasingly self-critical. However, if the act of recording makes mistakes and undesired sounds overly audible, it also offers the possibility of endless corrections and readjustments, so that the final mastered recording is duly 'photoshopped', edited and mastered to a polished level. Musicians, who are constantly exposed to these recordings, seek to emulate them in their live performances. They aim for the same degree of faultless perfection and the same noiseless context consistent with their experience of these recordings. And so as not to disappoint the audiences who are similarly familiar with these recordings, they make the recorded into 'live' performance.

In order to be close to the music, it does not suffice to hear 'pure' sounds; one must also make sense of them. Making sense of classical music is largely a mental activity which asks from performers and listeners a great deal of intellectual work. Next to the absence

of interferences, this activity requires the absence of interruptions. As Tim Ingold (2020), an accomplished cellist and renowned anthropologist, argues in an article about playing the cello, we are used to apprehending composed music not as sound, but as formal compositions rendered in sound. That is why when we listen to musical works, especially familiar works, we do not simply listen to sonorities but to sequences of gestures moving in a specific direction. In other words, we listen to a precise object and with a particular intention. Put together in time, these sequences of gestures form a closed structure, consisting of interrelated parts that constitute a whole. In relating to a structure, experienced listeners relate at once to its parts, to the way they interact and to the way they relate to the whole. Drawing on relevant theories and my own experiences as a performer and listener, I will linger for a moment on the specifics of this mental activity, or process, in order to demonstrate how it connects to silence and why it is important that there be no interruptions as this process unfolds.

Sociologist and musician Theodor Adorno (1976 [1962], 3), speaking from the perspective of what he calls an 'expert listener' – a professional musician or someone with consistent theoretical knowledge of classical music – refers to this mental activity as 'structural hearing'. For Adorno, musical works are to be considered as 'objectively structured things'; against the objective background of the work, listening consists of a multi-layered temporal process. He (ibid, 4) describes the activity of the listener in this complex process as follows: 'Spontaneously following the course of music, even complicated music, he hears the sequence, hears past, present, and future moments together so that they crystallize into a meaningful context. Simultaneous complexities – in other words, a complicated harmony and polyphony – are separately and distinctly grasped by the expert'. In this description, Adorno alerts us to the temporal nature of this mental activity, or process. How to relate to these different moments in time and to these musical complexities? In her reflection on time, philosopher Catherine Malabou (2019, 30) argues insightfully that the perception of any sonic event is formed in one's consciousness through a disordered interlacing of impressions and expectations which she, referring to Edmund Husserl, designates as 'retentions' and 'protentions'. Retentions are mental representations of the past, a series of images that keep changing in function of what one hears. Protentions, on the other hand, are a kind of anticipated future: they are images forming in one's mind based on previous experiences with similar sonic events, suggestive of what might come next. It is this synthesis of present perceptions and future expectations shaped by past experiences, as well as the retention of what has just been heard, that allows the perception of, for example, a sequence of notes as a melody, rather than as a succession of dissociate sounds.

Thus, to listen structurally to musical compositions implies, according to Adorno, that the listener, musician or not, has some knowledge of music and can undertake such synthesising processes; the more knowledge and the more previous experiences with classical music – the more 'expert' – the more one will be able to assimilate a musical composition. Musicians, by training their aural skills, become familiar with this structural approach: in perfect pitch exercises they learn to recognise single tones

detached from any context; in melodic dictations, they identify tones in relation to each other; in rhythmic dictations, they learn to remember rhythmical patterns; in chord hearing, they identify types of chords and inversions detached from any context; in functional or harmonic training they determine the harmonic function of the chord within a chord progression. Ideally, this training enables musicians to simultaneously distinguish, within complex musical structures, harmonic and overall rhythmical progressions, the profile of each chord forming these progressions, the melodies, motives and rhythmical patterns these chords accompany, and finally, each single pitch that makes up the work.[20,21]

When the musician performs, and not just listens, 'structural hearing' is complexified further by both the 'doing' of the playing and the necessity of mentally processing the score into sound. This process consists in the production and realisation of mental representations or sonic images. In my practice as a performer, when I read scores, practice, listen to or perform a piece of music, I am constantly producing mental representations which precede my performance and guide my playing. These images form the pillars of my interpretation, and are suggested by the musical score, by performance conventions, and by my experience with previous iterations of a particular musical work. Music education researcher Edwin Gordon refers to this ability of the musician to imagine sounds and rhythms as *audiation*. For Gordon, audiation is a form of 'forward thinking' in sound: 'When one audiates […] one knows what to perform next […] by anticipating in familiar music and predicting in unfamiliar music what is to come' (cf. Williams 2019, n.p.).[22] Experienced players trust the automaticity of the skill, relying on their bodies to do the work. They focus on the sounding results, rather than on body movements or on what one should do to produce this sound, for doing so might lead to mistakes and have a negative impact on the performance. Tuba player and brass pedagogue Arnold Jacobs (ibid) confirms this by encouraging musicians to listen to 'ideal music', that is, to focus on the sound they wish to produce rather than paying

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[20] As Cook (1998, 104) argues, musical education is in fact so focused on this type of training that the ears of the students become conditioned, with the possible consequence of making them oblivious to other ways of understanding music as well as to certain musical parameters such as timbre and texture. Cook furthermore argues that the privileging of such scholarly knowledge over other less theoretical approaches, turns music into what music sociologist Mário Vieira de Carvalho (2011, 7) refers to as a 'self-referential system', only understandable by the initiated.

[21] Historically, certain initiatives provided a similar training for non-musicians. For instance, the Society for Private Musical Performances founded in 1918 by Arnold Schönberg, whom Adorno admired greatly, had as its purpose the dissemination of in-depth knowledge of musical pieces through rehearsals, the actual concert being of secondary importance. In one of its seasons, the Society included ten public rehearsals of Schönberg's *Kammersymphonie*. 'That way,' Schönberg wrote in the text accompanying the subscription invitation to the concert series, 'the listener will have the possibility to listen to the work often enough so as to be able to understand it both as a whole and in its details '(Nicolas n.d., my translation).

[22] One might note the parallel between audiation and visualisation techniques practiced in many disciplines, for instance in sport, where athletes such as tennis players imagine the direction of a serve and the path of the ball before the actual serve (Girod 1997).

attention to their movements or to the actual sounds they are making: '[W]hen you have [mentally] controlled the sound, you have controlled the body'.

These considerations find resonance in the musician's daily practice and in instrumental teaching. Audiation was an important part of my own musical education; still today, my practice consists to a great extent on the construction and refining of mental representations. Generally, I imagine a sound but sometimes it is more visual. My body, used to thinking in images, knows how to respond. By depressing the keys slowly and softly, accompanied by a mental image of a cotton field, my fingers, arms, and body are engaged in a particular way, producing a specific touch informed by a repertoire of touches accumulated over the years through practice and experimentation. In their well-known treatise on piano technique, pianists Walter Gieseking and Karl Leimer refer to this form of practicing as the 'training of the inner ear' (1997 [1932-1938], 33). According to them, this training consists of developing a precise mental representation of the music before playing, 'an exact impression of the note picture upon the mind' (ibid, 90); the 'silent reading' of the score while imagining the music; and the visualisation of the music before playing, including imagining the physical act of playing (ibid, 11). Pianist Claudio Arrau (2011[1983], 108) reports on how he mentally goes through the score and the music backstage in the concert hall before a performance. Max Neuhaus (1998 [1958], 20), more elaborately, sees inner images as a conglomerate of intentions, experiences and imagination: 'The spirit is clothed in flesh […] The image conjured by us by imagination, emotion, inner hearing and aesthetic and intellectual understanding becomes a performance'.[23]

How do these mental representations come together during the performance into a coherent whole? Although mental representations may relate to various musical parameters, for example articulation or timbric quality, each of these images, because they represent sounds or musical gestures, have a temporal dimension, which is why I call them time-images. So, one thing is to make images, the other is to make time-images; in the same way I can imagine what I will play, I can also imagine how long it will last. Saint Augustine (1991, 605-607), preparing to recite a poem out loud, introduces us to the relationship between time-images and their realisation in sound. Having recited a poem mentally and entrusted it to his memory, Augustine claims to know in advance how long the poem and its different verses will last when said out loud. In his words, 'the space of time' of the poem is planned so that the recitation will have a beginning and an intended end, and that the variations of speed occurring during the recitation, voluntary or not, will be considered in relation to this planned space. The recitation has thus a pre-defined temporality given by Augustine's mental image of the

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[23] The notion of inner images or 'inner ear' is not the privilege of the classical musician, as it is also decisive in other musical styles. Whilst playing together, Frank Zappa complained about the tone of guitarist Steve Vai. When Vai protested, arguing he was playing on great gear, Zappa (in Coleman and Moran 2017, n.p.) replied by saying that 'the tone is in your head', meaning that the desired tone comes from the mind, and that no instrument, however great, can make up for a poor inner ear.

poem. The same goes for my playing. Connecting time-images while performing is like piecing together a jigsaw time-puzzle or editing a movie with a pre-defined time frame, fitting images or blocks of images together into larger scenes and finally into an entire film. Putting these time-images together in practice means to listen to the sounds I produce at the same time as my fingers are playing the sounds that will be produced next, and simultaneously evaluating what I hear in relation to what I would like to hear based on my mental representations. While I do so, my mind is already anticipating what I will play next, perhaps modifying certain pre-rehearsed representations depending on the acoustic results of my playing, including unexpected circumstances that might prevent me from realising them.[24]

Each interpreter will have their own way of approaching the score and the performance situation. Some musicians will predefine articulation, dynamics and temporal variations – they will have an entire film ready in their minds to be reproduced during the concert. Others might prepare different versions for specific passages without deciding what versions they will use when they play. Others again might practice without creating a plan, at least not consciously, or else they aim to forget about the plan when playing and just go with the flow; in such cases, practicing consists mostly of getting the technique right, without consciously assessing interpretive decisions and trusting that what was practiced remains stored either as muscle or mental memory. The preparation for the performance will depend on each performer's attitude towards the musical score and performance conventions. The more rigid the relationship with the score, the more fixed their performance will be. Personally, the way I prepare for a performance depends on the occasion and repertoire, and could include any of the elements just described, but generally I tend to spend more time practicing transition-passages, since they are the pillars that orient the overall structure of a piece. By mastering these 'safety points' I am sure that my performance will not fall apart, and I can more freely experiment in the spaces between them. Therefore, while my mental representations guide me, they do not entirely restrict my actions. For instance, when it comes to timing, I can spontaneously decide to play slower or faster, changing the anticipating images accordingly for various reasons, including as a response to unexpected musical opportunities. Musicians call this strategy of time manipulation 'tempo rubato', from the Italian *rubare*, 'to steal'; they speak of a give and take where the time stretched in one passage is 'returned' later by playing another passage somewhat faster, although they may of course also decide to steal without giving back. Even then, just the fact that they are 'stealing' implies that they are dealing with a representation of the totality of the work and not just with the passage in question. Concretely, and because of the expectational structure of the images, it feels like holding an elastic between one's fingers, which loosens and then stretches until it almost snaps. This gives tension and energy to the performance, and a

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[24] These unexpected circumstances can consist of a variety of things, for example, an unknown instrument. Mindful of the fact that pianists are confronted with unfamiliar instruments at each performance, pianist Claudio Arrau (cf. Horowitz 2011 [1983], 109) warns young musicians about the necessity and importance of being able to adjust on stage, 'instantaneously'.

sense of mastery of time. But again, they are not mastering or manipulating time in absolute terms but in relation to temporal representations, themselves constructed against the temporal horizon suggested by the musical score. However personal the images that shape the interpretation, they are nonetheless related to the work.

Looking at this from a slightly different perspective, one understands better the relation of the performer to the closed structure of the musical work when comparing my practice as described above to that of musicians working without a score or pre-composed materials that suggest a fixed temporal structure. In conversation with improvising musicians, I have heard that they too work with pre-constructed images: by way of example, percussionist Ståle Liavik Solberg once told me that his practicing routines consisted of exploring a preconceived sonic image in different ways, including repetition and variations not unlike those I practice when rehearsing passages of composed works. Yet there is a difference in how we mobilise our images during a performance, in particular with regards to time: while the beginning-middle-and-end structure of composed works imposes certain limitations on how much I can experiment with time-images during the performance, Solberg operates with an open-ended form. While Solberg is free to explore and develop his images during the performance, I actualise my images against the background of the notation and the totality of the musical work. In other words, while his images are open-ended, mine, like Augustine's, are always thought-of in relation to a whole that I must bring to its end. This difference explains, for instance, why the visual performance of improvised music can be so different from that of composed works. Take, for instance, the performance of Rachmaninov's 2nd piano concerto by the accomplished virtuoso Lang Lang I attended some time ago. From my seat in the choir stalls at the rear of the stage I could observe how Lang Lang would start lifting his arms and pulling back his shoulders already instants before a bravura passage; similarly, his head would start sinking discreetly several bars before a concentrated moment, possibly as he imagined the beautiful sound that he would then produce. The impression one is left with is that the interpretation of the music unfolds in the mind of the performer like a finished film that is projected live. By contrast, in *Aberrant Decodings*, a performance by Lucia D'Errico and Marlene Monteiro Freitas at the Ghent Handelsbeurs that was partly composed and partly improvised, we see D'Errico, surrounded by cables, pedals, monitor, computer, microphones, guitars and scores, calmly and concentratedly manipulating the many instruments and effects at her disposition (D'Errico 2018b). There are no mannerisms in her performance, no way for me to imagine what will come next, and I can sense from her movements how she first appreciates the sounds she produces before defining what to do next. Although performances of both composed and improvised music can of course look very differently from D'Errico's and Lang Lang's, my point is that while the former have a cinematic narrative feel, improvised performances often lack this teleological drive, and therefore more easily draw the listener to the sounds without as many expectations for their unfolding.

Back to my own practice. Due to the intellectual nature of the process described above, when operating within the temporal horizon of the score, my activity, outer or inner, only fleetingly involves paying attention to what I am doing and to the physical now of the performance in terms of what is going on in the performance environment at large. Amidst the entanglement of images, doing, anticipating, adjusting and evaluating, my experience of the actual physical present of the performance is lived in relation to the internal time of the work and not for and in itself, and in case I do pay attention to my surroundings, it is generally in terms of how it is contributing to the performance of the work. Otherwise stated, the now is 'an instant without identity' (Malabou 2019, 380, my translation), irrelevant except as a site of transference and a synthesising node between the different movements of my attention, as I oscillate between listening, playing, preparing and evaluating, between memory and anticipation, between future and past. In fact, this state of oblivion seems to be a necessity, as philosopher Peter Szendy (2008, 103) notes, specifying that hearing structurally means that there can be 'no void, no distraction, no wavering in listening, other than that of the brief comings-and-goings of memory between past, present, and future'. Once I have started the process of playing, listening, evaluating and reconsidering, it must run its temporal course otherwise my interpretation risks breaking down.

Reports by other musicians would suggest a similar experience of being detached from the physical environment when one is playing: 'When I am playing I do not think of the arm motion. I am, of course, absorbed in the composition being performed', says pianist Ossip Gabrilowitsch (cf. Cooke 1999, 129). 'At my own recitals no one in the audience listens more attentively than I do. I strive to hear every note and while I am playing my attention is so concentrated upon the one purpose of delivering the work in the most artistic manner dictated by the composer's demands and my conception of the piece, that I am little conscious of anything else,' Ferrucio Busoni (ibid, 99) corroborates.[25] These musicians, indeed, are so engrossed in the musical work as they play that their surroundings disappear; they forget about themselves and their bodily presence. This seems to be applicable to the audience as well, described by Weber (1997, 678) as 'absorbed' – listening 'in complete attention to the music'. Art critic and historian Michael Fried (cf. Wesseling 2016, 173) elaborated on this 'absorbed mode', describing

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[25] The complete oblivion of the surrounding at one extreme, musicians in fact cherish the liveness of performance, the palpable energy of the audience or the special acoustics of a good concert hall. These factors are enabling, they make them more daring. And yet, this response is often described in evaluative terms, *in relation to* an expectation, however vague: performers speak of an 'approving energy' or 'disapproving bows'. These kinds of reactions from the audience are somehow anticipated, already inscribed in the conventions of the performance, so that the performer is prepared to have to deal with them. The situation is different if the environment manifests itself too loudly or unconventionally, even though there are cases where musicians also report reacting positively to unexpected noises. If one remains open to these noises, they might make them resort to interpretive devices that they had not counted on, and the effect of this can be surprisingly positive, as we will see in chapter three. But here again, when asked about how performers react to unexpected sounds, there is a tendency to describe musical decisions in a comparative mode, in relation to an a priori: 'I played louder', 'I played much slower', 'my phrasing was different'. In other words, there is always a desired image regulating musical actions.

how the viewers of representational artworks, although they are physically situated in front of the painting, are mentally drawn into the image, whose 'life' apart from them arouses their interest and invites them to be lost in the work, without awareness of their own bodily presence or the passing of time. Art historian Jonathan Crary (2001, 10), studying attention, describes this same activity as a form of perception 'so rapt that it is an exemption from ordinary conditions, that it becomes a suspended temporality, hovering out of time'. Since time is suspended, all physical perceptions beyond those that occupy the attentive subject are also suspended; the spectator becomes oblivious to the rest of the world. [26]

Yet for the physical now of the performance to maintain its status as a neutral medium – that is, suspended physical time – it must also behave as such. Performance theorist Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006, 160-162), speaking of theatre, describes the fragility of the relationship between the perception of the internal temporal structure of a dramatic play and the physical environment: the performance is at constant risk of being interrupted by other phenomena, which themselves possess an own time. What Lehmann maintains, echoing my reflection, is that dramatic plots have a closed structure, characterised, like a musical work, by a beginning-middle-and-end. The temporal cohesion proper to the work can only be adequately perceived or performed when the play is presented as a continuous whole without interruptions or interferences, and when the spectators and the actors are drawn into the action and absorbed by the play. If something unexpected happens, attention will be directed to this disruptive occurrence and the internal logic of the plot might be destroyed. In these moments, the now is no longer a medium, it acquires a thick presence that the audience can actively relate to. For the balance between internal time and acoustic unfolding to be maintained, 'time as such' – that is, the perception of physical time – must 'disappear'. That way the focus can be completely on the time of the play.

Especially in sheltered and silent performance environments, disregarding the now of the performance goes effortlessly, for what one hears is the acoustic realisation of the music, which contributes to one's appreciation of the music's internal time. As musicologist Edward Cone writes (1966, 15-16), these environments provide a frame that protects musical time from the chaotic and indistinct flux of ordinary time. Also, performers and audiences are trained to focus and prepared to concentrate. In my experience, it is part of the skillset of performers to be able to concentrate deeply, not only in music but also in fields such as acting or sports. In the famous acting method of Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares* (1989 [1936]), the fictive director Tortsov asks his students to draw an imaginary circle around them, a tight circle, with enough

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[26] In this sense, absorption is also close to what literary critic Katherine Hayles (2007, 187), studying student focus in educational settings, has described as 'deep attention' or the ability of 'concentrating on a single object for long periods […], ignoring outside stimuli while so engaged'. However, Hayle's theorisation does not involve a reflection on the engagement between reader and content, whereas Fried's notion of absorption and Crary's 'suspension' suggest that the spectator's concentration comes partly from a strong identification with or personal interest for the content of the artwork.

space for the actor, a few objects, and not much more. The students are supposed to keep their attention and actions inside of the circle. The circle is supposed to create an effect of 'solitude in public', making the actor feel protected and safe from the pressures of the audience or the distractions of the environment: 'You are in public because we are all here. It is solitude because you are divided from us by a small circle of attention. During a performance, before an audience of thousands, you can always enclose yourself in this circle like a snail in its shell' (ibid, 82). In music, Arrau (cf. Horowitz 2011 [1983], 98) recommends something similar to young musicians, citing a passage from Eugen Herrigel's *Zen in the Art of Archery*: 'I expect you above all not to let yourself be confused by the presence of spectators but to go through the ceremony quite unperturbed, as though we were by ourselves'.

When it comes to the audience, ritualisation and the fact that the performance takes place in a special location smoothens the transition to an absorbed state. Drawing on ethnographic studies on ritual, performance theorists Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008, 174-180) and Richard Schechner (2006, 66-70) stress how being away from one's usual milieu makes individuals more open for new and transformative experiences. This deterritoralisation frees individuals momentarily from the constraints of everyday life, leading them into a different reality where it is possible to try out new perspectives, roles, and so on. From the point of view of perception, senses are sharpened, and impressions intensified by being in a new place that is out of the ordinary and where special rituals are enacted. In the concert hall, the frontal seating arrangement and the dim lighting in the hall, as well as a measured distance between performers and spectators – not so close as to break the spell and not so far as to be distracted from the music (Lehmann 2006, 21) –, are also crucial for sustaining attention, since they provide the ideal setting for individuals to immerse themselves in the fictive universe of the work. In his analysis of the cinematic *dispositif*, psychoanalyst and film theorist Jean-Louis Baudry (1975, 66-67) evokes Bertram Lewin's 'dream screen', highlighting how being enveloped by darkness as though umbilically attached to the screen (or in the case of the concert, the stage) suggests sleep, the mother's womb, and the beginning of a regression that brings us to a *place comfortable* (Wolfgang Ernst 2020, personal correspondence) in which we can dream away to the world of the film.

However, sounds extraneous to the music have the potential to disrupt the musical 'film' unfolding in minds and bodies. While most sounds occurring in a sheltered and acoustically isolated performance environment will be too discrete to actively notice them, at times something unexpected occurs that claims attention, transporting it from the time of the musical work to this sonic event and its temporal unfolding. Because such uncontrollable sonic events can be so unpredictable, they can keep a performer's attention on hold for an indeterminate amount of time, making them forget what they were playing, thus threatening to break the internal time of the music.[27] This ties in with

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[27] Of course, not only physical phenomena have the ability to deviate the attention of the listener from the music. As Anna Scott notes in a personal correspondence, 'nothing snaps a rapturous audience out of their absorption

the Heideggerian idea that ordinary things only become present in extraordinary circumstances and through the disruption of expectation, for instance whenever they appear outside of their habitual context or as result of an interruption of our everyday practices. Heidegger (1962, 101) says that the things (*Ding*) and tools (*Zeug*) that we use in our everyday dealings are 'ready to hand': we are not concerned with what they are but with the actions they allow us to realise. As long as things are considered for their purposefulness and used accordingly, they remain transparent to us. In other words, in the flow of practice, we interact with our environment in a non-analytic fashion. However, if there is an accident – a 'breakdown' –, and the thing/tool does not work as expected – the object becomes dissociated from us, and we become attentive to its actual properties (ibid. 116). Hence, if sounds that I can usually suppress from my consciousness, like the noise of the piano action, become too present, let's say because of a broken part, there will be a renewed kind of attention to the sound of the action and to the piano, which is then no longer only considered as a medium for transporting sounds. The same will happen to my perception of time, which will for a moment be concerned with following the unfolding of the action's sounds.

To give another example, in the play *Some Use for Your Broken Clay Pots*, theatre director, composer and performer Christophe Meierhans (2014) presented, in the form of a performance-lecture including a Q&A with the audience, a constitutional text written for a democratic state that does not yet exit. In most of the performances of the play, the debate between Meierhans and the audience turned into a lively debate: audience members found themselves discussing the system proposed by Meierhans as if it were a reality. Occasionally, though, terracotta vases hanging from the ceiling as part of the scenography would fall to the ground with a crashing sound. Through the disruption caused by the falling vases, the audience would be brought back across the border between fiction and reality, reminding them that this was but a play, and that the real life-changing discussion would need to take place outside, 'in the real world'. Examining my reaction in the aftermath of the performance, while at first just assuming that what had distracted the audience was the sound of the vases crashing, a closer reflection made me realise that it was not just the sound that 'awoke' me from my absorbed position as a spectator, but the fact that my attention, after having perceived the noise of the crash, lingered first on the resonance of the crash and then on the visual spectacle of the crushed vase, thus making a large detour before I could focus back on the protagonist of the play. This process took time, and although I did not think of time as such in that moment, or in such concrete terms, I did notice it indirectly, as I realised that I had better rush to focus again on the play.

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in the time of the work like a performance that markedly goes against their understanding of the temporality inherent to that work's unfolding – a conception of time rooted in, for instance, recordings or previous performances of the work'. The interference, in Scott's example, does not come from the environment but from the mind of the listener. However, for the purpose of this study and the artistic creations that it proposes (see Chapter Two), it is more interesting to focus here on the disruptions that are caused by events external to the listener.

The example of the crashing vases adds a further nuance to the relationship between the work, silence and time. When the spectators notice time like that, it disrupts the internal time of the play, but also the illusion of the play, resituating the spectator in the now. In the case in point, the disruption of the illusion was purposeful and belonged to Meierhans's overall artistic intention, which was to make the spectator reflect on the distance between his proposition and the state of affairs in the real world. However, returning to symbolic functions of silence, interferences and interruptions would disrupt the idea of musical masterworks as eternal and existing out-of-time, which is one of the pillars of Romantic aesthetics and of musical performance in a representational sense. In its most common definition, silence corresponds to the absence of sound, hence to the absence of sonic impulses. If no sonic impulses are perceptible, one does not perceive movement, and without movement, one cannot feel time, for the latter is made perceptible through movement. By virtue of this, silence is often associated with eternity, infinity, or with being out of time, as already noted by Chateaubriand. As such, silence abolishes the distance between the present of the performance and the musical past, transforming the environment of performance into an atemporal zone where the timeless aura of the masterwork stands out. Additionally, this silence facilitates the listeners' journey between the work and their inner subjective selves. For although they are timeless, musical works also function as time-machines: because of their evocative potential, listening to musical works produces associations and awakens memories that remit to one's personal past; as Ledent (2009, 7) writes, '[i]nvested with an incommensurable dimension, musical works could awaken individual reminiscences in search of lost time'.

Reflecting back on this chapter, I have established that, due to a reconfiguration of the musical landscape since the 18th century towards what one could call a spiritualisation of musical experience, a silent background has become a necessary condition for the performance and reception of classical music. I have given three main reasons for this necessity: silence emphasises the immediate contact between music and performer/listener; silence contributes to enhance the timeless aura of the musical work; and silence facilitates the mental activities of performer and listener, with regards to grasping and realising the closed temporal structure of the work. That is why, when we are in the presence of music, we silence. Yet behind this silence there is a tension and a constant negotiation between performers, audiences, concert organisers and all other partakers of musical events, all of which enact conventions, rules and strategies designed to create silence and to maintain the asymmetrical balance between the physical world and the music, where parts of the former disappear to give place to the latter. But, what if we could do away with this necessity? What kind of listening and performing practices could be imagined then? What kind of relationships could be established between music and world? In the last decades, silence or the motivations for creating silence have been questioned, opening the possibility of such questions. I end this chapter with these questions, which will be eventually answered in the next chapters through reflection and

examples from my own artistic work, in which I reconsider what it means to listen and perform with noise.

II – Sounds out of place

The beginning of this chapter finds me pondering a paradox. The soundscape of the performance environments delineated in the Chapter One becomes ever more silent, while the musical works that I perform in these environments are increasingly 'noisy'. By this I mean that these compositions are made of all kinds of sounds, including those that I defined as noise in Chapter One: the moving, grunting or breathing of musicians and audience; mechanical sounds produced by musical instruments (bow crossings, pedals pressed and released, piano hammers hitting strings and so on); ambient sounds such as creaking floors and chairs; street sounds; buzzes, electrical crackles, clicks and pops from the amplification system; audio feedback, and so on.

Noise is contextual. What is considered noise in one situation is not necessarily so in another. When used in (classical music) compositions, sounds previously considered as noise turn into musical sounds, attended for their musical properties, such as timbre, volume or duration. However, when these sounds – generally prosaic, everyday sounds – were first introduced to musical composition, what attracted composers was their 'noisiness' and the fact that they were out of place in the lofty universe of classical music.[28] As such they served as a means to build bridges between the musical realm and the everyday world. In other words, composers explored these sounds for their *performative* potential – the fact that they can transform a status quo. Even though these sounds are more firmly integrated into the compositional palette today, they are still far from neutral, always alluding to, representing or reminding us of something outside, next to or beyond the musical – more rebellious and unpredictable than traditional musical sounds. Indeed, for a performer, engaging with these sounds is different from, for example, playing scales, chords and other tonal material, material which one is used to master and control. Everyday sounds, environmental sounds, noise, or 'extra-musical' sounds most often evade careful preparation. This makes them challenging, but also exciting. This experience of performing with noise in contemporary works has motivated me to incorporate it in the performance of classical works. Thus, in the second part of the chapter I present the creation of two artistic projects of my own making, both of which were conceived around what I call a *metaxical amplification*, which is, roughly speaking, the sonic amplification – electronic or otherwise – of the performance environment.

Performing with noise

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[28] I take the idea of 'sounds out of place' from the historian Peter Bailey. He defines noise, as 'sounds out of place' (1996, 50) in reference to anthropologist echo Mary Douglas, who, in her 1996 book *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* from 1966, referred to dirt as 'matter out of place'.

Whether in digital or analog ways, many of the contemporary works that I perform involve either transporting sounds coming from a variety of environments into the concert hall, or producing, with my instrument, sounds that the more conventional classical musician would either ignore, suppress, or try to circumvent. They involve sounds that are usually unwanted in the context of classical music, and which can therefore be characterised as noise. Here I present some examples.

In *Beds and Brackets* for solo piano by Nicolaus A. Huber, composed in the 1990s, I am required to play scale-like gestures extending over several octaves and even beyond the range of the keyboard. Just as my hands leave the piano keyboard and I start playing scales in the air, an assistant opens the doors of the hall, and the noise that flows in from the outside acts like an extension of the musical sounds. It is important for Huber's music-political project that the audience sees this expansion happening, that the gesture of opening the door is done emphatically. By this simple act, the performance is 'de-bracketed', which is to say that the musical events in the concert hall are inserted into a larger space generally clearly demarcated from the closed and institutionalised space of music.

In Catherine Lamb's *prisma interius VII* (2018) for violin and keyboard, street sounds are picked up by microphones placed outside the performance space and merged with the keyboard sounds. The pianist controls, in real time, how outside sounds interact with the tones of the keyboard – at what volume and with which degree of clarity – through knobs and faders specified in the score. There are passages of up to five minutes where I am supposed to augment the volume of the street sound progressively. Five minutes within a performance can be very long, especially when the only action consists of moving a tiny knob in millimetre increments from left to right. In order to maintain the focus, I open my ears as much as possible to tiny nuances, and try to 'stay in the sound', living through and with it.

In Simon Steen Andersen's *rerendered* (2003), all tone material is played as softly as possible while the inside of the piano is heavily amplified. In this way, certain noises become audible, including the lifting of keys, the fingers touching the keys, nails sliding over them, the pressing and releasing of pedals, the lifting of palms pressed firmly against the piano surface, and so on.[29] Microscopic in and of themselves, the resulting sounds become gigantic through amplification. Generally, these types of sounds are what one could call 'collateral noise'. When one plays classical music on the piano, one usually does so by pressing down the piano keys with the fingers to produce tones. One tries to do so as deftly as possible in order to bypass sounds from the mechanical action as well as all other sounds that accompany the production of a tone but which do not belong to the composition – thus precisely the sounds that Steen Andersen explores in

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[29] As instructed in the score: 'It is extremely important for the piece that the "normal notes" are played so soft that they are almost outside the normal repertoire of pianissimo dynamics. In a way, it is better that the pitch of a note does not sound at all, than if it sounds too loud' (Steen-Andersen 2010 [2003], 4).

his piece. Prior to playing *rerendered*, I considered collateral noises to be a nuisance. However, my experience with the piece led me to reconsider these sounds, not as a burden but as a kind of a frame. This, in turn, made me acknowledge still more sounds. These include a creaking floor under the piano bench, the buzzing of a light bulb, my own breath, the audience moving, and so on – the frame of the frame. Due to *rerendered*, my perception was 'de-bracketed' and keeps expanding, now including sounds that are further and further away from my piano.

Of interest to this study is how noise 'performs' in these compositions, as it explores how the introduction of noise transforms a given state of affairs. As discussed in the Introduction, noise is a quality attributed to a sound. What we may come to call noise depends on the context in which certain sounds are heard, as well as the situatedness from which we judge these sounds. Regarded from the classical paradigm described in the previous chapter, all sounds extraneous to the music produce what is generally judged to be a negative effect: they disturb and distract from the music. So, certain sounds, when introduced in a concert setting, are *performative* in the sense that they disrupt the usual course of the performance. They disrupt because the performative element should only be the music, which is supposed to transform the listeners, emotionally or otherwise. However, when introduced formally as part of a composition, noise 'performs' in more nuanced and constructive ways. Framed within a musical work, it becomes emphatically audible and is no longer 'out of place'. Thence, what would usually be perceived as noise is now considered a musical sound, i.e., in relation to their sonic properties rather than as a disturbance. In the process of 'becoming sound', noise broadens and diversifies our understanding of music, and of what music can be.

Before delving deeper into what these transformations are and how they occur, I would like to specify what I understand by *performative*. Coined by linguist John Austin (1959, 115) in the late 1950s, a performative refers to an utterance which 'does' something or 'achieves an effect'. An utterance such as 'I do', said to my partner during a wedding ceremony, means I would like to marry him, but it also indicates that the moment I say it, I am in fact marrying him. Saying 'I do' at home will not suffice; if I would like to be legally wedded, I must say 'I do' in adequate circumstances, in the case in question, in front of a judge, possibly in a city hall, in front of witnesses, and so on. In other words, a performative only performs in an 'appropriate' context and with the right conditions (ibid, 8).

After Austin, the term performative has been used in a variety of non-linguistic contexts. For example, philosopher Judith Butler (2011) has expanded upon Austin's theory, arguing that certain gestures performed in certain contexts have the potential of confirming social conventions and identities. Hence, no behaviour is innocent; everyday acts such as sitting with one's legs crossed, a sign of female modesty, is a daily affirmation of a specific identity. Basically, you become what you do because you are socially conditioned or obliged to do it. Yet, in the same way that sitting cross-legged indicates an allegiance to a specific form of femininity, it also means that in the same

conventionalised context, where everyone shares a certain understanding about adequate or inadequate modes of sitting, sitting with one's legs spread open will have a transgressive effect. So, a performative has the twofold potential of either confirming or questioning the status quo.[30]

There are a number of ways in which noise becomes performative when redefined as musical sound in compositions. When noise entered music at the beginning of the 20th century, it involved, as in Huber's *Beds and Brackets*, sounds that did not belong in the traditional concert hall environment. In the 1910s, futurist Luigi Russolo, declaring himself a *bruitiste* (a 'noise-maker'), created instruments called *intonarumori*, which 'thundered, howled, buzzed and hissed', imitating industrial machinery (Serafin 2005, n.p.). Edgard Varèse included blazing sirens in the instrumentation of his orchestra piece *Amériques* (1918-1921). Such sounds were very foreign to a musical context in which music was conventionally defined as an 'art of tones'; plus, most of these sounds were ugly and jarring, and did not belong in a musical universe where even opera was attacked for not being pure or noble enough to be considered music (Bonds 2014, 11). Varèse and Russolo rejected this attitude, considered by Marcel Duchamp (1968, n.p.) to be an 'unnecessary and almost religious adoration of art'. Instead, they looked for more down-to-earth musical realities. Varèse sought inspiration in physics and became interested in the musical properties of everyday sounds.[31] Russolo used music to express and explore the industrialised and urban soundscapes of the time: in his manifesto for an *Art of Noise* (2004 [1913]), Russolo enthusiastically described how composing with noise revealed the undreamt-of surprises that these soundscapes held in store. Each in their own way, these two pioneers influenced generations of composers, who performatively used non-musical sounds, or noise, to propose new perceptual experiences and/or to reduce the gap between daily reality and the closed universe of 19th-century art.

Other important examples come from Fluxus, an artistic movement that appeared in the 1960s. For George Maciunas, one of the founders of this movement, art should express and reflect real and concrete life matters. Expressing emotions and feelings through music was a way of feeding illusions instead of saying something about life as we live it. Therefore, Maciunas chose to call himself a 'concretist', advocating the use, in musical composition, of sounds that he called 'concrete', such as a hammer striking the

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[30] Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008, 27-28) elaborates, referring to the performative of the actor's body: 'On the one hand, society violates the individual bodies by imposing performative acts that constitute gender and identity. On the other hand, performative acts offer the possibility for individuals to embody themselves, even if this means deviating from dominant norms and provoking social sanctions.' Accordingly, performative acts have the double potential of making us increasingly conform to social norms or of liberating us from norms and attitudes that are imposed or constraining.

[31] Varèse famously redefined music as 'bruits organisés' or 'organised noise' (Solomos 2008, 157). The expression is often translated to English as 'organised sound'. The original French expression, however, refers to noise instead of sounds, thereby more explicitly expressing the composer's subversive intention of musically embracing sounds that until then had not been considered musical (Varèse 1959).

piano. Using 'concrete' sounds – 'sounds [that] are commonly, although inaccurately, referred to as noises' – was a way of distancing himself from traditional music's 'artificial world of abstraction' (Maciunas 1988 [1962], 26-27). In a similar vein, Maciunas believed that composing should consist of not interfering with the unfolding of these concrete sounds: 'A truer concretist rejects pre-determination of final form in order to perceive the reality of nature, the course of which, like that of man himself is largely indeterminate and unpredictable' (ibid, 27). Therefore, the composer should do no more than offer a framework for the sounds to be themselves.

When speaking of 'following the course of nature', Maciunas was referring to the fact that concrete sounds, even when planned or controlled through compositional means, behave in ways that are not always anticipatable or consistent with the usual structures of expectation. Put otherwise, these sounds appear whenever they want and they take their own time, which the performer and the listener must endure. This makes them attentive to the moment: listener and performer are kept 'on the lookout', trying to guess what will come next. As they hear these sounds unfold, however, they are not immersed in the time of the music, but present to the same world in which they are physically situated. The famous example of sugar melting in water by philosopher Henri Bergson helps understand this state of mind. Bergson (1911 [1907], 15) writes that he is thirsty, and craving a drink of sugar melted in water. He prepares the drink, but the time it takes for the sugar to melt is something that he can neither predict nor control, however impatient he is to drink the sugar water. Waiting for the sugar to melt, his intended action (drinking the water) is constrained and entirely dependent upon the melting time. What happens in this moment is that the present becomes thick; he can feel and grasp time through the impatience of his body, and he is present to the 'here and now' for as long as it takes the sugar to melt. In parallel to this situation, having to 'endure time' in a musical composition, through the time it takes for sounds to freely unfold, makes the situation feel 'lifelike', for contrarily to the closed temporal structure of completely determined music, life is an open-ended situation whose temporal unfolding cannot always be controlled or predicted but rather just lived.

Like Maciunas and the composers mentioned before him, John Cage was also fascinated by 'noise'. In a talk delivered in the late 1930s, Cage (1961, 3) declares this enthusiasm:

> Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating: the sound of a truck at fifty miles per hour. Static between the stations. Rain. We want to capture and control these sounds, to use them not as sound effects but as musical instruments.

Cage explored his enthusiasm for noise's potential in a musical context by framing noise within his compositions. Cage did this in a move similar to Duchamp's, who transformed banal objects such as a urinal into art just by showing it in an art setting. In *4'33,* for example, the score only contains breaks, lasting for the specified length of four minutes and thirty-three seconds. In the absence of notated sounds, what one hears

during the performance are ambient sounds: the sound of the audience moving, coughing and whispering, the noise of the ventilation system and so on. In sum, the piece explores sounds that one calls noise because they are unwanted in a conventional musical situation. The environment thus becomes responsible for the content and hence the outcome of the composition.

Cage's interest in bringing noise into the concert hall in pieces like *4'33* represents a form of resistance to the aloofness of music in relation to the real world. 'When we separate music from life', he wrote, 'what we get is art (a compendium of masterpieces)', where sounds are used as 'vehicles for man-made theories or expressions of human sentiments' (Cage 1961, 44). For him, music that was close to life, was music composed in a way such as to let sounds emerge and develop unbridled, without intervening or giving them a purpose and direction. Here this means, as it did for Maciunas, that sounds became audible within the frame of a composition, but without being prepared or provoked by specific actions of the performer. This changed the status of the music from works in which all elements were predefined and precomposed to works that contained open-ended sonic processes. This means that sounds were allowed to unfold at their own and unpredictable pace, like the sugar in Bergson's water. This open-endedness was supposed to activate listeners and to stimulate them to compose their own listening: 'The less we structure the theatrical occasion and the more it is like unstructured daily life, the greater will be the stimulus to the structuring faculty of each person in the audience' (Cage 1965, 55).[32]

4'33 is a good illustration of how Cage would thereafter compose without 'structure': although the situation of the performance is tightly structured by the specified timeframe of four minutes and thirty-three seconds, as well as by the spatial positioning of performer and audience in the concert hall, the sounds that one hears are not pre-defined, and emerge 'spontaneously' from the situation. His motivations for writing the piece included a concern about how living in a daily soundscape increasingly dominated by muzak and noise was numbing our ears and ability to listen. In this context, listening in a focused situation to apparently banal sounds proposed a 'non-codified space of reflection' (Daniels and Arns 2018, 16), which could teach people to be more present to the world and mindful of their sonic environment. Such an attitude and agency could then be transported and exercised outside artistic situations, that is, in everyday life. In short, the sensibility of the listeners for their surroundings would be heightened and so would their general openness to sounds. As sound theorist Brandon LaBelle (2018, 45) proposes, noise as used by Cage becomes an 'open horizon' in the sense that it oversteps

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[32] Allan Kaprow, an American avant-garde artist and student of Cage, speaks about a 'lifelike art': **'**Western art actually has two avantgarde histories: one of artlike art, and the other of lifelike art. […] Simplistically put, artlike art holds that art is separate from life and everything else, while lifelike art holds that art is connected to life and everything else. In other words, there's art that is at the service of art, and art at the service of life. The maker of artlike art tends to be a specialist; the maker of lifelike art, a generalist' (cf. Schechner 2006, 40).

certain limits, pushing boundaries regarding what belongs or not to the musical space, and expanding one's listening palette.

Returning to the 'collateral noises' emphasised in Steen Andersen's *rerendered,* his unusual usage of the piano denotes a search for alternatives to what one could describe as an aesthetics of 'pure tones'. In this search, which Steen Andersen shares with many of his contemporaries, Helmut Lachenmann's *musique concrete instrumentale* was pioneering. Lachenmann attempted to distance himself from the bourgeois ideal of an immaterial music by treating classical instruments as sound-producing machines in the widest sense, identifying and rendering audible their noisy potential. Take the examples of *Guero* (1970), in which the pianist scrapes sideways over the keys to create a rattle sound reminiscent of a Latin American *güiro,* or *Got Lost*, discussed in the Introduction, where the pianist is required to play pizzicato on the strings, to press the pedals down very loudly, to scratch the strings with their nails and knock on the wooden frame. Since the last half century, with the development of microphoning technologies, it becomes even easier to integrate these types of sounds in a composition, as I have shown with the example of *rerendered*. Also, these technologies are themselves instruments that produce their own sounds beyond the sounds they transmit, as I will later show with the example of Paul Craenen's *tubes* (2008).

Leaving these musical examples aside for a moment, when one acknowledges noise as musical sound, noise becomes performative not only at an ideological, but also at a perceptual level. Pierre Schaeffer has composed in this vein. Inspired by Varèse's interest in new sounds and scientific research, Schaeffer used measuring and editing technologies that were developing in the 1940s to transform recordings of trains, spinning tops, saucepans and other objects into musical compositions. Schaeffer's way of dealing with these sounds in a musical context, was to disconnect the sounds from their material source by editing away the 'beginning' of the sound, usually called 'the attack', or by using repetitions, so-called 'loops', of fragments of recordings. Not knowing the cause or origin of the sound made it easier to focus on the musical properties of these sounds, on their duration, pitch, timbre, register and intensity. In Schaeffer's words, this approach made digestible and musically exciting sounds that would usually be negatively considered as noise:

> I was much more interested in the search for natural sounds, in their natural history, in what a sonorous body tells when it sometimes performs its little symphony; all that which we so improperly call noises, because there is nothing more organised, better organised than a noise. (Schaeffer 1979 n.p., my translation)

Schaeffer's approach to sound was not very different from Cage's, for they were both influenced by phenomenology and the contemplative attitude that it promoted. In other words, he understood listening as a contemplative and non-judgemental attitude that seeks a direct contact with sounds independently of their function and meaning. It was this absence of judgement that allowed him to think of noise as musical sounds

(Schaeffer 2017 [1966], 208-209). Other composers were more interested in thematising the way in which a banal sound could become 'musical'. In *Variations pour une Porte et un Soupir* (*Variations for a Door and a Sigh*, 1963) Schaeffer's colleague and contemporary Pierre Henry presented the 'doorness' of a door by starting with the clearly recognisable sound of a door creaking, before transforming and musicalising the sound until its physical cause became unrecognisable. It is in this tradition that one can also place the music of Catherine Lamb, mentioned above. Her works are like perceptual exercises in which the volume and degree of clarity of the street sounds oscillates from being distinct, with recognisable sources, to barely perceptible, in which case they sound like a shimmer, a soft tremulous sound wrapping the keyboard tones.

Finally, in addition to these examples, I also recognise a tendency in some of the newer works that I perform to simply stage noise 'as' noise, without trying to make it musical. This is perceptible in the way composer and turntablist Marina Rosenfeld conceived her piece for solo piano and electronics *piano and work (dominoes)* from 2019. *Piano and work* is more like a situation or a tableau than a piece in the traditional sense, for what I do during the performance is teaching myself to play a piece by Rameau. In the background, I hear noises produced by Rosenfeld's turntabling as recorded in the electronics part: the screeching of LP-player needles or the soft crackling when a record ends. These noises are meant to inspire me to explore similar sounds on my instrument. Progressively, the exploration of Rameau's piece is transformed into a three-part improvisation, including – besides the traces of Rameau's music – vestiges of turntabling, and the piano's mechanical noise. Thus, the noise of the media shines through both my performance and the recorded material, thereby exposing the generally concealed media. Indeed, there seems to be a growing interest in glitches and inconsistencies in contemporary compositions, as represented in Rosenfeld's work by the cracklings and screeching of her turntabling or the fragmentary performance of Rameau's piece (Amaral 2020a). These can be understood as a resistance against the 'excluded middle' precept in musical mediation and the way in which this form of mediation deals with the noise of the media, which it erases or minimises. These glitches can also represent an alternative to the ever-polished approach to sound by the record industry and the field of classical performance. Another example is Ida Lundén's *ba-ro-me-ter - Variations in air and sound pressure* (2017) for violin, piano and historical records, written for Duo Hellqvist/Amaral. The piece uses as material one of the first recordings of speech – the word 'barometer' – registered by Charles Tainter and the Bell brothers in 1884. As is characteristic in old recordings, one hears a great deal of distortion and hiss. In the piece, violin and piano freely echo the fragments of the historical recording, by imitating and improvising upon its noises and the practically indiscernible words. Lundén's enthusiasm for historical recordings has certainly much to do with her being weary of the contemporary hi-fi aesthetics as discussed in Chapter One, and with her search for new impulses in the 'imperfect' sound world of historical media. In both Rosenfeld and Lundén's works, noise is not made to be 'musical' because it is used as interference, as a means to interrupt. In this way, one is forced to relate to what is normally considered burdensome – noise from old recordings or surface noise

from LPs – at the same time as one is made to pay a different kind of attention to this noise, looking for the poetical in the muddy and the defective.

To sum up, there are various ways in which noise can become performative when integrated into musical compositions. It 'de-brackets' music, taking it off the pedestal of high art. It breaks expectations, encourages spontaneity, prevents the fixation on meaning and renews the attention towards physical phenomena in space and time. It expands the sonic sensibility of both performer and listener, also in terms of historical imagination.[33] In addition, noise is performative in the way that it leads performers to question aspects of their practice and move them out of their comfort zones.

Before specialising in contemporary music, I was trained as a classical pianist, performing repertoire from Baroque to Modern music. Music, for me, consisted of tones organised in time, eventually also of sung text. The sounds of wind, chatter, and passing cars were out of place in this musical universe. At my instrument, I avoided producing mechanical noises as much as possible, aiming at a perfect mastery of the instrument and my fingers, and, above all, striving for precision. Precision means, among other things, a clear attack and contour, hence a noiseless sound. As pianist Vladimir de Pachmann (Cooke 1999, 82) once said, '[e]ach note in a composition should be polished until it is as perfect as a jewel'.

In some of the examples above, however, such precision is either not desired, impossible to obtain, or sometimes both. For example, the collateral noises in *rerendered* cannot be clean and sparkling, because it does not lie in the nature of the sounds to be so. This form of imprecision is psychologically demanding for performers who would like to have perfect control of their tools. Yet, imprecision belongs to the dramaturgy of this piece, rooted in the exploration of the tension between the precision of the tones and the inaccuracy of the collateral sounds. The impossibility of having control produces a sense of liveness, an acute focus on the temporal and physical environment of the performance, because the instrument becomes an unpredictable partner. With time, I have learned to indulge in such marginal, 'dirty' sounds and to appreciate the element of surprise that they bring to the performance.

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[33] When one speaks about the performativity of noise or sounds, the engagement of the listener is an important but unpredictable variant which must nevertheless always be taken into account. For classical music to have a performative impact on listeners, they must be open and willing to be affected by the music, despite the conditions in which the music is presented. Naturally, a tired listener might remain indifferent to the music, and thus unaffected by the emotions, feelings, thoughts or atmosphere that it is attempting to convey. Thence, the performativity of the music is determined by the physical and psychological state of the listener and their will to engage with the music. The likeliness that the listener might be open for such engagement enhances when music is heard in an environment that is propitious, as described in the previous chapter. In this situation, it is unlikely that listeners willing to engage with the music will be very interested in environmental noise unless the latter is so present and adamant that it obfuscates the musical tones. The same applies to *4'33*: if the listener is unable or unwilling to engage with the sounds, these will not affect them in a substantial or transformative way.

Prior to performing such works, I firmly believed that I could not produce a beautiful tone without imagining one beforehand. Following the precepts of audiation discussed in Chapter One, I worked hard to construct a mental representation of the sound I wished to achieve from the reading of the score, memories of previous experiences and my own idea of how the music should sound. In other words, my practice consisted, mostly, of planning and control, and of rendering musical sounds that had been formed and imagined in a sometimes very far away past. However, my priorities changed when engaging with noise. In the compositions described above, I was forced to perform differently. I played in function of what I heard and not in function of what I had planned to hear or what I could read in the score, especially since the score – when there was one – did not always indicate what some of the sounds in the composition should sound like, or even what they were, as is the case in *4'33*. In other words, I reacted to what I heard instead of evaluating it in function of a predetermined interpretation.

Returning to the examples described in the beginning, in each of them, noise mobilises the performer in the present. Huber 'de-brackets' the performance situation and inserts it into a larger environment that I as a performer can acknowledge and hear; in *rerendered* I am reminded of the materiality of the piano, which is generally forgotten when I play only tones; and in Lamb's *prima interius* I interact directly with environmental sounds. In all of these pieces, I cannot prepare my actions as I am used to, that is, by imagining how they should sound. As I have argued so far, one of the major affordances of noise is that it resituates my musical experiences in the now. Firstly, through the entanglement with the materiality of the performance, and then through the works themselves, which have taught me to relate differently to the sounds of the piano, to the performance context in general, as well as to a different way of listening. These works have trained me to listen in function of the sounds I *produce*, instead of acting in function of the sounds I *imagine*. Thinking back on these experiences, my concern with the technical mastery of my instrument slowly superseded by pursuits involving new forms of virtuosity, many of them revolving around the idea of expanding my attitude towards listening. As a result, I have become more attentive to sound, to all kinds of sounds. Along with that, I have forgotten the (negative) meaning of noise: I appreciate listening to sounds that I previously considered to be noise. Attempting to capture in words the general approach to sound that I have developed, I would say that I have learned to 'touch' the sounds with my ears, imprinting myself on them, becoming the sounds, feeling their context through an imaginary symbiosis, and letting this feeling guide my doing and being. These experiences are very difficult to describe because they are fragile, fleeting and extremely subjective, but trying to formulate them for myself was the beginning of the artistic projects which I will now describe.

Creating with noise: metaxical amplification as an artistic method

Metaxical amplification is an audio system that I designed to amplify the 'noise' of a classical music performance. The concept of metaxical amplification comes from the

Ancient Greek *metaxy* (literally, the 'in-between'), a term that comes up in Aristotle's writings on sensory perception (cf. Alloa 2020). Before Aristotle, pre-Socratic philosophers used to explain all sensations in terms of touch and direct contact between the sensory organ and the sensed object. Something would need to literally touch the eye for it to be seen. Aristotle, however, however, defended the importance of an external mediating agent in sensory perception. In *On the Soul* (1995, 1787) he insists that something must be in-between my eyes and the object that I see. If this were not so, I would not be able to see the object at all, for it would coalesce with my eyes, blocking my vision. He referred to this mediating agent as *metaxy*, that which stands between the sensory organ and the object of perception, surrounding or enveloping both (for instance air, flesh, or saliva).

Metaxically amplified performances are concerned with the performance environment, understood as a necessary agent for the perception of a musical work. Unlike in conventional performances, this environment does not need to 'disappear' in metaxically amplified performances. Rather, the environment and the various elements that compose it can remain perceptible during the performance, not only as a support to the music but also as an idiosyncratic agent. Thence, noise becomes performative in metaxically amplified performances because it includes the environment in the perception of the musical work; said differently, the musical work is not (only) perceived for itself but as part of this environment.

In practice, the realisation of metaxical amplification consists in determining the elements of the environment that I would like to amplify and then deciding the best way in which to make them audible, perhaps through suitable microphoning and playback techniques. What to amplify depends on contextual considerations and the choice of musical work. As I will go on to explain in Chapter Four, metaxical amplification is also a form of interpretation. Therefore, the elements that I choose to amplify in each performance will reflect a certain understanding of a given musical work or emphasise the correspondences between the work and aspects of the specific spatial, social and institutional context in which the performance takes place.

In general, the amplified elements will be material things that naturally produce sound. But more figurative forms of amplification remain, such as trying to make audible thoughts and impressions of the performer and the audience. These elements can be said to belong to the immaterial environment of the performance. However, for reasons that I will soon present, the amplification of immaterial elements has yet to yield interesting results. In all instances, the modality of the amplification needs to be defined on a case-by-case basis. Yet my experiences so far have allowed me to identify the following elements as potentially suitable for amplification:

o   The piano, approached as a sounding machine with its keys, strings, hammers, felt, pedals and frames;

- The light system, its electrical noises, the sounds generated by mixing or the conflict between the frequency of the light and other frequencies present in the space;
- The ventilation system and other, similar sounds;
- The space itself, determined by its acoustic fingerprint;
- The physical presence of performer and audience, including breathing, coughing, moving, creaking chairs and so on;[34]
- Doors, windows, chairs, objects that might be moved during the performance;
- The outer part of the hall and the streets;
- Non-material elements such as the inner life of the performer and the audience, their personal relationships to music, or their impressions and thoughts.

The amplification of all the above-mentioned elements can be done by electronic means, but it is also conceivable to employ other methods such as using musical instruments to imitate certain noises.[35] In my experience to date, I find electronic amplification the most interesting. Electronic amplification makes one feel closer to the source of a sound than is practically possible in acoustic situations. Sociologist Nathalie Heinich (2012, 27) describes such closeness as an 'effect of presence'. For instance, the use of convolution reverb to amplify the perception of the space is particularly interesting, since it allows for the creation of 3D effects that make certain sounds seem livelier and more palpable. This 'presentification' of sound belongs to the psychological and physical affordances of technological mediation because it makes the listener more implicated than usual in the performance situation.

At the same time as mediatisation imparts a sensation of proximity, it also creates a slight separation with or distance from the music, which makes listeners more attentive to and engaged with the amplified sounds. This is because electronic media, speakers and microphones introduce an interval between phenomena and perception, a delay which induces self-awareness. There is also a factual delay in the transducing process, however negligible this interval has nowadays become. However, this delay would be there without these technologies as well, since our ears already contain, like microphones, transducing membranes that transform sound waves into electrical impulses – so there is always already *something* in-between sound and what we hear. But when acknowledged, the delay makes us self-reflexive and aware of our being and listening. Mediation technologies externalise and 'give body' to the transducing process

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[34] As part of his project *Audience Observations*, David Helbich has studied the movement in the auditorium during a concert. In this video (Helbich 2012a), filmed from above, one notices the level of agitation in the hall. On another occasion, sitting on stage during a live performance, Helbich (2012b) has observed the audience and categorised their movements, sharing the data collected with the audience at the end of the performance.

[35] Jan Martin Smørdal has done this in the piece *All Play* (2015), an instrumental transcription of a feedback-based guitar performance by Daniel Meyer Grønvold, shown on a mute film projected behind the musicians. The piece was written for Ensemble neoN, of which I am part. In performing *All Play*, we imitate aspects of the audio feedback on the piano by using tones and by scratching strings with CD covers or drawing a paintbrush over them.

so that it becomes more difficult not to acknowledge it. Additionally, the ambivalent nature of electronic mediation – the fact that this form of mediation brings one closer to what one hears while at the same time evoking separation – is reminiscent of the unfulfilled desire of the classical performer when dealing with musical works from the past. Although the performer knows that what can be delivered to the audience under the name of 'musical work' is no more than a personal reconstruction of bits and pieces of information from scores, historical sources and theoretical and practical knowledge, the performer aspires to fidelity to the original work. They would like to play the piece as it 'would have sounded', that is, as close as possible to the original, with nothing between them and the imagination of the composer, and then again between the music they play and the listener.

Guiding me in the formulation of metaxical amplification was an image by philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1987; 1991). Discussing the innovations of Baroque oil painting, Deleuze contrasts the light-coloured background used by Flemish Masters like Jan van Eyck, to the *mestica* used by Baroque painters like Caravaggio, a paste made of dark oil paint. Instead of drawing contours *upon* this ground and adding paint as was usual on lighter grounds, Caravaggio painted *with* and *from* the paste, leaving parts of the ground visible in order to create shadows and tone transitions between images, and outlining figures through incisions in the thick fresh paste. In such a practice, the representational work of the painter does not consist of placing upon a ground an image that exists independently from its pictorial realisation, but rather of creating images through relations between colours, model and ground. 'Things surge up from the background, colours well up from a common depth […] [the] status of the painting changes', Deleuze exclaims, (1991, 13). Deleuze used Caravaggio's ground to introduce a paradigm shift in philosophical thinking that comes to replace the Platonic distinction between ideal images and the physical world, where the former remains unaffected by the latter. In the work of Caravaggio, these two worlds mingle and reverberate with each other. The dark ground – the *fuscum subnigrum*, as Deleuze names it – is not a neutral surface of representation, but a field of potentialities from which the image emerges.[36]

I propose to call performances that are metaxically amplified 'grounded performances', in reference to Caravaggio's active use of the ground in oil painting, and as theorised by Deleuze. In a musical context, I consider the ground to be the physical environment of the performance. I distinguish between a narrow environment, including elements such as the performance venue, the audience, the instrument and the body of the musician,

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[36] The importance of the material support in the work of Caravaggio becomes even more evident in his *Medusa*, where the canvas of the painting stretched over a convex shield conveys the illusion that Medusa's decapitated face is springing out of the shield. As video artist and sculptor Sophie Ernst (2016, 101) remarks, instead of being immersed in an 'alternative pictorial space', '[Medusa's] image is layered onto the material reality of the shield as an extension of that object'. Although this is a different technique than that used on the *fuscum subnigrum*, the principle is the same: the image cannot be imagined; it *does not exist* as separate from the material context upon which it is represented.

and a wider environment which stretches beyond the physical walls of the venue, and which has in principle no clear boundaries.

I have tested the notion of metaxical amplification in two grounded performances, *touchez des yeux* and *Interferences,* with varying results. *touchez* was conceived around the *Sonata in B-flat Major D960* by Franz Schubert. It was presented at the historical library of De Bijloke Muziekcentrum in Ghent in eight performances held between 30 November and 6 December 2018 as part of *Fröhlicher Franz*, a festival dedicated to the music of Schubert.[37] The focus of metaxical amplification in *touchez* was on the narrow performance environment, the space and its acoustics, including the audience, the piano, and my personal role as a performer-curator. *Interferences* was also a solo piano performance, this time based on Johannes Brahms's *Study No. 5 (for left hand alone) after Bach's Chaconne, BWV 1016*. In *Interferences*, emphasis was placed on the wider environment, notably the surroundings of the venue in downtown Porto. The performance was presented in the concert hall of the Superior School of Music and Performing Arts (ESMAE) in Porto during the IV International Contemporary Piano Meeting in December 2019.

Zooming in on *touchez des yeux,* the title – in English, 'touch with the eyes' – is directly related to the concept of metaxy. As previously mentioned, pre-Socratic philosophers believed that direct contact, or *touch*, was necessary for sensory perception. Later, Plato and the young Aristotle distinguished between direct senses and senses requiring distance, including hearing and sight. They judged these two categories in terms of their purity. According to this distinction, which Aristotle later rejected, sight and hearing would speak directly to the intellect and the realm of ideas, whereas touch would be our most impure sense (Alloa 2020, 155). The juxtaposition of pure (the eye) and impure (touch) in the title of my performance seemed fitting to the idea of combining vulgar noise with a type of music generally considered as high art. Additionally, the expression 'touchez des yeux' refers to a French idiom with multiple meanings. In the imperative mode, 'touch with your eyes' is what parents tell their children when they are afraid that they might break something fragile. Touching by sight is also how one relates to museum artefacts that can only be observed from afar, not unlike the deference interpreters show for tradition and the musical past. In the vocabulary of seduction, it is the way lovers look at each other, full of desire. In relation to my practice, touch refers to the pianist's idiosyncratic interactions with their instrument. In all these cases, the expression indicates a longing for immediate contact with something that speaks to us but that is off-limits, something that is precious and fragile, an object or a body that could transform or be transformed through bare touch. For me as a performing musician

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[37] In addition to myself, responsible for the solo performance and the concept, *touchez* also counted on the participation of photographer Karen Stuke, sound engineer Max Sauer, programmer João Pais, the contemporary music curator of De Bijloke, Maarten Quanten and his production and communication team, scenographer Reinout Hiel and visual artist Maarten De Vrieze, who provided practical help on scenographic matters. Composer Erik Dæhlin and scenographer Tormod Lindgren contributed ideas and reflections in the conceptual phase of the project.

and in the context of this research, it is an injunction to lift my eyes (and ears) from the score and the instrument and take a closer look around me: acknowledging the environment I am in; who and what sounds are surrounding me;, what I do, or can do, to this environment; and what this environment does to me.

When it comes to practical implementation, the audience's space for *touchez* was amplified through contact microphones placed on the balustrade of the mezzanine and on the library floor, thereby picking up noises such as steps, whispering, and the friction of clothes. Next to this, the space itself – its acoustic fingerprint and sound-reflecting elements – was amplified through contact microphones which were placed on reflective surfaces such as glass vitrines. There was also a pair of condenser microphones hanging from the balustrade that captured ambient sounds whose signals became convoluted with the acoustic impulse response of the space. These signals, played back in real time, acquired depth and a three-dimensional quality. Oftentimes, the conflict of frequencies in the space triggered audio feedback, to which I will return shortly.[38]

During the performance, I sat at the piano and played the sonata's first movement, with an array of switches and pedals next to my feet, allowing me to turn groups of speakers on or off, to control the volume of the amplification, and to access a loop function with which I could record and play back fragments of the performance of my choosing. When depressed, most of the switches produced a clear and loud clicking sound that could also be used musically. The amplification system was controlled through a laptop running a Max/MSP patch and a virtual sound card connected to a mixer. The action of the piano became more audible because microphones were placed inside the instrument, close to the hammers, soundboard and pedals. These microphones captured the mechanical sounds that were then played back through speakers placed directly under the instrument. These sounds, which are natural consequences of the activation of the instrument when performing a piece such as this sonata, included the thud of the dampers when the pedal is pressed down and then quickly lifted, the light clicking produced by the hammers when depressing and releasing the keys, the sound of the fingers hitting the keys, as well as the 'shadow' sounds of the strings (a barely audible sound like a halo of a tone, produced through a very light and rapid pressure on the keys).

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[38] I had become acquainted with this form of acoustic amplification through *SoundSpecific:Oslo*, a concert-concept that I conceived during my tenure as guest curator for the Norwegian New Music Association in 2012, together with saxophonist Bendik Giske and composer and 3D-sound specialist Natasha Barrett. The purpose of the event was to introduce the audience to musical spaces with unusual acoustic properties through performances that would underscore these characteristic acoustics. During the concerts, Giske improvised on the saxophone while Barrett used convolution techniques to process the signals from the saxophone with acoustic information from these spaces. Through such digital processing, Barrett transformed the space into a three-dimensional sound environment that interacted with the sound of the saxophone as if it were a musical instrument (Amaral 2021b).

I was amplified using a lavalier microphone, which captured my breathing and voice as I read to the audience a selection of texts that commented on my role as a performer. These texts included short excerpts from Edgar Allan Poe's *The Purloined Letter*, the novel *Gradiva* by Wilhelm Jensen, and a chapter of George Perec's *Life: A User's Manual*. The period in which I created *touchez* corresponds to my discovery of artistic research and to the first time in my professional life in which I had the chance to 'think in-and-through' my practice, and to engage with it theoretically and philosophically. The texts I had chosen for the performance reflected a burgeoning crisis with the why's of this practice. What concerned me at the time was the contingency of this practice and the lack of urgency that I felt regarding the works I performed. I thought these works were perhaps too old, too disconnected from my and the audience's everyday reality. In my capacity as a classically trained pianist, music teacher and curator, I had been concerned with the relevance of classical and contemporary repertoire for a while, to the point of even devoting an important part of my professional life to developing discursive, artistic and pedagogical strategies of mediation, aiming to engage a wider audience. Through these efforts I tried to contribute to a better understanding of and renewed interest for the why's and wherefores of musical works within a society that is to a large extent oblivious to classical music. At the same time, though, another kind of urgency had started developing, the signs of which were becoming more and more perceptible. While spending time reflecting on what to do with musical works from the past, I had forgotten to consider the contexts and conditions in which I performed these works: the concert halls, the rituals, the etiquette. Were they not as determined for the way these works came across, and just as rigid? Gradually, I realised that the estrangement between classical music and today's world might have less to do with content – with *what* is played – and more with *how* this content is performed and under which conditions it is presented. From then on, my focus turned from filling the container to reshaping the container; the question of the relevance of the work became a question of the relevance of the context in which I presented it.

The tale about the life of Bartlebooth the puzzlemaker in Perec's book, corresponds to this first moment of crisis. For fifty years up to his death, Bartlebooth's life was occupied by a single project, conserving images. Bartlebooth conceived this project as a way of acknowledging and fully experiencing the contingency of life. Already a grown man, he learns the art of watercolours and travels the world painting seascapes. Upon his return, he orders that his seascapes be transformed into puzzles and spends the following years making these puzzles. Every time a puzzle is completed, it is glued onto a piece of paper and reframed as a painting. Then, it is dipped into a special solvent that causes its colours to progressively disappear, and sent back to the marine in which it was originally painted. As it hangs there, the colours of the painting dissolve. Bartlebooth came to represent for me the ultimate interpreter, constructing and reconstructing images with great precision, and constructing his life around this laborious making and dissolving of images without flinching or distraction. For many, his life would seem sterile but his dissectological project did not seem so far from my

life within the classical music universe, which was occupied by producing and reproducing musical interpretations.

Unlike Bartlebooth's project, however, I did not feel that my practice was all that contingent. Rather, it was based on the belief, inculcated since childhood, that I had a gift that allowed me to dive into the past and understand composers and their works. This gift turned into a mission. I felt responsible for sharing this music with others, to conserve a past that I had learned to interpret and cherish. This is where I connected with the protagonist of Wilhelm Jensen's book, in which archaeologist Norbert Hanold becomes obsessed with Gradiva, a young Pompeian girl who died millennia ago in the eruption of the Vesuvius, and whose steps he had seen printed in an antique relief. Not satisfied with admiring the relief and unable to find a living woman with a gait as gracious as Gradiva's, Hanold travels to Pompeii to unearth her original steps. In Pompeii, his obsession makes him lose his grip on the present: looking for Gradiva's traces, he starts to hallucinate. As I progressed in my research and started to uncover for myself the foundations of my practice, I discovered how little I had known until then about why and how I played concerts and under what conditions. I came to realise how little I had been able to see while only having invested and being interested in the depths of the musical work. I identified with the policemen in Edgar Allan Poe's short story *The Purloined Letter*. These policemen were so invested in their rules and fixed ideas about solving crime that they were unable to find a stolen letter because the letter was not shrouded or hidden but placed on a card rack in broad daylight.

In addition to these texts, an exhibition with photographs by Karen Stuke was shown in the vitrines of the library mezzanine. As mentioned in the Introduction, these photographs depict me as I perform, viewed from different angles. All photographs were taken with long exposure, matching the speed of the shutter to the duration of the performance of four different passages from the first movement of the sonata by Schubert. Like in old daguerreotypes, long exposure time makes moving elements become blurry or disappear. In Louis Daguerre's *Boulevard du Temple*, for example, one sees a street and buildings, but it is nearly impossible to discern pedestrians, except for a shoe shiner and his customer, who stood relatively still as Daguerre was taking the photograph. In Stuke's images, the longer the passage, the blurrier I become, disappearing into the piano and into the score. I included these photographs in *touchez* because they were important for the reflection process leading to the performance. Seeing myself disappear in a situation in which I felt so present, made me reflect about the role and position of the various performance elements. Finally, reflecting on the perspective not only of the performer but also of the audience, the performance also included recordings representing virtual audience members. These recordings were made by colleagues and acquaintances prior to the performance. In them, they report their impressions of the music while watching videos of me performing excerpts of the same Schubert sonata. The fact that these comments were made while watching the video of a performance, in the manner of a sports' commentator, gave them a rhythmical structure: one could feel the movement of the music in the inflections of the voices and

in the breaks between the comments. The point of these recordings was to give voice to the audience and to show how each person reacts differently to what they hear and see.

In terms of spatial arrangement, the rectangular shape of the space made it easy to create a stageless structure. This was combined with the positioning of the piano in an inconspicuous corner, and an uneven placement of the speakers in the corners of the mezzanine, inside the glass vitrines and under the piano. This created a path for the visitors, who entered the space through a side door kept open for the entire performance. The different layers of amplified sound and the recordings of the audience were played back through speakers placed unevenly around balconies, corners and other architectural elements of the hall. The audience was free to move around between the ground floor and the photo exhibition on the mezzanine. As a result of the scattered playback situation, one was never able to listen 'properly' inside of the performance space: there were no focal reference points, no so-called 'sweet spots', only fragments of the entire sonic picture. These fragments, amplified only slightly, were most audible when heard from a position either near the piano or the speakers. The lighting also invited exploration: different light sources were spread around the space, such as inside the vitrines or reflecting off the glass doors. The light was just bright enough to encourage people to move around as if in a real library. Further, there was no spotlight on me, the pianist, but a stronger light bulb was placed inside the piano to illuminate its mechanics, accentuating the interplay between the instrument's sonic and visual elements. Finally, I chose not to hide the cables belonging to the many microphones and speakers, in order to visualise the noise of the space.

In the second performance, *Interferences,* the amplified agent was the surrounding area of the ESMAE. Captured by microphones placed outside of the venue, street sounds including passing cars, honking horns, sirens, construction works, and people talking or yelling were played back in the concert hall in real time during my performance of Brahms's study. Scenographically speaking, the audience in the auditorium sat facing the stage where the piano stood, with two pairs of speakers placed on each side of the auditorium to keep the source of the recorded sounds clearly separated from the non-amplified piano. This separation ensured that the recorded sound and the sound of the piano did not blend together, but rather coexisted. That way, the audience would not feel immersed in a soundscape but rather placed in-between two sound universes. In addition to isolating instrumental and street sounds, the volume of the playback was adjusted so that midrange sounds, like cars passing or a conversation held at a normal volume, would correspond to the volume at which I would perform passages notated as *mezzoforte* in the score. The performance of the study was preceded by a performance of Catherine Lamb's *prisma interius II*, for solo keyboard. This is a piece which, like *prisma interius VII*, described above, uses streets sounds picked up by microphones placed outside of the performance space. Although the metaxically amplified performance of Brahms's study used the same microphones and microphone placement as Lamb's piece, the playback during the performance of the study was unprocessed, so the sounds were raw, precise and concretely perceptible. As an introduction to the

concert, I read to the audience a short, self-written text inspired by historian Peter Bailey's (1996) reflections on noise and its different meanings: noise as a state of aggression, alarm and tension; noise as related to powerful phenomena such as storms, thunder and the roaring sea; noise from the Greek *nausea* (seasickness); and noise as the German *rauschen* (the blowing of the wind), itself related to ecstasy and intoxication, or *Rausch*. I felt it was appropriate to introduce the performance with this text showing how, whether in Greek or German, noise affects and discomposes our bodies in various ways. It felt appropriate not only because I wanted to share with the audience the beautiful ambiguity contained within the term noise, but also to create a certain expectation and readiness for an unusual listening situation, which, as I will soon show, could become uncomfortable

Turning now to the outcomes of both performances and comparing them, the amplified sounds in *touchez* and the playback of the street sounds in *Interferences*, both of which from now on I will refer to as emergent sounds, behaved in a largely similar manner in both performances, with some exceptions. Emergent sounds were heard as either a homogeneous mass or in waves like the opening and closing of an accordion. They were heard as scattered noise, either as single and intermittent impulses, or as impulses clustering into punctual rhythmical patterns. Regarding their intensity, the emergent sounds were louder and more articulated in *Interferences* due to the higher volume of the amplification and the nature of the noises, since the streets in the centre of a city like Porto are more agitated than a closed musical venue containing no more than thirty people at a time, as was the case in De Bijloke.

My own reactions to the emergent sounds while playing included exploring different dynamic ranges. I made my voicing of lines in Schubert's sonata and Brahms's study respond to extraneous sounds; I explored various articulation strategies; sometimes I repeated motives or pitches that produced interesting acoustic effects; I played with tempo and timing or exaggerated the length of breaks and *fermate*. At times, I had difficulties sustaining energy in certain passages, like when a very strident and disagreeable siren-like sound entered the space during one of the most intimate and fragile passages of Brahms's study. As I will elaborate upon in more detail in the next chapter, my response was to improvise, playing softer and slower, thus creating an even larger gap between the two sounds. Through this distance, both the piano sounds and the siren became more distinct, and the tension between them more perceptible. In *touchez*, the extra pedals and switches connected to the amplification system provided additional resources for improvisation. For example, a looper function allowed me to record the sound in the space and play it back in a continuous loop, thereby freezing (or 'photographing') fragments of feedback, harmonic progressions and other interesting sonic events. By repeating these recorded fragments, I could respond to them differently each time. I also used a volume function to manipulate the curve of audio feedback occasionally arising in the space, making it either grow faster or disappear. Additionally, my responses to these sounds provoked yet other sounds, like the overtones made audible by the forceful treatment of the piano pedals, to which the environment in turn

reacted. The result was a self-amplifying chain of reactions progressively disconnected from their causal events.[39] The constant holding and releasing of the attention between emergent sounds and musical work, which was especially strong in *Interferences*, contributed to keeping the tension high, both for me as a performer and for the audience, as I was told after the event.

However, and perhaps because of the general sound level in the space, which was rather soft, the audio feedback that occurred repeatedly in *touchez* provoked interferences that I experienced as more drastic than those provoked by the street sounds. Audio feedback is an acoustic phenomenon common in amplified environments. It is caused by a signal that feeds back into itself, creating a loop of sounds and excessive audio gain. Feedback is largely a sign that the environment affects and informs the system, eventually modifying or reorienting its goal or purpose. To the ear, it manifests as a ringing, rumbling, screeching or continuous squealing sound, arising from a signal whose amplification and intensity grows exponentially and at different speeds. Feedback produces interesting sounds, yet uncontrolled feedback might develop into a popping sound that hurts the ears. For this reason, the early signs of emerging feedback are often perceived as threatening. By and large, the appearance of feedback and the modality of its development cannot be predicted, even though certain amplification systems or specific ways of positioning microphones can be propitious for the emergence of feedback. In *touchez*, feedback was determined by the bouncing of certain frequencies off the reflective surfaces of the space and back to the microphones, a phenomenon enhanced by the glass vitrines, the fact that the small space was heavily amplified, and also because the filtering of the amplified sound through the impulse response of the space doubled some of the frequencies already present in that space, thereby applying excessive gain to the microphone signals.

Within the controlled conditions of a classical performance, feedback introduces great tension and instability, creating a liveness that makes those present conscious of their physical situatedness. As Auslander (2011, n.p., my transcription) puts it, '[f]eedback in the broadest sense […] is the capacity of a machine to signal or seem to respond to input instantaneously. A machine that thus "interacts" with the user even at this minimal level can produce a feeling of "liveness" and a sense of the machine's agency'. Although feedback is generally undesired, several artists use or have used it as an artistic device with great success. Examples include Jimi Hendrix in *Wild Things*, Jan Martin Smørdal's *All Play*, an instrumental transcription of a feedback-based guitar performance by Daniel Meyer Grønvold written for Ensemble neoN as well as Paul Craenen's *tubes* (2007) for two performers and PVC-tubes. Although I did not perform

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[39] It might be interesting to note that, although I improvised freely during the performance with musical parameters like rhythm, dynamics, voicing and articulation, at no moment did I feel compelled to modify the pitches or harmonies of the pieces. This was neither a set rule nor a conscious decision. Thinking about it, I attribute it to a desire to keep the skeleton of the piece intact and to the fact that the emergent sounds had no recognisable pitch material to which I could relate. But then again, these are only speculations requiring further study and experimentation.

tubes myself, I consider it to be close to *touchez* in the way it seeks to elicit, control and then musically explore feedback. The setup of the piece is composed of one loudspeaker and microphone per performer, with speaker and microphone turned towards each other. This positioning produces constant feedback, since the microphone is capturing its own sound played through the speaker. The performers placed between microphone and speaker hold large PVC-tubes, which they move in order to influence the sound of the feedback. PVC-tubes are thus used as resonators as well as to change the pitch and timbre of the feedback sound. Although the piece is partly notated, the unpredictability of the feedback's behaviour asks sine qua non for moments of improvisation by the performers, as a reaction to what they hear. With this in mind, Cobussen (2017, 115) speaks of *tubes* as a situation-bound space of 'experimentation', 'surprises' and 'discoveries' in which the performers must listen and act reactively:

> Unlike other improvisations in which musicians are deliberately seeking the unpredictable, *Tubes* imposes this unpredictability on the performers, since the relation between their movements and the sounds is no longer the inevitable result of the mechanics of the instrument and thus, in principle, not anticipatable. In other words, the audible result is, to a certain extent at least, unrelated to the corporeal actions of the performers. Hence, they are challenged to react to sonic developments taking place outside of their direct control.

touchez surprised me positively for the way the performance uncovered the musical potential of a space as a medium and source of interface for sound production, and as a sound-producing agent in its own right. This was largely due to the unpredictability of audio feedback. Sensing the possibility of a new interference, both my body and that of the listener were kept in a state of alertness, attentive to the physical now of the performance and its possibilities (or threats). In this sense, like the performers in *tubes*, although I had pedals at my disposal to control the system, the system also controlled and played me.

Further examining the differences between the two projects, while *touchez* was rich in ideas and discoveries, its implementation was inconsistent and its texture too dense to allow me to recognise and properly explore the possibilities of the metaxical amplification. On the other hand, reflecting on these inconsistencies has helped me to better understand and delimit the scope of my research, leading to the creation of *Interferences* one year later. *Interferences* was a project that was technically and scenographically less complex but also more productive in terms of the impact it had on my practice, on my reflections and on the experience of the audience, to which I will return in the next two chapters.

What had been inconsistent in *touchez*? By creating a peripatetic space, I had wanted to give the audience the possibility to act upon the performance. For this reason, I had conceived of the amplification system as an interactive machine fed by the sounds produced by the performer, the space, and especially the audience as they moved around. As such, the amplification of the audience depended also upon their 'adequate engagement' with and within the space. It was crucial, for instance, that visitors would

move enough so as to activate the space and produce a perceptible sound mass. If the audience sat still or if there weren't enough people in the room making noise, there would not be much interference. However, in analysing the performance, I realised that the way I had wished to engage the audience in the making of the performance, successful or not, was incompatible with my initial motivation.

Why was my plan for the audience problematic? The notion of metaxical amplification is based on the idea of making audible the sonic environment of the musical performance. In *touchez*, the elements that I chose to amplify included the audience, the action of the piano, the acoustics of the space and my personal role. Following the logic of my own concept, the environmental sounds of the performance should have been amplified 'as they were'. However, instead of trusting the environment to sound on its own, I forced the environment to submit to my intentions, notably by asking the audience to move around so that they would produce enough sound and hence create instability in the space, which would then give me the opportunity to deviate from my planned interpretation. This was a crucial mistake that complicated my research in various ways, deviating my focus for a long time from the mechanisms and determinisms of listening. This deviation left its marks in the performance, creating inconsistencies such as feeling awkward and impatient when people did not move, encouraging the audience repeatedly to explore the space, as well as demonstratively and purposefully inducing feedback to produce interferences. Even though the result of this behaviour was, compositionally speaking, not uninteresting per se, I had ended up doing the exact opposite of what I would have liked to happen, namely taking full control of the situation instead of letting myself be played by it.

The introduction of texts in the performance was also not consonant with the metaxical concept. The passages from Perec, Poe and others were meant as a metaphorical amplification of my personal role, and more specifically of my discomfort with the traditional role of the performer of classical music. However, this did not work well because what I amplified were thoughts well-formed for the occasion but not for the materialisation of ideas occurring to me spontaneously during the performance. As such, my words came across as very rehearsed and 'processed' in contrast to the spontaneous and improvised nature of the musical interaction between the Schubert sonata and the sounds of the environment. For this reason, my spoken interventions functioned as a metadiscourse rather than as another layer of amplification. Since the texts were denouncing problems such as the performer's obsession with the past or one's inability to see what lies before one's eyes, they sounded like directives for the audience, telling them how to understand the performance and how to relate to it. Therefore, they turned the emergent interferences into an illustration of my words instead of an opportunity to listen differently. For me, the fact that these texts became a commentary on the performance rather than an integral part of the performance was problematic for two reasons. First, because, as Jacques Rancière (2009, 85) writes in *The Intolerable Image*, this kind of critique remains within the logic of what it is criticising. It does nothing but warn the spectator about their naïveté and establishes as universal a problem that was

first and foremost my own dilemma. In addition to distracting the audience from the possibility of engaging with the situation as they saw fit, it prevented me from fully being in the moment as I had planned. It is one thing to react to the environment through my playing, and another thing entirely to react while both playing and reciting prefabricated texts, not least in terms of multitasking virtuosity. Naturally, I had the choice to react by modifying both the texts and the musical interpretation of the sonata, which I did to a certain extent. But again, like with my desire and expectation to let the audience move, I was interfering with my own concept, dissolving it together with the coherence of the artistic experiment.

The second idea behind *touchez* was to highlight the ambiguities of the performance situation. The many layers of the performance (playing, noises, texts, photographs, movements) might have had the effect of creating even more ambiguity. Conversations with the audience and reading one of the reviews (Vanderhaeghe 2018) revealed the impact of this layering. Instead of creating a division of presences among the different elements of the performance, what seems to have occurred was that the many layers reinforced the focus on the sonata. Unable to find their way through the dense texture of the performance, some of the spectators looked for familiar references, which appeared in the moments when the sonata was played rather straightforwardly. Yet, because these moments were few, the audience was left frustrated. Now, while frustration is not necessarily a negative thing in the context of an artistic presentation, I had aimed at evoking a different kind of tension. As theatre director and composer Heiner Goebbels (2010) explains, the absence of a main theme or storyline can be productive. This absence can activate the imagination of the spectators as they try to fill in the blanks, or it can provoke a form of tension connected to a desire to experience what is absent or no longer central. Goebbels gives as an example the body of the protagonist in his play *où bien le débarquement désastreux*. In one of the scenes of the play, the protagonist is hidden behind a giant structure of aluminium hanging over the stage. Aware of the presence of the actor but unable to see him, the audience becomes even more curious. However, that which keeps the viewer on their toes and wanting more, can also cause negative 'withdrawal symptoms' (Lehmann 2006, 169) that might translate into a loss of general interest for the action. This is what ended up happening in *touchez*.

Finally, there were some technical issues in the performance including the soft volume of the amplification and how the 3D-amplification overshadowed other sounds. I had wished for a subtle amplification, just loud enough to heighten the awareness of the space and the sense of physical presence of the performer and the audience. However, instead of reorienting the attention, the imperceptibility of some sounds and their haziness, notably where rhythmical impulses were concerned, created an immersive bubble instead of a lively environment. In other words, I intensified the general attention but did not effectively change its focus.

In contrast with *touchez*, in *Interferences* I looked for more crispness and concision in the implementation of metaxical amplification, which is why I decided to amplify one element only and not several at once. The space was clearly structured around the traditional configuration of auditorium/stage, with dark lighting, and with the only scenographic intervention being a few spotlights that shone not only on the performer but also on the auditorium. The sound of the piano came from the stage only, whereas the loudspeakers playing street sounds were positioned laterally in relation to the audience, so that the origin of the two sound sources would be maximally distinct. This was a simple solution that respected both the concept and the technical possibilities available at the theatre. The *Chaconne* by Bach as arranged by Brahms is for left hand only, and except for sporadic broken chords, most of the piece consists of a bare melodic line. The precision of the spatial and sonic arrangement was meant to create a one-to-one exchange between the street noise and the solitary left-hand line. The audience also had a more conventional role in the sense that they remained seated in the 'sit still and listen' (Rebstock 2011, 143) position of the traditional classical concert. However, in searching their way through the pronounced sonic chaos of the situation, they were auditorily more active than in *touchez*.[40] This allowed the focus to be on the experience and interaction of the two auditory layers – the piano sounds and the street sounds.

In the next chapter I offer a more detailed description of how the listening activity unfolded in-between these different layers. Instead of focusing on creating for oneself a coherent interpretation of a musical work, one listens and performs amidst fluctuations and instability. Listening in such a context complexifies and problematises traditional notions of attention and raises questions about the general involvement of the performer and listener in the musical event. This includes looking back at the improvisatory activity of the performer as described above, how it entangles with traditional musical interpretation, and how this entanglement allows me to recover a sense of presence. This sense of presence is something that I, through the metaphor of Stuke's pictures, had deemed lost. This reflection will lead to a final chapter in which I discuss how the autonomy and aesthetic self-sufficiency of the musical work, as presented in Chapter One, is replaced by rethinking the musical work as inseparable from the environment – or ground – upon which it is (re-)presented. In other words, the musical work emerges from the present rather than being realised in it.

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[40] The expression 'sit still and listen', in German 'stillsitzen und zuhören', is from composer and theatre director Matthias Rebstock (2011, 143). In the Netherlands, it is a common sentence used to address children and have them behave.

III – Multiphonic Attention

> Things and thoughts advance or grow out from the milieu, and that's where you have to get to work, that's where everything unfolds.
> (Gilles Deleuze)

This chapter outlines the notion of multiphony which surfaces from the perspective of metaxical amplification. I understand multiphony in the context of this research project in a broad sense, covering a wide acoustic spectrum, containing sounds belonging to the musical work as well as sounds external to the work. As such, it throws open wider opportunities to attend to sound. Investigating these opportunities, I discuss how they affect the roles and relationships of performer and listener as they become entangled with broader theoretical considerations on listening and attention.

As I discussed in the Introduction, classical musicians and listeners have, either knowingly or unknowingly, participated over a long period of time in a shift in habitus conditioning them to pay attention to music in a focused way, with no ears for sounds other than those belonging to the musical work. This process is reflected in the establishment of performance environments that are still dominant today. Of concern to me is how to break from a sedimented mould which prevents individuals from engaging with sound in new ways. As media theorist Yves Citton (2018) suggests, it is probably impossible to restructure a sedimented mode of listening and attention if one remains within the same performance environments. Instead, it is either necessary to relocate music to less conventional spaces or to reconfigure the environments in which one usually encounters it. In my grounded performances, using metaxical amplification, I have sought to do the latter. My strategy, as described in the previous chapter, has been to juxtapose two sonic universes. On the one hand, classical music, which musicians and concert habitués are trained to attend with great focus and with certain expectations regarding timbre, pitches, rhythmical structures, form and its unfolding in time. On the other hand, the emergent amplified sounds, whose temporal unfolding and acoustic characteristics – although associated with specific events (a car passing, the honking of a siren, the breathing of the performer, the action of the piano) – are, at the outset of the performance, largely undetermined and unpredictable. These different sonic universes mobilise different modes of listening, hence different ways of engaging with sounds. Therefore, when they are juxtaposed a multiphonic situation is established in which one must juggle between these different modes of engagement. This offers an opportunity to rethink and reconfigure attention. What happens in the open moments in which a transition takes place between these different modes? What reinventions and which transformations occur in these spaces?

Grounded performances as multiphonic assemblages

When I began to analyse *Interferences* and *touchez des yeux*, the notion that best resonated with my artistic exploration was 'polyphonic assemblages' as theorised by

anthropologist Anna Tsing. Inspired by music and the philosophical thoughts of John Cage, Tsing (2015, 24) uses the notion to explain how heterogeneous elements such as humans, landscapes, objects, sounds or animals work together to 'make life':

> For those not musically inclined, it may be useful to imagine the polyphonic assemblage in relation to agriculture. Since the time of the plantation, commercial agriculture has aimed to segregate a single crop and work toward its simultaneous ripening for a coordinated harvest. But other kinds of farming have multiple rhythms. In the shifting cultivation I studied in Indonesian Borneo, many crops grew together in the same field, and they had quite different schedules. Rice, bananas, taro, sweet potatoes, sugarcane, palms, and fruit trees mingled; farmers needed to attend to the varied schedules of maturation of each of these crops. These rhythms were their relation to human harvests; if we add other relations, for example, to pollinators or other plants, rhythms multiply. The polyphonic assemblage is the gathering of these rhythms, as they result from world-making projects, human and not human.

For Tsing, the issue is how to consider assemblages as open-ended gatherings. Commonly, the heterogenous elements that compose an assemblage are viewed under a common purpose or denominator. However, to reduce an assemblage in such a manner – for instance to reduce farming to its output, as is usual in commercial farming and in a capitalist paradigm centred on productivity – is to overlook the myriad relations and potential outcomes unfolding within a plantation field and amongst the elements that compose it, such as its different crops, other plants, insects, the weather, the farmers, etc. Instead, an awareness is needed that relations can generate other purposes and possibilities, breaking beyond the logic of a closed system. To try to capture this potential, Tsing proposes to look at assemblages 'polyphonically'. As in polyphonic music, which Tsing (2015, 23) defines as 'music in which autonomous melodies intertwine', the movements of the different elements that compose an assemblage are not subordinated to a melody or a dominant voice or purpose that determines and conditions these movements. On the contrary, they establish their own direction, crossing each other sporadically in moments of consonance or dissonance, and generating a variety of rhythmical patterns that cannot necessarily be apprehended through a stable pulse. In this kind of music, attention is turned simultaneously to two or more stimuli (voices), and the information coming from these different voices is processed in parallel. As Arrau (in Horowitz 2011 [1983], 103) used to say about fugue playing, it is 'necessary [for the pianist] to follow every voice with the ear'.

Tsing's polyphonic approach has intrigued me. Applied to my metaxically amplified performances, it seemed to invite a form of openness and a listening attitude that would cover a sonic landscape broader than that of the musical work, and which was not solely oriented towards the work, although elements in these grounded performances – for instance the presence of a pianist who sets the performance in motion or the fact that the performances were announced as performances of specific works – still suggest a certain aesthetic framing. However, the idea was that their outcome would be defined on the

spot through the unforeseen interactions between their agents.[41] To put it more simply, the general intention when conceiving grounded performances was to create a situation that 'lets things happen', independently of whether the effects would be positive, negative, pacifying or productive. In terms of aesthetic framing, there are in fact similarities between grounded performances and Cage's *4'33*. The piece frames the 'performance' of ambient sounds by providing a setting and a duration, but it neither defines what these sounds will be nor what they will do. In grounded performances, the musical work provides a similar frame for listening to the environment as represented by the emergent sounds. The difference between my grounded performances and Cage's *4'33*, however, is that in the latter, the performer does not interact with the emergent sounds, while I, despite having practiced the Schubert sonata and the Brahms study 'by the book' before the performances, was ready to deviate from the score if the occasion presented itself; or, to put it in more subjective terms, if the circumstances were right and I felt like it.

It was in this quest for open-endedness that I connected with the 'polyphonic' world of Tsing. Nevertheless, considering polyphony from the perspective of a classical musician, I am aware that behind the seemingly independent voices of polyphonic genres like fugues, lie complex compositional rules. There is also a dominant tonality to which the voices are subjected. And because of this, fugal polyphony as a qualifier is perhaps not best suited to open-ended gatherings if one would like to consider the different elements as agents in their own right, and not as an instrument working towards a finite purpose. For these reasons, 'multiphony' may seem a more appropriate term.

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[41] How to announce and frame the performances was a complicated topic. *touchez* was performed in the context of a festival dedicated to presenting the music of Franz Schubert and was announced as an expo-performance and an artistic research project on his *Sonata in B-flat major D.960*. The format of the performance was left vague in order to accommodate the photo exhibition by Karen Stuke, but also to suggest that the performance would offer unexpected perspectives on the well-known piece. Yet, it was difficult to determine opening times. I had conceived the performance as a situation in which the audience could go in and out between the different concerts of the festival. But since it was decided that *touchez* would be the beginning of each evening, it was necessary to set a start time and a duration (1hour), recommending that visitors should spend at least twenty minutes in the space. The result of these instructions was that visitors came either early and then sat in the performance for a whole hour, or else they arrived just before the next concert. So there was a large flux of movement at the very beginning, and then again at the very end but almost none in-between. This became a problem as I explained in the second chapter, since the performance depended on the audience leaving and entering. In *Interferences*, I used a different strategy by announcing the performance as a performance of the Brahms study. While I had initially not wanted to do so – I was afraid that the performance would be perceived as a direct 'attack' on the traditional performance conventions instead of a proposal to start a new musical conversation – it ended up being more interesting. The expectations that it created brought along a certain friction: expecting to listen to a conventional version of the study made the audience more likely to experience the emergent sounds as disturbances. This had not been the case in *touchez*, where the lack of concrete expectations partly neutralised the disruptive effect of the emergent sounds. Against a background of concrete expectations, the contrast between the different types of sounds was more pronounced and the tension greater in *Interferences*. As I will show in this chapter, this activated listening and attention more productively.

Redefining attention

To consider an assemblage and associated forms of listening as multiphonic is to account for the messiness that invariably transpires in open-ended environments. In these environments, attention is spread amongst heterogeneous events, which are left relatively free to unfold at their own pace and according to their own logic. Using a concept emerging from poststructuralist thinking, one can say that attention is decentred. Decentring avoids the privileging of some voices over others. The concept was used by Jacques Derrida (1967, 280) to problematise authority and the notion of a foundational text or prime source of texts (a 'transcendental signified'), but it has since been adopted in other disciplines such as postcolonial studies and museology. In their effort to deconstruct the canon or canonised collection displays in various ways, contemporary museums seek for instance to include in their collection works by artists held on the side-lines of history, or to replace shows traditionally themed along the 'great lines' of (art) history with exhibitions highlighting alternative historical narratives, such as *The Poetics of Democracy*, a recent exhibition of the Reina Sofia Museum about artistic expressions neglected during the dictatorship in Spain (Bishop 2013).[42]

In music, this approach has become known through the works of composer and theatre director Heiner Goebbels, which are characterised by the absence of the expected, including traditionally central performance elements such as text, plot or dramatic protagonists. Although Goebbels (2010, n.p.) speaks of an 'aesthetics of absence', central elements do not actually disappear in his work, but are instead just treated differently. What he does is using elements such as light, music, bodies or space as independent agents. In *Stifters Dinge* (2007), for instance, many pianos piled together at the back of the room create their own music in ways only indirectly related to the texts and music heard through the loudspeakers. In the staged concert *Eislermaterial* (1998), the centre of the stage is empty, creating a counterpoint to the complex musical actions undertaken by the musicians seated on the side. This avoidance of a centralised focus on a protagonist, a main theme, or a text has a de-hierarchising function. If a text is no longer treated as central, part of its 'authority' is transferred to other theatrical elements, resulting in what Goebbels calls a 'division of presence' between these elements. In short, instead of serving as media or support for the music-theatrical text as they do in conventional music theatre, elements such as light, bodies or space acquire agency on their own and take centre stage. While they were formerly strategically arranged to *converge* towards a common goal, these elements now *interact* without a common goal, or rather, towards a multiplicity of goals. For Goebbels, decentring

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[42] Lately, in the effort to include more voices of those minorised for their ethnicity, class, gender or sexual orientation, decentring as a curatorial strategy has become crucial. I have recently been part of an extensive research programme on music curatorship by the German Federal Cultural Foundation which dealt with the issue of decolonisation in the contemporary music scene, at the level of artists represented in concerts but also attending to the presence of segregated minorities in areas such as production, management, artistic direction or criticism. Results of the project are published in Freydank and Rebhahn (2019) and Curating Contemporary Music (2020). See also Born (2017) and GRiNM x OnCurating (2020).

represents an opportunity to notice and create interest in things that were until then ignored. At the same time, it gives a larger scope for co-composition by the audience, who can fill in the blank spaces between the independent voices with imaginary relations. Additionally, it causes a tension connected to the desire for the thing that is absent or no longer central. Goebbels's works often exploit the audience's desire for the 'missing thing' by momentarily showing or evoking it obliquely. This is what I referred to in Chapter Two when speaking about the tension created by the constant disappearance of the actor's body in *ou bien le débarquement désastreux….*

As previously suggested, a similar form of desire can be associated with grounded performances, generated by the quest to follow the progression of the musical work. The experience of the listener in *Interferences*, as became apparent from conversations with audience members and from my own participation as a listener, was initially one of tension, created through the juxtaposition of Brahms's study and the emergent sounds that did not formally belong to the work. This juxtaposition provoked a constant oscillation between different modalities of attention. There was, at first, an overwhelming desire to listen to the musical work in the traditional and structural sense. As I explained in Chapter One, when one listens to a musical work, moments of synthesis are required to be able to consider it as a piece of music and to grasp musical time. Synthesis enables the perception of single notes as indecomposable melodies, motives or harmonic progressions, where each note, chord, and beat only makes sense if experienced in relation to the ones that come before and after. If we just listen to the notes, we would no longer hear a melody, but rather a series of disconnected sounds. This requires a form of concentration that leaves one only halfway in the present, while also oscillating between anticipating and remembering what one has heard. However, in *Interferences* and *touchez*, other stimuli claimed one's attention, interrupting structural hearing and precluding the synthetic experience. These stimuli were not always related to each other, nor did they have an intended meaning. They were just sounds, best experienced phenomenologically as sonic events with their own acoustic characteristics beyond some origin or signification. The attention, therefore, fluctuated between following melodies and harmonic progressions, letting oneself indulge in these emergent sounds, and forming new musical constellations by connecting environmental noises to the musical sounds. One could say that this fluctuation between different listening modes – structural, phenomenological, associative – could happen in relation to any music. Here, however, it is emphasised by the instability generated by sonic interruptions. In a performance like *Interferences*, where the musical work consists mainly of one voice, the desire to follow the single line was particularly strong, making the interruptions all the more disturbing. Without the possibility of synthesising what one heard, the experience of listening, became more fragmentary. Listeners could either become confused or find new ways to navigate these discordant sounds.

In grounded performances, attention is decentred due to the ambiguity provoked by media appearing in other ways than expected. The ambiguity is related to the coexistence of the representational universe of the musical work and the more prosaic

or everyday universe of the emergent sounds. Thus, the piano is simultaneously experienced as the source of the musical sounds and as a machine producing noisy sounds like the thud of the pedals and the striking of the hammers. The pianist performs the musical piece but also improvises. Because the transitions between these roles are not always clear, questions come up: when does the composition ends and the improvisation start? When is the sound of the piano part of the performance and when is it only noise? Theatre actors have explored such ambiguities extensively in postdramatic plays such as the Wooster Group's staging of Chekov's *Three Sisters*, *BRACE UP!* (2003). Here, ambiguity comes from the audience not knowing whether the actors are rehearsing or reciting their lines. Indeed, the staging uses the theme of self-deception present in Chekov's drama to problematise this issue more broadly, starting from a deconstruction of the fictive nature of drama itself. There is a constant disruption of the illusory reality of the play when non-fictional elements belonging to the reality of the staging are inserted into the performance, for instance, actors rehearsing or giving instructions to the production crew or other actions normally confined to the 'backstage' of a scenic production. As a result of this oscillation between fiction and reality, the staging holds the audience in a state of unresolved confusion. This perceptual instability is well-expressed by performance theorist Erika Fischer-Lichte's (2008, 99) 'radical concept of presence', which she uses to indicate the disorientation and the self-awareness created when the borders between the real and the fictional, the ordinary and the representational are not clearly demarcated. My own performances thrive in this in-between and the unstable moments during which the listeners, caught between the conflicting energies of the symbolic universe conveyed by the music and the familiar but displaced sounds of steps or passing cars, become intensely engaged in the process of perceiving, questioning, doubting and making sense.

These ambiguities and instabilities ask for a revision of familiar notions of attentive listening. Traditionally, the expected and desired mode of listening to classical music, as described in Chapter One, consists of doing so absorbedly, 'with complete attention to the music' (Weber 1997, 678). Listening in this way is part of the quest to relate to the musical work both in terms of the sensations, feelings or emotions it may evoke, and intellectually, looking for structure and the relationship between its parts. This view of attention is backed up by classical theories and definitions of attention that have prevailed since the 19th century. For instance, renowned psychologist William James (1931 [1890], 403-404), writing in the late 19th century, affirms that,

> Every one knows what attention is. It is the taking possession by the mind, in clear and vivid form, of one out of what seem several simultaneously possible objects or trains of thought. Focalization, concentration, of consciousness are of its essence. It implies withdrawal from some things in order to deal effectively with others, and is a condition which has a real opposite in the confused, dazed, scatterbrained state which in French is called distraction, and Zerstreutheit in German.

For James, paying attention is a targeted and purposeful action consisting of 'taking possession' of a particular object, like a hunter catching prey. In other words, the

attentive individual has eyes and ears for the perceived object only and detaches it from its environment so that perception of the object can be digested more clearly. In an analogy with vision, one could say that attention functions like the zoom of a camera or a looking glass with different levels of magnification. The more we magnify the object of our attention, the less we notice that which surrounds it. Also, paying attention is no neutral activity and can, according to James, be done more or less 'effectively', depending on what the individual can infer from the observation of the object.[43]

James's definition of attention, and variations thereof, are still commonplace, despite the 'crisis of attention' that I have described in the Introduction. In sources such as the APA Dictionary of Psychology (2022b), for example, attention is defined as 'a state in which cognitive resources are focused on certain aspects of the environment rather than on others'. Katherine Hayles (2007, 187), studying attention in educational settings in the early 2000s, characterised the type of attention that is aimed for in schools as the ability of 'concentrating on a single object for long periods […], ignoring outside stimuli while so engaged'. And in classical philosophy, attention is viewed as the ability to focus on an object with the goal of gaining a better knowledge of that object, as well as a better knowledge of oneself through this object (Alloa 2010). This feedback loop between the object of attention and the attending subject, whereby learning about the object teaches the subject something about themselves, corresponds to the kind of epistemic transcendence one generally looks for in classical music, where one uses the music to become an improved version of oneself (see Chapter One).

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[43] I have noticed that the terms attention and listening appear interchangeably in my research notes. In attempting to differentiate them and, especially, through the comparison of English and French sources, I found out that they are etymologically very close. The French word for listening is *écouter*, which shares the root of the English 'to auscultate', which literally means leaning or bending the ear. Attention comes from the Latin 'ad' (to, toward) + 'tendere', meaning stretching to or toward. 'Leaning' or 'bending' the ear alludes to the way we slightly bend our neck when we want to hear, but the actual physical act of listening happens through the stretching of the tympanic membrane. '[T]o listen is to 'tendre l'oreille' – literally, to stretch the ear – an expression that evokes a singular mobility, among the sensory apparatuses, of the pinna of the ear', writes philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy (2002, 5). For Nancy, the tension of the ear 'stretching' indicates an intention and a curiosity, making me think of certain animals whose ears are literally 'on the lookout'. Following this etymological approximation, listening is a form of attention paid by the ear. Indeed, many sources, including Pierre Schaeffer (2017 [1966], 75-76), conceptualise listening in terms similar to those used by James. Schaeffer affirms that listening is intentional and 'utilitarian'. For him, listening is a means to infer something about a sound that we hear. Therefore, when we 'listen' to sound, we tend to focus on its 'message', on what the sound tells us. An example is the motor of a car: one listens to the noise of the motor not to indulge in its vibration but rather because if it is sounding strange, it might tell us that the engine is about to fail. So, for Schaeffer, listening is always a project and a means: one targets sounds whose meaning one wants to understand and with the purpose of doing so. As a rule, in classical music, the 'project' of the listener is to make sense of a musical work and sounds are attended to as forming part of the work, approached semantically (ibid, 83) and with an ear for the aesthetic appreciation of their artistic content.

Philosopher Emmanuel Alloa (2010, n.p., my translation) is critical of this intentionality because it reduces attention to the analytical realm, ignoring its broader sense of a first contact, or a primary awareness of the world:

> Whatever the angle of view: it is always a logic of the proper that is implicitly called for, as opposed to an attitude of dispersion, distraction and lack of attention. Although this opposition completely misses the modulating dimension of attention - in certain situations such as in analytical treatment for example, the floating attention may be more able to 'grasp' what is at stake -, it only reverses the prejudice of reflexivity which has always conditioned the role of attention in philosophy. From this perspective, attention will only be granted on the condition of leading to a higher awareness of properties, whether in the form of a return to oneself or a grasp of the objects.

With a 'logic of the proper', Alloa is referring to the third phase of what he sees as a tripartite process. When I pay attention, there is, first, a moment of awareness, a vague sensation of presence that will be confirmed in the second phase, when I acknowledge the presence of a specific object. This leads to a third phase in which I recognise this object, attributing properties to it, and searching for similarities and correspondences with what I already know or expect. In a process of qualification, it is inevitable that I can only understand something that is external to me based on what I already know. However, there are degrees of flexibility in how I mobilise this knowledge. When I grasp an object with an intention that is too fixed, I might be preventing other types or areas of knowledge from being activated, and I will therefore create for myself an image of the perceived object that is possibly too limited.

To avoid such limitation, one must remember that attention does not always need to be synonymous with intention. Instead, Alloa reminds us that intention is only a modality of attention among many others, such as the floating attention mentioned in his quote above. For instance, psychanalyst Sigmund Freud was very interested in this form of attention, which he characterised as hovering or suspended (*gleichschwebende Aufmerksamkeit*) (Freud 1999 [1912], 377-378). In this state of mind, the psychoanalyst listens to the patient without preconceptions and without paying attention 'to any one thing the client says' (APA 2022a), but by remaining open to unexpected connections, associations or emotional reactions of the client as expressed by nuances in the voice, body posture or pauses in their speech. In this form of attention, associations rise involuntarily in the consciousness of the perceiving subject, and refer to past experiences, lessons or knowledge, interweaving subjective experience with objective knowledge, and materialising into new knowledge, insight and ideas (Fischer-Lichte 2008). Like many theatre directors in the postdramatic tradition, Goebbels (2010, n.p.) also counts on this type of attention from his audience. Influenced by Freud, Surrealism and the poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin, he sees the 'blank spaces' left for the imagination of the audience as conducive to a more poetic logic. This logic resembles dream thoughts, whose essential quality is a non-hierarchy of images, movements and words. Dream thoughts form a texture that resembles collage, montage and fragmentation

rather than a logically structured course of events, constituting therefore a great model for non-hierarchical theatre and musical aesthetics.[44]

Yet, while floating attention considers the object of perception in relation to aspects of the context in which the object becomes manifest, it still does not give a satisfying account of the relationship between object and the environment in which it is perceived, in the sense that the perceiving individual is still positioned outside of the environment in which perception occurs. The environment is treated like a kind of box from which one extracts the objects of one's interest. This seems to me to be an incomplete perspective. We do not live in an environment, we 'are' this environment (Citton 2018, n.p.). Therefore, it is impossible to take oneself (or something) out of an environment, or to make the environment disappear. Stated differently, this distancing from the environment only makes sense from the psychological point of view of an individual who is already conditioned to consider the act of paying attention and their position towards the attended object in a detached way.

Refining these views on attention, French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre explains the workings of perception in a more subtle manner. He demonstrated how individuals can become oblivious to their environment without ceasing to exist within it. Sartre (1956, 9-10) thinks of attention in terms of transformation: the environment does not disappear, it is transformed into an object of attention. He gives the example of entering a café to meet his friend Pierre:

> It is certain that the café by itself with its patrons, its tables, its booths, its mirrors, its light, its smoky atmosphere, and the sounds of voices, rattling saucers, and footsteps which fill it – the café is a fullness of being. And all the intuitions of detail which I can have are filled by these odors, these sounds, these colors, all phenomena which have a transphenomenal being. Similarly Pierre's actual presence in a place which I do not know is also a plenitude of being. We seem to have found fullness everywhere. But we must observe that in perception there is always the construction of a figure on a ground. No one object, no group of objects is especially designed to be organized as specifically either ground or figure; all depends on the direction of my attention. When I enter this café to search for Pierre, there is formed a synthetic organization of all the objects in the café, on the ground of which Pierre is given as about to appear. This organization of the café as the ground is an original nihilation. Each element of the setting, a person, a table, a chair, attempts to isolate itself, to lift itself upon the ground constituted by the totality of the other objects, only to fall back once more into the undifferentiation of this ground; it melts into the ground. For the ground is that which is seen only in addition, that which is the object of a purely marginal attention. Thus the original nihilation of all the figures which appear and are swallowed up in the total neutrality of a ground is the necessary condition for the appearance of the principle figure, which is here the person of Pierre.

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[44] As I will show in the next chapter, the reference layers to a musical work in the performances of MusicExperiment21 are also based on this idea of a hovering attention and on the creation of associations which can ground one's understanding of the work as part of a larger aesthetic-epistemic network, rather than as a defined entity (de Assis 2018, 40).

In this example, Sartre thinks of attention in terms of his 'project', which is to meet his friend Pierre. Entering the café to meet Pierre, Sartre experiences it as 'a fullness of being', as a lively environment composed of objects, people, lights, smells, colour, chatter, and so on. However, since his purpose is to meet Pierre, he is not able to acknowledge this lively environment as such, regardless of whether Pierre is there or not. Why is that so? Sartre's experience is guided by his expectation of meeting Pierre. This expectation becomes the filter through which he experiences his environment. Thus, if meeting Pierre is his project, Sartre will perceive the café in function of Pierre. If Pierre is there, the café becomes a confirmation of Pierre's presence. However, if Pierre is not there, his presence will still be felt in the café; in fact, the entire café will become a confirmation of the absence of Pierre. Therefore, the café and the elements that compose it do not disappear in Sartre's perception. Rather, the environment is transformed into an object of attention, or into the negation of this object. In brief, whether Pierre is there or not, the centrality of Pierre in the shaping of Sartre's café experience is so absolute that he can see nothing but Pierre; he can only see Pierre, present or absent, in everything that he sees. As such, the café does not disappear; it still exists but it has been neutralised. Its elements have lost their identities and have, even if in *via negativa*, become Pierre.

These considerations echo the concern I expressed in Chapter One about the way the focus on the work in traditional classical music performances shapes an experience in terms of expectations, the performer's mental activity when evaluating their performance, the response of the audience, the discourse around musical performances, and the relationship between performer and audience. An example is how scholars like Sanden (2009) and Beaudoin (2021), interested in the noise of Gould's creaking chair, have analysed it in function of what it does to the piece. For instance, Beaudoin (ibid, n.p.) presents a meticulous analysis of the recording of Schönberg's *6 Little Piano Pieces* Op.19, using spectrograms, statistics and diagrams to visualise by the millisecond the temporal coincidences between the creaks and Gould's performance of Schönberg's composition. What the analysis shows is how Gould's sound-producing movements increase in passages that are metrically free or unclear. This suggests that the creaking of the chair functions as a representation of the performer's inner pulse. This example considers the noise made by the chair in its relation to the interpretation of the work, and not with respect to a larger situation of which both work and noise are part. This was also the conclusion of Christina Vanderhaeghe's unpublished review of *touchez des yeux* mentioned in Chapter Two. Because of an excess of elements in the performance, and the fact that the interferences were not as eloquent or disruptive as I had expected them to be, Vanderhaeghe was not sure as how to understand what she heard and saw. As a result of her confusion, she sought to understand the situation in terms of common knowledge about Schubert and the sonata. Resorting to a topos in music history, the relationship between a composer's death and their last works, her review described the atmosphere of the performance as a successful illustration of Schubert's disorientation when writing the sonata shortly before his untimely death.

Compared to the definitions that I examined earlier, I find Sartre's thoughts more relevant for reconsidering attention within the context of grounded performances. Even though his example shows how an individual becomes insensitive to the environment, and how their perception becomes narrowed when guided by a single object of attention, the relevance of Sartre's definition remains because it does not posit attention as an 'extermination' or 'eradication' of an environment. Rather, it explains attention as the attribution of power to one central element, which neutralises and even annihilates the environment in which it is contained. This would suggest, more productively, that a redistribution of power through, for instance, the decentring of attention, could help recover or reconfigure the environment.

This is precisely what I seek when metaxically amplifying my grounded performances and positing them as multiphonic assemblages: to de-hierarchise the traditional division of roles between the different elements of a performance so as to avoid that the musical work dominates and determines the artistic experience. Recalling the definition of metaxy, its main affordance is that it makes clear that perception never happens in a vacuum but rather within and through a particular environment. Grounded performances highlight this idea by emphasising the capacity of the performance environment and its different elements to function as mediators or receivers of a musical work without being reduced to doing only that. As a consequence, it is much more difficult for the musical work to obnubilate or dominate the whole perceptive field. By way of illustration, this means that while the piano remains a medium which I used to perform the Schubert sonata, due to the close microphoning, it is also perceived as a sounding machine whose hammers and levers have their own sounding properties, creating their own music in parallel to the conventionally musical tones. This also means that, while I may set out with the intention of performing the Schubert sonata, I can also allow myself to improvise beyond my role as the sonata's interpreter. The audience, in turn, is engaged in listening to the sonata, but as they do so their renewed awareness for the environment leads them to seek relations in-between the sounds that belong to the sonata and all other sounds present or absent in the environment. So the environment, as a medium for the perception of both musical and environmental sounds, becomes a transformative field. When interpreting Schubert, I pay attention to the environmental sounds without neutralising them in my consciousness. Instead, I go towards them, reacting to them through my playing. The same happens to the listeners, whose relationship to the music is destabilised by the perception of the environmental sounds, forcing them to reorganise their listening experience. The environment, for them, is like a lake; not a lake in which they fish, but a lake in which they swim.

Before further exploring these transformations, I will discuss attention in this fluctuating environment as a form of swimming. Attention conceptualised as swimming is no disengagement from an environment, but a way of moving and acting within a multiphonic assemblage. There is no foreground and background, but gradations of intensity in the way one approaches and interacts with the heterogeneous agents composing the assemblage. One of the most pertinent examples of what I refer to as

swimming is a moment that occurred during *Interferences*, when a siren-like sound reigned the space for several minutes. As the performer, I listened intently to the siren, and played softer and softer to enhance the contrast between the expressivity of the siren and the music, pausing sometimes to acknowledge the more punctual sounds of horns honking or cars passing by. It could well be that I, in those moments, didn't grasp these sounds 'together' in a literal sense. I cannot exclude the possibility that my attention was moving quickly between them instead of hearing them at the same time. In this sense, I was 'distracted', distraction defined here as the attention of an individual pulled apart by heterogenous but simultaneously present impulses. Nevertheless, even if I did not follow each sound all the time, I was profoundly aware of their co-presence. There was no question of detaching a single sound from its larger context. Instead, attention manifested itself as levels of intensity in the way I was present and reactive to these sounds, and in which they were present and reactive to me. Within this broad understanding of attention, several intensities and modalities might coexist, including 'intentional' or focused attention, but also non-intentional, distracted, wandering or hovering attention. In the case of grounded performances, this explains why performer and listener can focus on the work, while also being productively distracted by other sounds, and not simply bothered by them. In the best of cases, these other sounds are not disturbances but new possibilities for reconfiguring the experience of classical music as a grounded phenomenon. This means for me a sonic landscape where all sounds graft on one another: random sounds taking roots in classical music, and classical music growing from random sounds.[45]

A transformative field

When discussing the roles and positions of performers and listeners within grounded performances, swimming is an interesting metaphor. Although immersed in the water, one cannot forget to swim, otherwise one risks to drown. This means that one is aware of swimming, in much the same way that one, in a grounded performance, is aware of oneself listening. Also, swimming requires high adaptability. One must deal with waves and currents, and change swimming style accordingly. This is also what I find myself doing when performing as part of the multiphonic assemblage. Although I practiced the Schubert sonata and the Brahms study before the performances of *Interferences* and *touchez*, I did not remain indifferent to the emergent sounds. When a particular sound claimed my attention, I did not hesitate to change the course of my interpretation in function of what I heard. I reacted to these sounds by exploring different voicings,

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[45] Complementing what has been discussed here so far, Ruth Herbert (2018, n.p.) speaks of an ecological approach to listening. In her definition, distraction is re-framed as 'potentially richly polysemic and perceptually inevitable'. Ecological listening, for Herbert, is a form of listening that is relational and heteronomous rather than self-referential. The listener is regarded as entangled in a musical assemblage made of interactions between subjective perceptions, personal knowledge and the environment. To listen ecologically means to listen within and to a physical environment and its fluctuations. According to Cobussen (2017, 35), this evolves the 'manifold interactions' between bodies (human or nonhuman) and environment.

dynamic ranges, articulation, pedal effects and tempi. I used repetition and modified the duration of notes and pauses accordingly. Sometimes I skipped certain passages or changed their order. The only element I did not change were the pitches. I also reacted by recording and playing back fragments of the performance, using a loop pedal, and I played with the volume of the audio feedback. In this sense, I was improvising, that is, freely engaging with the environmental sounds, the amplified noises, the notated material, and the piano. This flexibility has made me re-examine the notion of musical improvisation.

Musical improvisation is a reaction to a musical idea, an environment or other circumstantial factors, which ask the performer to mobilise their skills and experience on the spur of the moment, in an unpremeditated way. In this sense, the improvising musician is not unlike a *bricoleur*, described by anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss as a handyperson who 'works with his hands and uses devious means compared to those of a craftsman' (Lévi-Strauss 1966 [1962], 16-17). Unlike the craftsman, who uses only specialised tools and materials, *bricoleurs* must make do with whatever is at hand. They look around for things that are at once contingent and teeming with potential, a potential which will only become apparent within each new circumstance, and in contact with similarly contingent things. Thus, when the circumstance arises, they use both their practical and theoretical knowledge (including intuition) to react to and activate their materials.

A good example of a musical bricolage is a concert by the Taku Sugimoto quartet (described in Cobussen 2017). The musicians played very sparsely, reacting to the sounds of the environment and improvising with these sounds, but also remaining silent to make space for these sounds to unfold: 'The musicians' creative inhabitations of the venues and their attentive listening lead to temporary, cautious, and sensible acoustic interventions and infiltrations, strongly influenced by the rooms' acoustics. The space is no longer a static object, not simply a given [...] but has turned into a live instrument: Sugimoto and Chang are playing the space; they can be considered as organisms adapting themselves in order to cope with the environment' (ibid, 164). Another example of a bricoleur at work is guitarist Marc Ribot. As Cobussen (2017, 35) reports, Ribot's performance with the Fell Clutch Trio in Rotterdam in 2007, was altered due to a broken amplifier. Instead of stopping the concert to fix or change the amplifier, Ribot continued to play, integrating the noise of the broken amp in the music. His decision to interact with this unforeseen noise brought newness into the situation, newness understood here not as a something previously unseen or unheard-of, but as a reconfiguration of the environment that revealed unforeseen possibilities.

Understood as a form of bricolage, improvisation for the classical musician consists in 'find[ing] new ways of inhabiting old forms' (Cobussen 2017, 22). As such, it presents an occasion for the performer to 'recycle' their playing abilities, which in my case are tightly connected to traditional piano techniques and the score. When improvising in my grounded performances, I also learned how to listen *reactively* and how to take the time

to listen to sounds as they unfold without simultaneously preparing in my mind what I would play next, and without seeking to control these sounds. Instead, the sounds of the piano and the environmental sounds share the stage. Music-making thus becomes 'transitive' (Ernst 2013, 67) rather than purely interpretive. The performer acts in direct reference to and in contact with the surrounding objects and sounds, rather than in function of a predetermined message or meaning.

Improvising with the environment in this manner is not an easy task for me as a classically trained performer. Performers are viscerally connected to musical traditions, and it is very difficult to break free from musical notation and performance conventions, from entrenched habits and rehearsed movements. Cobussen (2017) reflects on how the level of openness and the agency of the performer vary in different musical styles. Of course, music performances always involve improvisation, simply because they happen in a live environment that remains to some extent unpredictable. For instance, the acoustics, venue and the available keyboard will always influence certain decisions regarding tempo, volume, intonation, and dynamics. Cobussen argues that beyond these uncontrollable factors, the musical choices that a free jazz musician like Ribot can make during a performance are not fundamentally different from those of a classical pianist like Evgeny Kissin. What differs is the nature of the constraints that guide these choices or, as he puts it, their creative space. In the case of Kissin, this creative space is determined by the horizon of the score and, as I will discuss in the next chapter, by the nature of the relationship that the performer has with the score. The attitude towards the score and the performance traditions will indeed determine whether they will just adjust a rehearsed interpretation in the moment of performance, or whether they will modify this interpretation in order to engage with the unexpected circumstances. If they do react to the unexpected, however, performers might discover abilities that they perhaps did not know they had, and they can reposition themselves *within* an environment instead of *towards* the work.

This 'being in and with the environment' also affects the relationship to the audience. As I mentioned in Chapter One, audiences and performers generally share a relationship that could be characterised as 'evaluative'. Performers long for the approving energy of the audience, which emboldens their performance. Simultaneously, the audience seeks in the performer, and through their performance, a confirmation of expectations, either towards the musical work, or as related to the virtuosity, sensibility, or any other characteristic of the performance. As a result of these reciprocal expectations, the relationship between audience and performer becomes more of a transaction than a shared experience. Even though the music unites them, the relationship that both share with the musical work is so subjective, so entrenched in their own mental space, that it cannot be convincingly stated that they are listening to the same thing. Unexpected events change this relationship. When a sudden noise interrupts a performance, it creates a moment of togetherness in the act of listening. Psychologists Nameera Akthar and Morton Ann Gernsbacher (2007) call this 'joint attention', moments in which preverbal children, when absorbed by something they see, notice that an adult or another child is

focused on that same thing. '[J]oint attention involves the child and adult coordinating mutual engagement with their mutual focus on a third entity' (ibid, 2). In the moment in which the child becomes aware of the adult's engagement, they often point to the thing, and this delineates the beginning of a direct exchange between adult and child based on the mutual contemplation of the thing. Joint attention plays a critical role in the development of social cognition and communication skills in small children, including early word learning. For the audience and the performer, joint attention works in a similar way. When listening to the music, the mental space of performer and listener is dominated by a flux of protentions and retention, that is, by expectations, associations and evaluations which happen across subjective, physical and musical time. In contrast to focusing on the music, listening to environmental noises and acknowledging the sonicity of these phenomena forces their attention outwards and towards a common object. These moments of interference, then, are the true meeting points between performer and audience. They are pillars of togetherness in personal experiences that would otherwise not be synchronised.

I turn now to the possible experience of the listener. I have already mentioned the destabilisation of the perceiver's position brought about by the presence of the noisy amplified sounds. I write 'possible experience', because I have not explored the reactions and opinions of the audience on my performances beyond several informal conversations and what I could observe from my position at the piano. Nonetheless, I allow myself some general observations, including those based on my own listening experiences while performing. The attendee of grounded performances does not approach the environmental sounds with the sole purpose of attending to a musical work and interpreting it from afar. Rather, they must make sense of the situation by composing their own sonic experience using the heterogenous sonic impulses. A new attitude is required whose particularity is to constantly engage the listener into making choices about where and how to direct their attention. In a sense, the listener becomes both maker and protagonist (or rather one of the protagonists) of their own listening experience. Michael Fried (1967), whose discussion of the 'absorbed mode' was already mentioned in Chapter One, opposes this mode with an approach that he calls he calls 'theatrical'. He (ibid, n.p.) introduces the term in the context of a study on spectatorship in the visual arts to describe the way in which minimal art transforms spectators into conscious protagonists of their own experience:

> [Minimalist] sensibility is theatrical because, to begin with, it is concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters [minimalist] work. Morris makes this explicit. Whereas in previous art 'what is to be had from the work is located strictly within

[it],' the experience of [minimalist] art is of an object in a situation – one that, virtually by definition, includes the beholder.[46,47]

Because most minimalist artworks are no self-contained objects of contemplation but objects inserted into a given space or a situation, they make no sense without the physical presence of the perceiver. With sculptures such as those of Carl Andre or Robert Morris, which take up the floor of the gallery, the position of the spectator is not anticipated in the same way as with respect to a framed painting. The spectators must move around to perceive the work, adjusting and readjusting their way of looking, becoming acquainted with the space in which they are; this becomes a central element of the artistic experience. 'The work itself and the situation it creates cannot be separated', remarks art critic Janneke Wesseling (2016, 176); the situation, the context, 'is the work' – a kind of happening of which the spectator is part.[48]

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[46] Fried refers to minimal art as 'literal' art, since what it shows is not an object or an image that represents something else, as in figurative painting and sculpture, but the object itself, exactly, or 'literally', as it presents itself to the viewer. In this excerpt, I replace 'literalism' by minimalism following the example of art critic Janneke Wesseling in her book *The Perfect Spectator* (2017), in which she discusses Fried's essay *Art and Objecthood* extensively.

[47] For Fried, the theatrical mode represents 'the negation of art'. His ideological stance is that the artwork *is* its content and can only be considered good if one becomes absorbed by and in it. Theatricality is connected to the abstractness, meaninglessness or 'hollowness'. As Wesseling (2016, 176) writes, '[the] consequence of the all-embracing theatricality of minimal art is, according to Fried, that such art is merely "an uncompelling and presenceless kind of theatre", meaning with presenceless the fact that these objects do not reveal themselves to us immediately and neither do they seem alive enough for us to want to surrender and lose ourselves in them.' I do not share Fried's ideological viewpoint about the quality of the artwork (Wesseling doesn't either), but his distinction between a theatrical and a self-reflexive mode of viewing against a contemplative mode is useful and applicable to my present reflections. As a passing remark on the same topic: although Fried discusses this mode of viewing as a minimalist innovation (he speaks of minimal art as having 'given birth' to the spectator'), Wesseling points out that this kind of 'theatrical' art existed well before minimal art, for instance in Cubism. In front of María Blanchard's *Femme assise*, where one tries to distinguish the figure of a women deconstructed in abstract shapes, one no longer feels excluded from the work since the work has no 'story' until one starts decoding its various layers, making sense of the multiple perspectives baked into the canvas. What concerns the spectator here is not only the content of the painting but also how to perceive it. Media theorist Marshall McLuhan speaks about Cubism as a challenge to perception, noticing how this art form leads to the reconsideration of assumptions and habits of seeing. Until Cubism appeared, one used to ask what the picture was about. As long as one remains within the universe of figurative painting, what the painting shows is more important than the act of seeing. With Cubism, things changed because a painting was no longer about something but about how we look at something. Painting as a medium to explore perception became more interesting than what the painting was portraying. It is in fact in McLuhan's comments on Cubism that his famous saying 'the medium is the message' comes up, introducing his concern for how perception is structured by the medium. Going even further back in art history, Georges Bataille (1995) argues that this shift already took place in the work of Manet, whose work was not about representation but about colour, lines and forms on a two-dimensional canvas. However, I have chosen here to emphasise Fried's theory because it is specifically concerned with the repositioning of the spectator in relation to the artwork, and not only with a shifting paradigm of perception in Cubism, or an artistic alternative to purely figurative painting, as done by Impressionists like Manet.

[48] Some of the happenings that took place in the US during the 1950s and 60s under the pretext of creating lifelike art are illuminating examples of multiphonic situations that are not restricted to music. In one of them, *Theater Piece Nr. 1*, which took place at Black Mountain College in 1952, artists John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg, Merce Cunningham, Charles Olson and David Tudor framed a very familiar situation as a performance: that of

Now, it is of course debatable whether it is possible to reframe the position of the listener as a protagonist. This would suggest that, usually, the listener is *not* the composer of their own listening experience. When I started reflecting on Fried's theories, I was considering them in relation to *touchez*. During this performance, the listener was invited to move around in a sonic environment in which there was no clear focal point of reference. Instead, there was the piano placed in a corner, mostly playing very softly, and multiple speakers spread across the space playing back different types of sounds: some played back the sounds of the piano mechanics, others the sounds arising from audience's movements, others again the voice of the performer, and so on. In *touchez*, the analogy with minimalism in the visual arts and as understood by Fried, is more evident than in the case of *Interferences*. For example, the position of the listeners in-between the piano and the speakers, and the (implicit) invitation of entangling and disentangling the different sounds coming from these two sources, had, to a certain extent, the effect of experiencing the performance from *within* rather than from a more distant position as in a normal concert setting. Yet in discussions with colleagues and mentors, I was repeatedly told that listeners always construct their own experience, whether in a concert venue, listening to music in the streets or otherwise. While this might be true, I would still claim that there are differences between the 'work' that needs to be done by a listener in a grounded situation and in a conventional classical concert. Self-consciousness is an important topic here. Ideally, as discussed previously, the classical music listener is expected to be both 'centred and transcendent' (Wesseling 2016, 176): the listener is physically positioned in front of the sound source, or within an immersive sonic environment, but the composition they hear has been created for them beforehand so that they can immerse themselves in it – hence the 'transcendent', which suggests self-forgetfulness and absorption in something else than oneself. From this perspective, the listener co-composes their sonic experience but the material of this composition will be based on the musical sounds and their subjective experiences, previous knowledge, state of mind and a 'horizon of expectations'.[49] In *Interferences*, however, only part of the event is composed, and 'told' to the listener. There is no whole to be grasped and understood, but a wealth of material elements that the listener can either acknowledge or ignore. So the listener cannot linger for long in an internal realm of association and appreciation. They are constantly asked to reassess what they hear

several people doing completely different things and yet sharing the same space (Rutherford-Johnson 2020, 125). There were no time constraints or instructions other than a floorplan of the performance space defining where each artist should stand and specifying what they should do in very laconic terms ('Robert Rauschenberg: phonograph'; 'Cunningham: dance path'; 'lecture with John Cage: behind', etc.). Even though each artist had a task, this was not synonymous with a goal. Audience and artists could interact, but they could also choose not to. The important point was that they shared a situation which would develop according to whatever happened within it, or rather, whatever they *did* within it.

[49] Literary theorist Hans-Robert Jauss, influenced by the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, maintains that we carry with us a 'horizon of expectations' towards the work. This horizon is formed by our cultural, social and personal baggage: 'The reader comes to the text with his own models and values' (Jauss in Machado 2010, 60, my translation). Jauss affirms that the work is not an object that exists per se but rather 'a form waiting to be actualised', a form that 'becomes' as it mobilises the world experience of the reader (ibid).

and where they are. In contemporary music and sound art, there are many works that present similar affordances, especially sound installations or works using advanced sound spatialisation. However, it is very unusual to find this kind of approach in classical music. Therefore, I would firmly argue that there is a difference between music imposing particular meanings which require interpretation, and my projects. In them, I am posing questions, or inviting the audience to explore two parallel sonic worlds. This invitation also concerns the performer, who, like the listener, is required to stop interpreting and to start acting.

As an illuminating analogy, I think of the transparent crystal display frames conceived by Lina Bo Bardi for the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP) through which the audience sees the painting as well as the wider context of the museum: visitors, other paintings, themselves. In this situation, not only do they become aware of their own spectating through the reflection in the crystal; also the 'private' dialogue between paintings and audience is extended to a larger social and art historical context. We are dealing here with a reconfiguration of the relationship between artwork, display and the situation of viewing in which all agents become part of the actual artistic experience. By analysing grounded performances as multiphonic assemblages, I notice a similar reconfiguration. The artistic experience is no longer centred on the realisation and reception of a musical work. On the contrary, it encompasses the whole situation of a performance, of which musical works are but one element. This is because of the decentring of attention and the 'multiphonisation' of listening proposed in grounded performances, and because of the multiple roles that many of its agents take. Fischer Lichte (2008, 181) speaks in such cases of the transformation of performance into an event. As an event, performance becomes a dynamic process in which 'art', generally represented by musical works, is resituated within the physical and material world, 'reenchanting this world' with new perspectives, and, as Kaprow would say, making the art world more lifelike. This brings me to the next and final chapter, in which I explore in more detail the impact of this reconfiguration on the tradition of classical music performance and the understanding and function of the musical work.

IV – The Past as a Pretext

> As much as and more than a thing of the past, before such a thing, the archive should call
> into question the coming of the future.
> (Jacques Derrida)

Reflecting about what moves artists today, art theorist Boris Groys (2008, 71) concludes that contemporary art is about 'the act of presenting the present'. He explains: 'What differentiates contemporary art from previous times is only the fact that the originality of a work in our time is not established depending on its own form, but through its inclusion in a certain context, in a certain installation, through its topological inscription' (ibid, 74). Included in a larger context, an artwork may enter into dialogue with this context, transform it and be transformed by it. This idea of art becomes manifest in the work of many classically trained performers within the classical and contemporary music field. These performers no longer treat musical works as autonomous entities, but as pretexts for differentiated experiences, engaging listeners and themselves in the present and at times even beyond the purely sonic realm. Disregarding the autonomy of musical works and submitting them to possible transformations does not go without saying in a practice that to this day has been largely oriented towards preservation. It requires both courage and a critical distance to the tradition, as well as a retraining of previously hard-wired habits and assumptions. In what follows, I explore different ways in which performers might relate to this tradition, by looking back at the process of creating and implementing my grounded performances, and considering related works and thoughts by other musicians that have directly or indirectly contributed to this process. Of particular interest to me in this final chapter is to observe how, when performers consciously deviate from this tradition, their choices reflect tendencies or intentions for the future of their practice.

History in sound

Tradition is one of the most recurrent terms throughout this thesis and one that requires further elaboration. Tradition drives the field of classical music. To follow a tradition is a way of connecting with the past and legitimising a practice in terms of 'how things have always been done'. As Foucault (1976, 21) writes: '[The notion of tradition] allows a reduction of the difference proper to every beginning, in order to pursue without discontinuity the endless search for the origin.' What Foucault means to say is that tradition suggests a continuity between the past and the present despite the many changes occurring in an environment or field over time, absorbing or ignoring the many changes occurring in a given practice over time. In the case of some classical music performance practices, tradition feeds the illusion that there is a 'right' way of performing and that it is somehow possible to 'restore' a musical work as it was once imagined by the composer or as it was originally intended to sound. The Vienna Philharmonic, for instance, considers itself to be a 'guardian of musical authenticity' (Kenyon 2012, 17), because of its more than 150 years of existence, and hence its

'continuous links to the sound world of Beethoven's Vienna' (ibid). The orchestra reflects the spirit of most conservatory trained musicians. Due to their education, such musicians come to embody, preserve and disseminate a specific cultural heritage. As Daniel Leech-Wilkinson (2020) affirms, these performers are trained to do 'history in sound'. Shining through classical music performance is the legacy of the past, rather than the relationship between this past and the present. It is no wonder that Mauricio Kagel, in his film *Ludwig Van,* in which the music of Beethoven appears in myriads of contexts as disparate as streets or zoos, chooses the song *In Questa Tomba Oscura* ('in this dark tomb') for one of the few scenes in which Beethoven's music is performed in a concert hall. Likewise, it should come as no surprise that when reading an article by the chief of the American National Archives Conservation Laboratory, Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler (2015, n.p.), on how to best conserve books, I associate many of the expressions she uses – terms such as 'careful handling', 'placing in boxes', 'no exposure to sunlight', 'controlled conditions to avoid change' – with the way I dealt with musical works and with the secluded conditions in which I used to perform them.

Many scholars and musicians in the field of classical music have located the authority of tradition in the preposition 'of'. Classical performers do not just perform. They perform *something*, this something being music, or a musical work. The 'of', in these cases, refers to the representational nature of musical performance, that fact that it represents or mediates a work. This is different from the term performance as used in the visual arts. Performance in the visual arts, as practiced since the Dadas and Futurists and especially after the 1970s, is not followed by the preposition 'of', since the main characteristic of performance art is its refusal of the art object and the very principle of representation. Artists perform because they realise actions that are performative in the sense of Austin and Butler (see Chapter Two), particularly actions that are not fictive and meant to have a transformative and often controversial impact on a given social, artistic or political context. As art theorist Jonah Westerman (2016, n.p.) remarks, 'performance is not (and never was) a medium, not something that an artwork can be but rather a set of questions and concerns about how art relates to people and the wider social world'. This was demonstrated by Marina Abramović in the 1975 performance *Lips of Thomas*, in which she was not performing an artwork or a play, but rather testing the impassivity of the spectators as she flagellated herself in front of them for hours in a row (Fischer-Lichte 2008). In classical music, however, the object of performance is precise. One speaks of the performance *of* music or *of* a musical work. In what follows, I will look at different interpretations and subversions of this 'of', both theoretically as well as through examples of performances that I attended during this research, which shed light on some of the concerns addressed by my grounded performances.

When one refers to the performance of a musical work in a classical music context, it is generally assumed that the musical work is something that pre-exists the performance and is rendered audible by the performance (de Assis 2018). This definition of the musical work is considered Platonic, for it sees the musical work as an abstract object that only manifests itself imperfectly in the ephemerality of performance. Yet it is hard

to say what the work is exactly in this definition. As de Assis (2018, 53) claims, what is being alluded to is most often an 'image-of-work', characterised by a number of ideas, sounds and references that one associates with a given work. Due to beliefs concerning the continuity of performance traditions and widely shared practices of musical interpretation, relatively stable images of musical works have emerged throughout history, giving them a certain objectivity. Schaeffer (2017 [1966], 97-98) speaks of a musical work as a peculiar 'body' that maintains both its aura and a recognisable profile independently of what is done with it:

> Appalling instrumentalists or disastrous transmission can indeed "massacre" a classical work; but "massacred", it nonetheless remains what it is, just as a mutilated body is still a body. […] We are not talking about disembodied music but about some highly developed forms of music, based on objects that are so perfectly understood, or at least so exclusively used as signs, that their realization in sound is, as it were, immaterial or at least secondary.

Performers usually derive their 'image-of-work' from the musical score, which is considered a concrete pillar upon which to ground the performance. This solidity attributed to the score has to do with the fact that, in a practice concerned with the past, the score stands out as having a certain objectivity, a material element that most substantially connects the performer to the composer's original intentions. And in a sense, this is also true. If we follow Derrida's claim that language is always already writing (interview with Derrida in Stiegler 2002 [1996], 162), then a composition cannot be considered as a free-standing idea in the mind of the composer; it is already imagined in relation to the possibilities offered by musical notation, and realised in and through notation. In this perspective, score and work coincide. The objectivity imputed to the score is also understandable, especially when considering the overall evolution of musical notation in the last centuries. For a long period, musical notation was more of a shorthand system that musicians knew how to decode and complete, whereas throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the essence of the work became more codified in the score in terms of dynamics, expression and rhythm. The idea of a 'base' emerged – a clean, objective version of a piece which a performer could spice up within adequate limits. Also, while the popularity of performing from scores annotated by great musicians and experts had endured, in modern times the 'Urtext', or 'text of the origins', as Dorian (1996, 224) translates it, became the only dependable source for a reliable interpretation. Nowadays, classical musicians are most often trained to consider the score as a stable and fixed category, governing performance as an 'intelligent measuring device' (Orning 2014, 287), and allowing listeners to measure its correctness. On this note, Cobussen (2017, 111) formulates the traditional definition of the score as 'an authoritative or a coded grid, mainly designed to facilitate unidirectional instructions from composer to performer'. Carolyn Abbate (2004, 508) refers to this tradition as 'human bodies wired to notational prescriptions'.[50] In sum, musical notation since the classical period has

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[50] Based on thorough historical research, as Richard Taruskin (1995, 71) reminds us, the exacerbated textual criticism characteristic of modern editions contributes substantially to the authority of the score, which even increased with the rise of new technologies. Today scores are often accompanied by video or audio materials

been considered as a prescriptive and binding script, and its importance remains largely undisputed. This despite the growing tendency to question both the objectivity and the reliability of received traditions, which are being replaced by perspectives, or interpretations, on and of a musical score.[51]

When one operates with this definition of the musical work – the definition used in this study until now – one usually aims at a certain degree of fidelity towards the score and the work, varying from total to relative. Goehr (1996, 6) distinguishes for instance between 'a perfect performance of music' (PPM) and a 'perfect musical performance' (PMP). A perfect performance of music takes the 'of' seriously by considering the musical work as more important than its impact on the listener or the social aspects of a performance. What counts, in a performance, is the 'thorough understanding of the work' (ibid, 7) in the structural sense of Adorno, as discussed in Chapter One.[52] Performers have a responsibility towards the work and the composer, shaping their performances according to the *Werktreue* principle, or 'fidelity to the work'. This principle, as cellist Tanja Orning (2014, 296) claims, has 'an almost incredibly strong hold over performance', affecting not only instrumental performance but also musical discourse, perception and mediation formats, as I too have shown in previous chapters. By contrast, PMP is concerned with the 'doing' of the musician and/or the impact of the performance on the spectator regardless of whether the performer is strictly obedient to the score. 'Even if the sonorous event remains central, the perfect musical performance […] regards that event as inseparable from the actual performers who produce the sounds, from the formal, visual choreography of their musical movements, and from the real spaces or environments, acoustic and cultural, which shape it' (Goehr 1996, 18). In

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that show the performer how to prepare their instruments or execute certain actions (see, for example, Mauricio Pauly's *Patrulla Reliquia* (2015) for solo piano or Kristine Tjøgersen's *Travelling Light 2* (2015) for ensemble).

[51] Initiatives such as the Faithful! Festival in Berlin in 2014, running under the motto 'fidelity and betrayal of musical interpretation', present different interpretations of the same work during the same concert, showing how nuanced the perspective of performers of the same work can be. In artistic research, performers are looking back at early recordings instead of just scores to recover a more varied performance culture (Scott, 2014). For more details on the topic of the limits of freedom of the classically trained musician, much discussed since the last decades of the 20th century, see also Danuser (1992), Goehr (1992), Taruskin (1995), Dreyfus (2007) and Leech-Wilkinson (2020).

[52] Within this perspective, the social practice of music is conceptualised 'in terms of a direct and private communication from composer to listener.' In its most extreme expression, PPM leads to what Mary Hunter (2005, 361), in *To Play as if from the Soul of the Composer,* calls a 'conceptual disappearing of the performer', who is supposed to embody the music, and to become a vessel for the transmission of intent from composer to listener. Philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (2013, 115), in turn, suggests that to mediate art requires an ultimate disappearing act. The performer should, namely, 'transform into structure'. 'Transformation into structure' takes place when the activity of playing is superseded in the eyes of the players and spectators by the 'pure appearance' [Erscheinung] of what is being played. In more detail: '[The true nature of art] emerges when one takes the sense of transformation seriously. Transformation is not alteration, even an alteration that is especially far-reaching. […] Rather, play itself is a transformation of such a kind that the identity of the player does not continue to exist for anybody. Everybody asks instead what is supposed to be represented, what is 'meant'. The players (or playwright) no longer exist, only what they are playing' (ibid, 115-116). This belief in the higher importance of music is what led Glenn Gould to defend recordings and abandon the concert hall.

other words, in contrast to the ideal universe of the musical work, PMP is about energy, the body and gestures of the performer, the delight of the audience and the social experience. Goehr's distinction between PMP and PPM is of course schematic. In fact, as she explains herself, most of the time mainstream performance practice consists of a combination of both, with performers finding themselves very often in a 'strained' condition (ibid, 12) where they try to reconcile their belief in free and subjective interpretations with their desire to comply with the original ideas and intentions of the composer as specified by the musical score.

Artist researcher and guitarist Lucia D'Errico (2018a) deals with this paradox imaginatively, using the 'of' as a space in which to 'resist' or reconfigure her approach to the score and the work. More specifically, for D'Errico the 'of' represents a tension between faithful representation and the possibility of transformation contained in the act of translating the notated sign. It is like the canvasses of Francis Bacon, where the skeleton or sketches of the depicted images are visible behind the image, attesting to the temporal evolution of the painting and the many transformations that occurred between these first outlines and the final product: 'The canvas of the of, devoid of actual materiality and at the same time burdened with the virtual inertia of the past is the place of a crucial transformation' (ibid, 13). The way this materialises in her practice is by refusing conventional correspondences between the musical symbols in the score or the sounds she hears in a recording, and their acoustic realisation in performance. The decoding of scores and recordings happens via their association with former sonic experiences which she uses as a starting point for improvisation and new creations that may well include media other than sound. In brief, rather than rejecting the traditional 'image-of-work' and the materials generally used to construct it, she subverts this image, using it to explore the musical past and the way the latter manifests itself when she listens to music or reads scores. From the perspective of my own work, I see in D'Errico's explorations a parallel to the idea of metaxical amplification, since the musical work becomes for her a site of figurative amplification of her personal relationship to music, and as such, the pretext of an exploration that exceeds the work itself. Also, I find relevant the way in which D'Errico insists on calling her own creations 'performances of musical works' rather than compositions. This distinction might seem superfluous at first, but for the performer its consequences are immense. While composers, throughout music history, have transcribed and arranged scores by other composers, and have imprinted their own views upon somebody else's music, performers are not used to 'touching' these scores. Tinkering with or modifying them, as I have done in my performances, is in many senses a subversive act.

Indeed, returning to the various degrees of being truthful to the work, there are few examples of artistic projects which intervene directly with the practice of the performer and their relationship to the score. Intervention, as I would like to understand it here, also refers to indirect involvement, through the way artistic projects experiment with the modalities of musical presentation. An example is *Liquid Rooms* by Ensemble Ictus, a performance-concept which places equal focus on the music as on the social dimension

of performance. Conceived as informal and relaxed performance situations inspired by rock festivals and improvised gigs, *Liquid Rooms* is intended for those not familiar with the strict rituals of the traditional classical concert. In the version that I visited with a non-musician friend in Berlin in 2015, contemporary works were performed for several hours on a series of stages placed in different parts of the concert hall. Blackouts, strobing effects, projections and other extra-musical elements ensured a smooth and unbroken transition between stages and musical works, and the audience was invited to move freely within the concert space, entering or leaving at will. Another example that emphasises the 'eventness' of performance is the site-specific project *Kunsthalle for Music*. Here the curator-composer Ari Benjamin Meyers displaces musical performance from the concert hall to a so-called white cube – an art gallery space characterised by its neutrality, bright lighting and light-coloured walls. For this project, which I visited at the former Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam in 2017, Meyers selected a group of musicians who performed in the museum each day, all day, for the duration of the show. The white walls were left empty except for signposts indicating the title of the piece to be performed on that spot. Other than that, the musicians did all the work, alternating performances in the different rooms of the museum, playing solo, in small groups or as a whole ensemble. Since the performances were unannounced, the audience had to move around the rooms and follow the sounds to find out where to go and what would happen next. By displacing musical performance from the concert hall to a white cube, Meyers created a structure that would allow music to be produced and heard in accordance with the rules of an art gallery or museum. As such, in a white cube, people are supposed to walk, as is suggested by the partitioning of the space into several display areas, so if visitors at times sat down to enjoy a particular performance, it was a matter of choice.

These two examples pertinently question the temporal dimension of music. While most of the pieces performed on these occasions had a pre-defined temporal structure with a beginning-middle-and-end, very few visitors sat down or paused to listen to the works in their entirety. To use an expression by Peter Szendy (2008, 104), the way they listened, in relation to the works' structure, was 'lacunary'. Szendy (ibid) praises this 'lacunary' mode, which proposes an alternative to Adorno's structural and synthetic listening (see Chapter One), which he finds too absolutist:

> Now, according to Adorno, […] we have only the expert face-to-face with the representatives of an increasingly fallen listening, until music becomes pure "entertainment". "The tendency today", writes Adorno, "is to understand everything or nothing". […] with the notion of a work as Adorno presupposes it, we are necessarily led to this alternative: either to understand/hear everything (as it is, without arrangement being possible), or to understand/hear nothing. Perhaps most surprising […] is the absence of one possibility, as "theoretical" and quantitatively insignificant as it may be: namely, that distraction, lacunary listening, might also be a means, an attitude, to make sense of the work; that a certain inattention, a certain wavering of listening, might also be a valid and fertile connection in auditory interpretation at work.

As Szendy suggests, Adorno's views on listening are polarised: he denounces any form of listening other than those aiming at the understanding of the structure and content of musical works. He (1976 [1962]) writes that the analysis of listening must be done from the thing itself, i.e., from the structure of the music which provides objective data against which to measure the adequacy of listening. Although Szendy's critique on Adorno is understandable, so is Adorno's attitude, when considered contextually: For Adorno, listening to music was a serious, politically emancipating and self-cultivating activity. Therefore, there might have been a concern that non-focused forms of listening would banalise this important relationship to music or ignore the music's important socio-critical function. Such concerns were shaped, for instance, by the listening 'revolution' brought along after the 1950s by the rise of the recording industry and the increasing popularity of ambient or 'wallpaper' music in offices and public spaces. These cultural, social and political trends were perceived as harmful by Adorno and many of his kindred spirits. Consuming music without proper attention meant falling prey to the forces of the cultural industry, producing lazy listeners and alienated subjects. It turned music into a commodity, into something that was used rather than disinterestedly appreciated. The fear, then, was that the neoliberal logic of consumerism and lack of criticality reflected in these trends would affect the relationship with art, and therewith art's emancipatory potential.

And yet, such views on listening, as already alluded to in my Introduction, seem nowadays to be falling out of fashion. Adorno himself, in his later texts, already adopted a more open attitude to listening, considering that certain works or situations might invite to or even require different listening strategies. As curator Monika Pasiecznik (2012, n.p.) writes, non-judgementally, about *Liquid Rooms,* they are '[an] invitation to another kind of listening, more diversified, fragmentary, of differing intensity, full of associations and free drifting of thoughts'. Indeed, one recognises in the freedom given to the listeners to *Liquid Rooms* – the explicit possibility of entering and leaving the performance space at will – both the wish to connect to a contemporary culture characterised by growing informality and to an ecological listening. Listening ecologically is theorised by Herbert (see Chapter Three) as a combination of distraction and intensity, where the listener also focuses on things other than the music's structural unfolding. This worked for my non-musician friend, who, albeit more used to contemporary concerts, experienced this one as a space of freedom, because the possibility of deciding for herself when, what and how to listen made her feel more willing and less pressured to engage with the music.

To sum up, artistic projects like *Kunsthalle* or *Liquid Rooms*, by reconfiguring the concert hall environment and 'installing' musical performance in a non-musical environment, problematised time as a decisive musical parameter. How you deal with the temporal dimension of music determines how you will understand music. If a performance does not create the optimal conditions for focused listening, the symbolic time of music is experienced differently. Instead of perceiving a closed structure composed of parts forming a whole, the focus of the listener is on isolated passages and

fragments. So, even though musicians perform the works in a conventional manner, the way the works are presented affect the way they are perceived. These types of musical performances arouse interest because they incorporate rituals and listening modes that are admittedly more suitable to a contemporary habitus; they also offer new understandings of music as a temporal phenomenon. In what concerns the musicians, although neither the *Kunsthalle* or *Liquid Rooms* interfere with their practice in a substantial way, one could imagine that the popularisation of peripatetic reception practices will interfere over time with and transform more traditional performances. It might for instance no longer make sense to practice entire works or concentrate on defining their form and the relations between their parts when these are going to be heard in a fragmentary, or lacunary, way.

In contrast with these approaches, which demonstrate different levels of engagement with or resistance to the authority usually attributed to the musical work, there are yet other proposals. These outmaneuver the weight of the 'of' more fundamentally by redefining the very concepts of work and score themselves. One such maneuver comes from the artistic research programme *MusicExperiment 21* (ME21), with which I was associated between 2014 and 2017. ME21 sought to expand the traditional 'image-of-work' to include related scores, sketches, editions, renderings, recordings, philosophical texts, reviews, and films, among other heterogeneous materials. These materials were used by the group in experimental settings by overlaying instrumental performance, texts, images, electronic sounds, voice, and so on. In these constellations, the score became but one of the materials that constituted the work. The musical work was no longer regarded as a closed and abstract entity, at least partly encoded in a score that would determine its acoustic realisation, but as a potentiality which could be actualised by the performer in an infinite and indeterminate number of ways and media. As de Assis (2018, 40), the group's principal investigator, explains:

> Situated beyond 'interpretation', 'hermeneutics', and 'aesthetics', the *Rasch* series is part of wider research on what might be labelled 'experimental performance practices'. Such practices offer a tangible mode of exposing musical works as multiplicities. On the contrary, if one sticks to a traditional image of work based upon the One (or Idea), one has necessarily to stick also to notions of 'work concept', interpretation, authenticity, fidelity to the composer's intentions, and other highly prescriptive rules that originated in the nineteenth century. […]. What I mean is that every musical practice, every way of doing performance depends on, or is the direct result of, a specific ontological commitment. If one's goal is the passive reproduction of a particular edition of a musical piece from the early nineteenth century, one is indeed better advised to remain within the 'classical paradigm', with all its associated practices of survey, discipline, and control. But if one is willing to expose the richness of the available materials that irradiate from that piece, one has to move towards new ontological accounts.

De Assis implies that the way one chooses to perform a piece depends on one's conception of what a musical work is. The *Rasch*-series consisted of a superimposition of materials associated with Robert Schumann's *Kreisleriana op.16,* including music, texts, images and voices. By navigating these different layers, the audience is always

gaining new perspectives on the musical work being thematised in the performance. These shifting perspectives block the synthetic effort of the listeners as they attempt to encapsulate the piece in one comprehensive experience. As a result, the image of the work remains open. *Kreisleriana* cannot be defined as a particular musical work, but rather as a piece in a universe of 'things' associated with the idea of the work.

Rather than expanding the concept of the musical work to integrate different elements, Nicholas Cook likes to open up the musical score. Inspired by theatre and performance studies, Cook proposes to look at scores as scripts rather than as prescriptive documents. In theatre or film, scripts are unfinished by nature and completed by the many people involved in the production of a performance. That being so, scripts emphasise process and open-endedness, whereas a score tends to represent a fixed product or structure that performers are required to reproduce.

> Whereas to think of a Mozart quartet as a 'text' is to construe it as a half-sonic, half-ideal object reproduced in performance, to think of it as a 'script' is to see it as choreographing a series of real-time, social interactions between players: a series of mutual acts of listening and communal gestures that enact a particular vision of human society […]Musical works underdetermine their performances, but to think of their notations as 'scripts' rather than 'texts' is not simply to think of them as being less detailed. (As I mentioned, performance routinely involves not playing what is notated as well as playing what is not notated; in this sense there is an incommensurability between the detail of notation and that of performance, so that notions of more or less are not entirely to the point.) Rather, it implies a reorientation of the relationship between notation and performance. The traditional model of musical transmission, borrowed from philology, is the stemma: a kind of family tree in which successive interpretations move vertically away from the composer's original vision. The text, then, is the embodiment of this vision, and the traditional aim of source criticism is to ensure as close an alignment as possible between the two, just as the traditional aim of historically-informed performance is to translate the vision into sound […The] shift from seeing performance as the reproduction of texts to seeing it a cultural practice prompted by scripts results in the dissolving of any stable distinction between work and performance. (Cook 2001, n.p.)

In this passage, Cook opposes the notion of script to what he calls a practice of reproduction. This practice is based on the idea that performances are supposed to be no more than the realisation of the original vision of the work. In contrast, in contemporary theatre, many practitioners have an unfettered way of approaching classical texts, using them as a source of inspiration rather than as something one 'does justice' to, and therefore not hesitating to alter or leave out parts to suit their conceptual needs. In fact, since the 1960s, a theatrical orientation known as postdramatic theatre has been reconfiguring the relationship between staging, performance situation and text. The prefix post- in 'postdramatic' indicates a rupture with the traditional relationship of theatre to drama (Lehmann 2006, 2). This also contained a rupture with the classical tradition of staging or *mise en scène*, usually concerned with complementing and giving physical shape to the intentions of the author and the context of the original text of the play, also known as the primary text. In postdramatic theatre, however, the focus is on the so-called 'performance text', comprising the 'whole situation of the performance'

(ibid, 85). This means that staging is no longer subordinated to the primary text but considered a point of departure for the realisation of a broader theatrical project. When Cook speaks of script, he is referring to the possibility of the musical score becoming, as Lehmann (2006, 32) writes, 'a beginning and a point of departure, not a site of transcription/copying'.

In an essay about Carmelo Bene's stagings of Shakespeare plays, literary scholar Fernando Cioni (2018) differentiates between rewritings and adaptations of the primary text. 'Adapting' a text doesn't mean that the original (perceived) meaning of the work is modified, although there are linguistic alterations, cuts or addition of scenes and speeches (ibid, 164). This form of adaptation is generally meant to give a more contemporary note to classical texts and corresponds to what Hermann Danuser (1992) has theorised in music as an actualising mode of musical interpretation. Characteristic of the actualising approach, more popular in post-WWII theatre productions than in music, is indeed a need to make the past understandable and more palatable for today's audiences. To convey the expressive intentions of the composer, performances should transcend the physical conditions available to the composer. Therefore, the performers who defend such views do not hesitate to adapt the text at their own discretion, to change instrumentation or other artifices. Glenn Gould's recording of the *Goldberg Variations*, with its extensive use of new recording techniques to project articulation and highlight specific structural elements, is a good musical example of this type of practice. 'Rewriting' a text, on the other hand, is a more inventive activity consisting in intervening in the text from a particular ideological standpoint (Cioni 2018, 165). Rewriting also means de-historicising a text or contraposing it to other texts, in which case the text becomes the starting point for an entirely new creation. The intention behind such transformation is often of a critical nature, either with regard to the content of the original text or in relation to the conventions of theatre and canonical expectancy. As Cioni (ibid, 163) explains: 'In contemporary theatre, as in culture at large, the classics are updated, modernized, in order to free them from a static and inviolable literary tradition, which has been appointed (chosen as) the simulacrum of Western culture. The creative act [...] becomes a critical act'.

The way text has come to be dealt with in theatre was one of the first inspirations for my own research. My interest in theatre was sparked by a year spent as a participant-observer of the bachelor course in theatre direction at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts between 2010 and 2011. One of the exercises of the course consisted in creating 'opening structures', or non-narrative situations that introduce a play by establishing a context and an atmosphere for the subsequent action.[53] These opening structures

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[53] A known example is the opening sequence of Lars von Trier's film *Melancholia*, including bizarre images of dead animals falling, fragments of snowy landscapes by Pieter Bruegel, the long and the never resolved harmonic tension of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, among other elements fluctuating between real and surreal and compellingly suggesting the emotional detachment that we would later recognise in the mental struggle of the protagonist.

included a variety of media such as light, movement, image, sound and so on. I recall for instance spreading scents into the air, and making spectators walk through tunnels and on wet ground. Defining their success involved the combination of psychological discernment and a great precision in the use of different media. Through these thought-provoking exercises I have learned that theatrical elements have their own form of presence, and that they can be calibrated or 'voiced' to create different meanings independent of a text. A few years later, hosting theatre theorist Hans-Thies Lehmann and theatre directors Heiner Goebbels and Tore Vagn Lid at the Ultima Academy, I became better acquainted with the way postdramatic practitioners experiment widely with the boundaries of traditional theatre by creating interactions between classical texts and contemporary discourses, or by including audiences and reality (the 'outside world') as co-players on stage (Lehmann 2006). This approach to text was rather stimulating compared to the strict Werktreue tradition in which I was trained.[54] Together with the experience of opening structures, the theatrical freedom in the use of texts informed the conception of grounded performances, since I could now think of texts, including musical texts, as yet another 'voiceable' element in a performance, and not necessarily the central one.

Comparing Cook's idea of script and the ontological reconfiguration proposed by ME21, I find the latter inspiring as a method, especially for performers wishing to experiment beyond their usual practice. Still under the pretext of performing a work, the performer can explore different media and operate scenographically and compositionally, deciding how to organise these media in space and time. In a sense, the role of the performer comes closer to that of music theatre directors or curators, in a performance in which they may or may not play their instrument, all depending on what they decide to include in their image-of-work. Similarly, Cook's idea of scores as scripts is attractive and even closer to my grounded performances because it makes performers more mindful of and engaged in aspects of the performance other than just the work. As with *Rasch*, Cook suggests performers should think like scenographers, dramaturges or theatre directors. They should no longer be focused solely on the work but instead consider a larger context, including space, the presence of the audience, movements, lighting, and perhaps even environmental sounds. The redefinition of the work and the score, then, entails a redefinition of the performer's *modus operandi*. Yet, although these considerations did inform me in the conception of my performances, I hesitate to embrace the idea of redefining work and score, for even though considering the score as a script reconfigures and expands the preparation process as well as the performer's awareness of the physical situatedness, it does not necessarily entail more openness and spontaneity during the performance itself. They remain prepared, rehearsed, and with a fixed end. Besides, in *Rasch* in particular, the absence of the 'of' removes the element of friction, so that one can experience the performance as too one-dimensional. The

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[54] As an illustration of the exacting nature of my earlier musical education, I still recall how some of the professors at my former university in Freiburg used to count the wrong notes we played during our exams. The fear of wrong notes is still one if not the worst nightmare of classical musicians.

historicity of the materials, and the constant allusion to the *Kreisleriana*, allow the sensation of being in a museum rather than problematising the definition of the work. Instead of Goehr's 'imaginary museum of musical works', it created a beautiful and poetic museum of imaginary musical works. [55]

Taken together, these examples are illustrative for the way in which the musical work is considered within a context, instead of an autonomous and self-sufficient entity that should be heard in-and-of itself. In each case, the work becomes a pretext for the exploration of the performer's personal sound world, of historical and associative perspectives, of the sociality of the performance event, of alternative modes of listening and artistic spaces, and of the performance environment itself. Each time, the insertion of the work into a different context informs and transforms the performer's practice and the perception of the work. Experiencing the performance is no longer centred on the realisation and reception of the work, but, rather, on its situatedness, including the interactions between various agents, and the relations that audience and performers draw from these interactions. This is certainly the most essential way in which these examples inform my own work, to which I now return by looking back at the process that led me to the notion of metaxical amplification and its implementation in grounded performances (see Chapter Two), and by investigating the changing ways in which I, during this process, related to the 'of'.

Why Schubert

When I started this research, I worked very conventionally. I approached the musical works that I later used in my grounded performances as a 'mainstream' performer, respectful of the work and the traditions of musical interpretation and extracting from these works a great part of my artistic ideas. It all began with the *Sonata in B-flat Major D960* by Franz Schubert. Having performed the sonata several times in diverse circumstances, including my master exam in historical keyboards and a concert shared with a noise improviser, I had a special relationship with the piece which included the sense that there was something odd about it. I wanted to find out what that was. Since I, at the beginning of this research, had no more than a vague question regarding the current relevance of musical works from the past, I started out by practicing the sonata again and again, dissecting its history and analysing its harmony and form like a 'regular' interpreter would. Progressively, associations started forming in my mind concerning issues of perspective, perception and the passing of time. Many of these associations emerged from my analysis of the piece. As Adorno (2005 [1928]) writes, Schubert's music in general has a fragmentary character, unfolding without coherence

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[55] Other performances by ME21 have been more successful in the sense of creating a discourse that goes beyond the universe of the musical work itself, however large this universe is now considered to be. *Nietzsche: The Weight of Music* performed at the Tanzquartier Wien in November 2015 is a good example of a performance that both thematised and problematised the tradition without locking up the audience in a self-referential musical universe.

or concern for the constraints of fixed form. Poetically, he (ibid, 9) suggests that the music grows like crystals, penetrating cavities, forming solid from liquid.

> Everything in Schubert's music is natural rather than artificial, this growth, entirely fragmentary, and never sufficient, is not plantlike, but crystalline. As the preserving transformation into the potpourri confirms the formerly configurative atomizations characteristic of Schubert – and through this the fragmentary character of his music, that makes it what it is – it illuminates Schubert's landscape all at once.

What became apparent from my analysis of the sonata is that the formal treatment of its main theme gives it the fragmentary character. Yet the constant repetition of this theme gives it a luminous character as well, as suggested by Adorno. Repeated innumerous times throughout the first movement, the theme ceases after a while to be perceived as a centre and the movement's protagonist; instead, it shines light on the figurations, rhythmical variations, motives, bass line, and harmonic modulations that surround it. Explained otherwise, although the many repetitions of the theme make listeners familiar with it, and although this familiarity 'calls' them to it, their attention shifts after a while to become more engaged with what takes place beyond, beneath or around it. For example, the theme's presence alerts one to changes such as rhythmical variations in the eighth-note accompaniment in the middle voice between bars 1-18; the variation of the main theme in the melody, imitated by the third note of each four-note group of the bass accompaniment, in bars 20-26; and a doubling of the theme transposed a sixth-lower in the first note of each triplet of the bass accompaniment in bars 36-44.

Furthermore, the absence of pointed rhetorical figures and transitions between the renewed appearances of the theme gives the impression that these appearances are purely accidental. Therefore, when listening to the sonata, I can feel like a passenger on a train driving through tunnelled railways who, in-between these tunnels, is surprised by the ever-changing landscapes. This is most like my experiences of recurring memories and passing thoughts that connect to other thoughts or disappear without me knowing how or why. In this light, my experience of the piece acquires an existential dimension, reflecting a certain contingency, which is possibly why there is a certain melancholy in several descriptions of this sonata, something about fleetingness and vulnerability, entwined with openness and surprise. However, as Adorno says, it is not easy to find a story in Schubert's instrumental music, to really guess what the piece is about. The logic of Schubert is neither programmatic nor psychological. I noticed, in fact, that when searching for concrete topics that could be collated with the sonata, nothing stuck – the piece might be about nothing, really. Instead, and this is my own interpretation, it articulates perceptions; perhaps it is even self-referentially commenting on the act of perceiving. Therefore, looser concepts of perspective reversal, time, modes of sensing and images of changing and ever-expanding landscapes established

themselves as key themes that could be worked on further in my decoding of the sonata.[56]

In a conceptual phase preceding the invention of metaxical amplification, working with photographer Karen Stuke, composer Erik Dæhlin and scenographer Tormod Lindgren, some of the first ideas that came up during our talks were formulated in relation to these themes – reversal of perspective, the passing of time, modes of sensing and changing landscapes. In the notes from our meetings, I find references to open-endedness, and the suggestion to build a rotating platform that would present the pianist to the audience in ever-shifting angles. There is also the idea of transposing the imaginary topography of the piece (its open landscapes) to the physical space of the performance, for instance by avoiding an illuminated centre or fixed seating positions in favour of creating a wandering space – very cliché in the context of Schubert but for a good reason. Whereas open-endedness and a wandering space were implemented in the final performance, the rotating platform was considered counterproductive to the intention of decentralising attention, since it would have required a centralised stage. Nevertheless, what stayed in my mind was the idea of rotation and the multiplication of perspectives that would come along with it. As my first intention of creating a music theatrical performance around the sonata progressively gave way to an interest in exploring the concert situation and its auditory landscape, this initial idea metamorphosed progressively into the idea of a system that would make one hear a familiar situation with new ears.

In the case of the *Study No. 5 (for left hand alone) after Bach's Chaconne, BWV 1016* by Johannes Brahms, I chose the piece first and foremost for its concision. After the experience of *touchez,* I was looking for simplicity so that I could better explore the metaxical amplification system. Additionally, its closed variation form reminded me of the partition mania of the 19th century, and especially its separation between art and the everyday. The piece, composed of sixty-four variations over a four-bar harmonic progression, recalls the secluded space of the concert with its fixed structures and familiar works, but one in which an infinity of emotions and sensations could be experienced. Harkening back to the issue of concision, what appealed to me was its left-hand line, unaccompanied, an elegant solution found by Brahms to evoke the solitary line of the violin. Dramaturgically, I was looking for tension. It seemed to me that this lone voice, in dialogue with amplified noise, would offer resistance to distraction, and sustain the focus of performer and audience more tightly than a complex, polyphonic work. Searching for this contrast and finding myself at the heart of the relatively large city of Porto, I decided to amplify the contextual element of 'location' by playing back the noise of the streets in the venue.

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[56] Although Adorno's approach to Schubert resonates with my own, musicologically speaking it is rather unconventional, standing in contrast to the work of known Schubert scholars such as musicologist Edward Cone and music semiotician Robert Hatten. They have sought to interpret Schubert's music dramaturgically and in terms of its 'extrageneric' meaning (Cone 1982, 239), that is, with reference to non-musical objects, events, ideas or emotions. For instance, Cone speaks of the music's expressive content, while Hatten studies the works of Schubert in terms of their 'tropological meaning', i.e., programmatically and through metaphors.

In a nutshell, and to finalise this study, interpretive considerations apropos the musical works were crucial for the development of artistic concepts such as the metaxical amplification, as well as for punctual decisions such as what to include in each performance and what to amplify. I would not have come to the idea of investigating the concert situation or of amplifying the performance environment without the Schubert sonata. Neither would I have been able to observe the impact of the amplification without the precision and dramatic force of Bach's *Chaconne* as arranged by Brahms, pulling attention towards the musical work while at the same time engaging with the environmental noises. So, for my performances it mattered that I played this particular sonata and the study by Brahms. Each of these compositions conveys a particular atmosphere and has specific characteristics that have inspired me when conceiving the performances. Other works would have resulted in different choices, a different metaxical strategy and different outcomes. In this sense, these projects were very much the work of musical interpretation in the traditional sense of the term.

That said, the two pieces had a functional use in my grounded performances beyond their idiosyncrasies. I also chose them because they are symbolic objects belonging to the canon of classical music and associated with the introspective aesthetics of the 19th century that inspired silent listening practices. In other words, I selected them because they represent the particular period of the past in which the sonic apparatus that characterises today's mainstream concert became a reality in public concert life. As I interpret these pieces, I perform their pastness or the past through them. When noise, an element so unwanted in the performance of such works, pours into the space and interrupts or interferes with the perception and interpretation of these works, their fragility is revealed. Through this fragility they reveal their pastness and a certain awkwardness in appearing in the present. When I interpret them, it feels as though I have a double role: that of a performer 'of' and that of a performer of the 'of', representing through the musical work the past and its attached traditions. I am aware of this double role: objectifying my practice has allowed me to distance myself enough to be able to observe and acknowledge the way this practice functions. Objectification was also the only way through which I could give up my interpretive control and let the environment play me. Within this context, the musical work ceased to be an abstract image or an unattainable goal, but an object of friction. Thence, bringing noise and work together in one performance signified for me the staging and resolution of the tension between two forces: tradition and conservation and the desire for change.

Conclusion

This research has had two main objectives. Firstly, to understand the importance of a silent background for the performance and reception of classical music. Secondly, to challenge the custom of performing in silent environments, and to investigate the artistic and aesthetic potential of performing classical music in a non-silent environment. I have explored these issues through the close observation of my practice as a performer of classical and contemporary music, testimonies by other musicians, literature and examples from a variety of disciplines including music performance, media theory, musicology, music sociology, philosophy, anthropology, the visual arts and theatre, as well as through the creation of experimental performances.

This methodology has given rise to a number of concepts. *Metaxical amplification* refers to the sound amplification of the sonic environment of a classical music performance, including sounds produced by the action of the piano, the bodies of performer and audience, the concert hall and its surroundings and so on. *Grounded performances* are concerts that are metaxically amplified, and where the sonic environment of the performance is actively integrated into the musical performance, as opposed to an ideally silent environment for the interpretation of musical works. A central affordance of grounded performances is that sounds emerging from the amplification decentre attention, preventing the usual dominance of the musical work over the sonic landscape of the performance. In this reconfigured environment attention is reoriented from the musical work to a larger environment of which the work is 'only' a part. This reorientation becomes an invitation to think of musical performance beyond the conventional idea of interpreting a musical work. Instead of considering the sounds emerging from the performance in evaluative terms, i.e., in terms of how they correspond to what one would like to hear or what the score and performance conventions tell the performer to hear and play, one becomes receptive and reactive to the agency of the environment. Music-making, in this sense, is transitive rather than purely interpretive: the performer acts in direct reference to and in contact with the surrounding objects and events, interacting and improvising with them, even if this means deviating from prefabricated performances of a musical work. The work, inscribed in an environment that is fundamentally unpredictable, becomes a pre-text to listening and performing in an expanded sense: as a relational, reactive and contextual practice that develops in the interplay between traces of the past, represented by the work, and fluctuations of the physical present.

Furthermore, the research has also made evident that silence is not by definition or always necessary to make musical performances possible or successful. It is necessary if one aims at an intimate and exclusive relationship between music and listener, where one's inner transformation can become paramount. However, unless this transformation

is anchored in a wider sonic environment, it will not be grounded. A grounded musical performance is like real life: full of distractions and imperfections; it is like a work-in-progress, where the challenge is to find energy and poetry within this less perfect and more messy reality. If a musical performance is to be grounded, one needs to learn to accept imperfections and to consider musical works as unfinished, as 'entangled and worldly', to use an expression by Donna Haraway (2016, 4). Silence, then, acquires a different meaning. It is no longer there because it has always been there, or because it must be there, but because it has a value, and because it enables a particular kind of musical experience, one among many possible others. It becomes an element, not of tradition, but of choice.

Such insights raise questions and possibilities that are not sufficiently addressed or explored in this study. One of them is what would happen if metaxical amplification was used *outside* of the concert hall. There are several reasons why I decided to conduct my experiments in the concert hall and a historical library located within a music centre. The first has to do with expectations. One of my leading questions concerned the capacity to abstract oneself from everything but the object being focused on. In public spaces such as streets, train stations, parks, or similar, there is no pre-defined focal object of attention. When one hears someone playing the piano at a noisy airport lounge, the music appears as a bonus for music lovers, or an addition to an already noisy environment. It is not the situation's intended focal event, but rather something that enriches and/or modifies our experience of the space. The expectations towards listening or towards what is played are therefore different from the expectations of the concertgoer, who attends a concert primarily in order to experience the music. The nature of these expectations, in turn, define the relationship between music and environmental sounds, which will be more tense in the concert hall, where non-musical sounds are usually unwanted. I was interested in exploring precisely the tension arising when the aspirations towards an autonomous form of listening are contradicted. Even in *Interferences*, where the emerging sounds consisted of street noise, the tension was present and reinforced by the estrangement caused by these foreign sounds in the hall as played back through loudspeakers rather than through open doors or windows. In non-musical spaces, this tension would not be there, or at least not so markedly, and the starting point for the musical experience and the performance would be totally different. In terms of performance, I would probably behave differently as well. The concert hall is the environment in which I am used to enact certain ideals such as fidelity to the work, the composer and/or the score. Playing outside of the concert hall in whatever situation tends to create a distance from these ideals and makes them seem less binding. My interaction with the environment would have a playful rather than a conflictual or liberating character. However, although I have chosen here to focus on the tension and disorientation created by the unwantedness of noise in the concert hall, I am aware that seriously exploring the possibilities of the metaxical amplification in open public environment might lead to interesting results, albeit of a different nature than the ones proposed here. These results might yield new answers to the relevance of classical music in contemporary culture, including a more extreme understanding of performance as a

transitive activity. Yet is important to realize that engaging with such spaces comes with other questions, one of the most important being *why* classical music should be performed there. A second reason for performing in more conventional concert venues, especially *touchez des yeux*, was my curiosity to explore specific types of noise, in particular those generated by playing an instrument. Outside spaces are obviously noisy, whereas the noise of the concert hall is more subtle, and part of it is derived from the act of playing. I was interested in exploring this auditory split between tonal sounds and the mechanical sounds and acoustic reverberations accompanying these sounds. Finally, the institutional nature of the concert hall attracted me as an exemplary laboratory for a type of experiment that could eventually be transposed to similar spaces, for example for other art forms. Concert halls exist as secluded spaces, and they will not cease to exist very soon. One of my concerns was how to open up these spaces from within, showing multiple and contrasting layers of tradition and meaning, pointing at structural disbalances and sedimented rituals but also at the possibility of rediscovering and reconfiguring a space so familiar and loaded with tradition, as ways of encouraging a similar reconfiguration in other secluded and institutionalised places.

This research focused on my solo performances. A next step would be to expand my solitary experiments with metaxical amplification to a chamber music context, in order to see if it can also affect the practice of other musicians. In the concert that concludes this research project, I plan to break beyond the solo playing by playing with musician-colleagues from the Ensemble neoN to explore together the environmental sounds emerging during the performance of a Mozart piano sonata. Ensemble neoN has already started working in this direction. In a performance in March 2022, abandoning the score altogether, this classically trained ensemble improvised and developed new musical material for three hours based on 'noise' alone, together with noise musicians from the Far East Network (FEN) ensemble and Lasse Marhaug. The idea of this concluding performance is that the musicians should become 'living' microphones and speakers, imitating and amplifying the environmental sounds, but they should also be free to improvise with Mozart's composition, with each other and with me. During the rehearsals, I have conceived exercises to train our listening, and making ourselves as a group more attuned to the 'noisy' content of the concert hall. I expect this chamber music project to raise new questions such as how to coordinate (or not) our reactions to the emergent sounds, or whether to come back together to the musical score or to follow individual paths all the way through the performance.

On a more personal tone, looking back at what I have achieved vis-à-vis my research questions, I see further perspectives for my own practice. At the start of this research, I was in a strange place, deeply entrapped by performance traditions and at the same time rebelling against them. My discomfort with tradition had been accompanying me for a long time. Having started to play the piano early, by the time I was about ten, I started working with an inspiring teacher who knew how to light up my imagination, connecting classical music to books, painting, travels, emotions, history, nature. The growing

interest in music coincided with some traumatic events in my early adolescence. I found refuge in the piano and in the fantasies evoked by the music, as well as in the life stories of the composers whose music I admired. My teacher was, like me, imbued with respect and fascination for a musical past that she made sound so important. Recognising in me a certain potential, she convinced me and herself that I had a certain vocation and that it was my 'mission' to disseminate music and this past. By the time I was twelve I was practicing for several hours every day, taking part in competitions, and moving firmly towards a musical career. With this came the constraints: although I enjoyed the daily discipline required to succeed, the pressure of doing well, and the fact of being constantly exposed – 'put on view'– to be appreciated by a critical audience of classical lovers were sometimes too heavy to bear. I remember feigning sickness a few times to avoid meeting the gaze and expectations. In order to perform, I had to create a protective shield around myself when playing. There came to be two of me: one that was passionate about the music and the other that hated this music, because it made me feel like I was never good enough. Studying both early music and contemporary music during my bachelor studies liberated me from this tense condition. My passion for music gained some freedom. Learning, for example, that harpsichordists are encouraged to ornament and define their own articulations, for the first time I began to play notes that were not specified in the score. I also began working closely with composers who did not have all the answers about how to realise their music. This was illuminating because, having grown up with Beethoven's bust on my family's piano among other deifying traditions, until then I had treated all composers as omniscient beings, whose authority I could not defy. After this, I began experimenting, and it was a golden time. Yet, although these experiences helped me find my way in my professional life, my relationship with classical music remained strained.

This whole trajectory has represented for me a way to reconnect with classical music. Delving into the complexities of my 'conventional' practice as a classical performer, I have begun to appreciate it and respect it more. This newfound freedom has removed the resentment that was formed around this tradition. At the same time, I have become less afraid to deviate from it since I now better understand the depth of the classical music tradition and I feel more ownership of my own musical choices. There have also been changes in practical terms. Analysing my experiences at the piano, in particular the processes underlying the construction and realisation of a musical interpretation and of temporally shaping a musical work, has given me new authority and more flexibility when performing these works in a conventional sense. I believe that formulating these processes was instrumental in this sense. More than just recording my experiences, it has also helped to consolidate my practice, making me better able to make conscious and informed decisions regarding how, why and in which conditions I would like to play. Also, before this research I had learned and known a great deal about music history, but this concerned mainly the life and ideas of composers or the evolution of musical styles. How I should perform, in which environments and according to which rituals and customs, were a given, as so many other aspects of the performance practice. I now realise much more clearly how my relationship to the musical work, as well as

the way and the environment in which usually I perform and listen to classical but also contemporary music are richly steeped in a wider sociohistorical context. This realisation has opened the path for a reflection on how contemporary ideals, unconscious biases and acquired habits (such as the way we are used to pay attention), might affect my practice, and possibly also this research. It makes me feel responsible for how my practice and the choices that I make within it might contribute to reinforce and transform these ideals, biases and habits. But it also makes me understand how I, when being aware of these elements in the shaping of my practice, can impose on this practice my own ideas and visions, and express concerns and curiosities that go beyond musical questions and issues. By developing my own performance environment, for instance, I have found a new space for myself where performance is not about how the piece should be played, but about using music to explore a space and to investigate how perception unfolds within this space.

Beyond these realisations and experiences, this research has been important for redefining what it means for me to be a musician. Under the umbrella of artistic research, I could connect various activities and interests, as well as knowledge from various fields, such as the curatorial, media theory, performance studies, theatre and performance art, sociology and so on. I have also had the occasion to develop my writing skills and to publish articles and essays related to my research topics in various publications dedicated to music curatorship and to the relationship between contemporary musical practice and the classical music tradition. In the online journal *OnCurating* (Amaral 2020b*)*, I have discussed the role of the contemporary performer as a 'producer of situations'; in the book *Traces of Vang: Suspended Spring* (Amaral 2020a), I have analysed how contemporary artists deal with the musical archive; in *Impossible Situations: Concerts in The Making* (Amaral, Hellqvist and Hannesdóttir 2021), I have, together with my duo partner Karin Hellqvist, described our experiments with curating performances on various stages and in collaboration with artists from other disciplines; and in the anthology *Contemporary Piano Music: Performance and Creativity* (Amaral 2021a), I have presented my own practice in the light of performance history.

As Lucia D'Errico stated in a lecture entitled 'What Can Artistic Research Do?', unlike pure musical performance, artistic research gives importance to the theoretical insights of the musician, who becomes more than their musical skills. While excellence in traditional music performance is not simple, from a research perspective it is at the same time 'all too easy' she says, because it relies almost solely on the deployment of pre-constituted postures and prefigured competences. Artistic research on the other hand, because it emphasises the interplay between practice and theory, represents an arena for the performer to develop and integrate their musical practice, varied skills, interests and knowledge that go beyond the purely musical or the purely practical. My practice now expands beyond the mastery of an instrument: I cannot think of performing without considering the environment and the context in which I perform, and how these may inform or influence the artistic, perceptual and aesthetic experience. Preparing a performance does not only mean learning to play the music but also shaping an

environment and engaging with its contextual aspects. To be able to engage with these aspects even more actively in the future (for this research is but a beginning), I will need to deepen my research, which will be different each time, and which will each time offer an opportunity to expand my practice to yet other domains and fields of interest.

These personal insights make me reflect on the positive results that could arise from including, early in one's musical education, some of the topics discussed in this dissertation, as well as its general methodology, based on a combination of reflection and artistic experimentation. It could for instance prepare students to make more active and informed choices. Over the last decade, one can notice a tendency towards training musicians to be 'makers' in a wider sense: they should be able to conceive and produce their own projects, and to adapt to and work in a variety of circumstances. However, more can be done, particularly in terms of making them mindful of the why's of this 'makership' and in general, in the development of critical reflection and experimental tools such as those provided by artistic research. In teaching activities undertaken during this research, I have noticed how thirsty students are to better understand the fundamentals of their practice and to include elements from other discourses and disciplines. In writing about the course With and Beyond Music which I currently teach at the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague (Amaral, 2021b), I have claimed that students are 'yearning to connect', even if this involves distancing themselves from traditional moulds. Like me before them, these students have had little or no education on curatorial issues such as why we play in a silent environment or why we relate to the musical score in a certain way. Neither have they been encouraged to challenge these and other givens of the musical tradition. Yet confronting the why's and how's of their practice, although it often involves an initial moment of crisis or resistance, unleashes their creativity and willingness to take risks. Courses like With and Beyond Music have the potential of speaking directly to the yearning to connect among students. It has been my experience, shared by a significant majority of my students, that this type of education has the possibility to enhance reflexivity and encourage students to experiment beyond their usual practices. However, this curatorial approach is yet to find home in academic institutions.

The same can be said of unorthodox improvisational practices. Improvisation has always been important in musical performance and education. During the Baroque period, it was usual to flourish melodies with spontaneous ornamentations and to define the accompaniment of a thoroughbass or create one's own cadenzas on the spot. Until late into the 19th century, classical musicians used to improvise in public performances, and even to compete about who would do it better and in the most virtuosic manner. Even though this has now partly fallen into disuse, this practice is still taught in most music conservatoires. It is, however, always taught in relation to a melody, to harmonic or rhythmical progressions and other elements likely to be found in the score. By contrast, this research encourages a form of improvisation based upon noise. In my view, to practice this kind of improvisation, based upon all sorts of elements external to both the score and/or the usual language of classical music (a space, an image or abstract

ideas), would better develop a student's imagination and creative skills, sonic or otherwise.

There is always the fear, with such innovations, that tradition would somehow get lost. I do not believe this to be so. The question is not to reject the old but to create more elastic spaces where old and new can coexist. In interrogating and deviating from their usual practice, performers might well feel empowered to explore unorthodox avenues and choose for new musical paths altogether. On this journey, certain aspects of the tradition might become less relevant or important. However, those choosing to pursue classical performance in a traditional sense would be operating more consciously and in an informed way, which would in turn produce more convincing interpretations, performed with more ownership. Whether or not this will come to pass, time will tell. As the painter Kazimir Malévich (cf. Groys 2013, n.p.) used to say, it is important to be able to let go of the past as well. 'Life knows what it is doing', he once wrote about the excessive zeal in preserving art, 'and if it is striving to destroy, one must not interfere, since by hindering we are blocking the path to a new conception of life that is born within us'.

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Summary

Informed by my experience as curator and performing musician, this research is an exploration of classical music performance from a curatorial perspective. It reflects upon, but also challenges through artistic creation, the configuration of traditional performance environments and, more specifically, the conventional practice of performing classical works in silent environments. My motivation for undertaking this research was twofold: to better understand this little-discussed yet dominant practice, and also to problematise this practice: enveloping musical works in silence is in many ways similar to how objects are displayed in museums. While displaying artworks thusly protects and preserves them from detrimental environmental effects, placing them in vitrines renders them untouchable and, also in the case of musical works, rigidifies the relationship artists and audiences might forge with them, and with each other.

At the beginning of the research stands the question of why we perform and listen to classical music in silent environments and how this situation came to be. I trace this practice back to the Romantic era, and the emergence of a performance culture centred around the interpretation of musical works and aimed at the establishment of an intimate and even spiritual relationship between these works and listeners – a relationship detached from any worldly or material conditions. Within this culture, musical works are thought of as closed, ideal, and abstract objects that pre-exist their performance, and that are given material shape through performance. Complementing these historical considerations with observations from my own practice as a classical music performer, testimonies from renowned musicians and pedagogues, and theoretical notions such as Adorno's 'structural hearing', I conceptualise how we play and hear classical music as a form of reconstructing these abstract objects in time and space. This reconstruction process involves the creation of mental representations based on the musical score, the performance of these representations, and the synthesis of musical fragments into a coherent whole, as well as many other tasks requiring total attention to the music and facilitated by an environment where no sounds extraneous to the music can interrupt or interfere with either the performance or the experience of the listener. For these reasons, the evolution of both the classical concert and, later, the recording industry, have been marked by tireless efforts to cleanse the acoustic environment of classical performance. This has meant removing or minimising all sounds extraneous to the music, including mechanical sounds emanating from instruments, audience noises, and the hum of lighting and ventilation systems. Within this background of silence, music can shine undisturbed. This form of mediation echoes similar attitudes and rituals found in other art disciplines, such as theatre and museum practices, based upon the notion of the 'excluded middle': a principle stemming from communication and media theory, which assumes that materialities should disappear during the act of communication in order to establish a direct contact between message and receiver, or, in the case of classical performance, between the musical work and listener.

In addition to tracing the development of these new aesthetic preferences and listening habits, I also contextualise these practices in light of broader social concerns for productivity in the

increasingly industrialised and rationalised world of the 19th century. Here, too, attention played a key role. Focusing one's attention on a single object, to the exclusion of all other perceptual stimuli, was considered necessary for the establishment of a productive relationship with that object. Forming these productive relationships was important because the harnessing and mastering of objects resulted in the accumulation of knowledge and cultural capital, leading to personal, economic, and social growth. I then ponder how these wider social currents permeated emerging attitudes towards musical works and performances. Far from being necessary for the appreciation of music, I suggest that the establishment of silent performance environments, free from extra-musical interruptions and interferences, was part of a larger social construct: one that can be challenged, leading to other kinds of aesthetic experiences, in different circumstances, and in different times.

Next, I turn to my experience as a performer within the field of contemporary music, where many of the works that I perform are composed of sounds that are generally unwanted and considered as noise in classical music contexts. Looking back at musical composition since the early 1900s, I examine how noise – often prosaic, unexpected, and not totally controllable – has been used by Edgard Varèse, Pierre Schaeffer and John Cage, and more recently by Helmut Lachenmann, Catherine Lamb and Marina Rosenfeld, among others. Noise has represented a form of resistance to the Romantic demarcation between art and the everyday. It made art more lifelike, expanded our sonic horizons beyond tonal material, and it reoriented our attention towards the physical and environmental situatedness of performance, and thus away from the ideal universe of the musical work. As I further argue, engaging with these sounds leads performers to question aspects of their practice and to move out of their comfort zones. Noise challenges their need for technical control and their concern for shaping a perfect and finite object, while also making them more receptive to the fluctuations of the moment of performance, the agency of the environment in which they perform, and the value of improvisation. The experience of performing with noise in contemporary musical works has made me reflect upon how I might transport the performative affordances of noise to the performance of classical music. I have done this by developing performances of classical works using what I call 'metaxical amplification', inspired by the notion of *metaxy* – that which is in-between. Metaxical amplification is thus the amplification, by electronic or other means, of that which is between the musical work and the perception of the work: the sonic environment of the performance. Aristotle used the term *metaxy* to indicate the richness of the field of perception, which is the medium between the perceiving sense and the object of perception. Translated in musical terms, the environment of the performance can be a rich and important medium for the shaping of artistic experiences.

During this research I have developed two performances for solo piano and metaxical amplification, *touchez des yeux* (2018) and *Interferences* (2019). I describe in detail the challenges that marked my creative processes, which might be useful for others interested conceiving similar performances – particularly with regards to the correspondences and compromises to be made between conceptual stringency and practical realisation. Far from suppressing or maintaining certain elements of the performance environment as peripheral or neutral, metaxically-amplified performances focus on these elements and their potential

influence on the perception, realisation, and conception of musical works. Noise becomes performative in these performances because it includes the environment in the perception of the musical work; said differently, the work is perceived not for itself only but as part of this environment. In this way, metaxical amplification proposes a reconfiguration of the performance environment and the ways in which attention unfolds within that environment. It also challenges traditional notions of musical interpretation and a work-centred performance culture, since the performance mode emerging from this form of amplification is not oriented towards the interpretation of musical works, but rather to the sonic exploration of musical environments through these works. More broadly, metaxical amplification propels the development of a practice in which musical interpretation, improvisation, and curatorial thinking are tightly interwoven. Here, I am no longer responsible only for performing musical works, but also for designing the environment in which I perform these works, defining what to amplify, and how. I may also at times deviate from the conventional interpretation of a musical work as I react to the sounds emerging from amplification and improvise with them.

I review these and other findings in the final chapters of this dissertation in close dialogue with literature from various fields, including anthropology, philosophy, psychology, and media theory, as well as through related examples from the fields of musical performance and composition, theatre, and the visual arts. Engaging in such wide-ranging dialogues generates theoretical and artistic insights that may prove useful for other performers, curators, and teachers in the fields of classical and contemporary music and beyond. From anthropologist Anna Tsing, for instance, I develop the notion of 'multiphonic attention'. In contrast with classical definitions of attention, like that proposed by psychologist William James, where attention is seen as the intentional act of detaching an object from its context in order to better examine its individual properties, multiphonic attention encourages an open-ended form of listening that covers a sonic landscape broader than that of the musical work. From music philosopher Marcel Cobussen and anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, I examine concepts of musical improvisation and 'bricolage' as useful ways of conceptualising the kind of improvisation that occurs in my metaxically-amplified performances. Understood here as a form of bricolage, improvisation presents an occasion for the classical performer to reinvent their playing abilities beyond traditional piano techniques and the score, and in direct reference to and in contact with surrounding objects; reacting and playing with environmental noise rather than only delivering a predetermined interpretation. Finally, I explore performances by MusicExperiment21, Lucia D'Errico and the Ictus Ensemble, as well as Ari Benjamin Meyers's *Kunsthalle for Music*, and the experimental staging of classical texts in theatre, in order to contextualise my own artistic work within a growing tendency to approach musical works as pretexts for differentiated aesthetic and perceptual experiences, rather than as the sole and final purpose of performance. This tendency implies a renewed attitude toward musical tradition, which I discuss in the broader light of a musician's responsibility for, and positioning within, the relationship between present and past.

Samenvatting

Dit onderzoek, gebaseerd op mijn ervaring als curator en uitvoerend musicus, verkent klassieke muziekuitvoeringen vanuit het perspectief van een curator. Het reflecteert op de configuratie van traditionele uitvoeringsomgevingen en, meer specifiek, de conventionele praktijk van het uitvoeren van klassieke werken in stille omgevingen. Daarnaast daagt dit onderzoek en de daaraan gerelateerde artistieke creaties deze bestaande praktijk ook uit. Mijn motivatie voor dit onderzoek was tweeledig: een beter begrip krijgen van deze weinig besproken en toch dominante praktijk, en het problematiseren ervan. Het met stilte omhullen van muziekwerken is in veel opzichten vergelijkbaar met de manier waarop objecten in musea worden tentoongesteld: ze worden beschermd tegen en behoed voor schadelijke invloeden van buitenaf; veelal geplaatst in vitrines worden ze letterlijk onaantastbaar. Bij muziekwerken gebeurt iets soortgelijks wat de relaties beperkt die kunstenaars en publiek met die werken en met elkaar zouden kunnen aangaan.

In het eerste hoofdstuk staat de vraag centraal waarom klassieke muziek gemaakt en beluisterd wordt in stille omgevingen en hoe dit is ontstaan. Ik herleid deze praktijk tot de Romantiek, en het ontstaan van een uitvoeringscultuur waarin de interpretatie van muziekwerken centraal staat en gericht is op het tot stand brengen van een intieme en zelfs spirituele relatie tussen werk en luisteraar – een relatie los van wereldse of materiële omstandigheden. Binnen deze cultuur worden muziekwerken beschouwd als gesloten, ideale en abstracte objecten die voorafgaan aan hun uitvoering en in de uitvoering een materiële vorm krijgen. Door deze historische overwegingen aan te vullen met observaties uit mijn eigen praktijk als pianist, getuigenissen van gerenommeerde musici en pedagogen, en theoretische noties zoals Adorno's 'structurele luisteren', conceptualiseer ik hoe klassieke muziek gespeeld en beluisterd wordt als een vorm van reconstructie van deze abstracte objecten in tijd en ruimte. Deze reconstructie omvat het creëren van mentale voorstellingen op basis van de partituur, de uitvoering van deze voorstellingen, en het synthetiseren van muzikale fragmenten tot een samenhangend geheel, evenals vele andere taken die totale aandacht voor de muziek vereisen. Dit alles wordt gefaciliteerd door een omgeving zonder geluiden die vreemd zijn aan de muziek en die de uitvoering of de luisterervaring kunnen onderbreken of verstoren. Daarom wordt de evolutie van zowel het klassieke concert als later de opname-industrie gekenmerkt door onvermoeibare pogingen om de akoestische omgeving van klassieke uitvoeringen zo schoon, dat wil zeggen zo stil mogelijk te houden. Dit betekent dat alle geluiden die vreemd zijn aan de muziek – mechanische geluiden van instrumenten, geluiden van het publiek of het gezoem van verlichting en ventilatiesystemen – moesten worden verwijderd of tenminste tot een minimum beperkt. Slechts tegen deze achtergrond van stilte kan de muziek ongestoord schitteren. Deze vorm van bemiddeling weerspiegelt vergelijkbare houdingen en rituelen in andere kunstdisciplines, zoals theater- en museumpraktijken, en is gebaseerd op de notie van het 'uitgesloten midden': een principe dat voortkomt uit de communicatie- en mediatheorie, dat ervan uitgaat dat materialiteiten tijdens de communicatie moeten verdwijnen om een direct contact tot stand te brengen tussen boodschap en ontvanger, of, in het geval van de klassieke uitvoering, tussen het muziekstuk en de luisteraar.

Naast het onderzoeken van de ontwikkeling van deze esthetische voorkeur en luistergewoonte, contextualiseer ik deze praktijken ook in het licht van een bredere maatschappelijke bezorgdheid aangaande productiviteit in de steeds meer geïndustrialiseerde en gerationaliseerde wereld van de negentiende eeuw. Het richten van de aandacht op een enkel object, met uitsluiting van alle andere perceptuele stimuli, werd noodzakelijk geacht voor het aangaan van een echte relatie met een object. Zo'n relatie was belangrijk om het object goed in je op te kunnen nemen en daardoor een accumulatie van kennis en cultureel kapitaal mogelijk te maken, wat dan weer leidde tot persoonlijke, economische en sociale groei. Met andere woorden, ik heb me afgevraagd hoe meer algemene maatschappelijke ontwikkelingen de opkomende houding ten opzichte van muziekwerken en uitvoeringen hebben doordrongen. Hoewel niet per se noodzakelijk voor de waardering van muziek, stel ik dus dat het creëren van uitvoeringsomgevingen die vrij zijn van buitenmuzikale onderbrekingen en interferenties deel uitmaakte van een grotere maatschappelijke constructie. En precies dit kan op de proef worden gesteld en leiden tot andere esthetische ervaringen, in verschillende omstandigheden en in andere tijden.

Vervolgens ga ik in op mijn ervaring als uitvoerend musicus binnen de hedendaagse muziek, waar veel werken (mede) bestaan uit geluiden die in een klassieke muziekcontext als ongewenst of storend worden beschouwd. Terugkijkend op de componeerpraktijk sinds het begin van de twintigste eeuw, onderzoek ik hoe die 'ongewenste geluiden' – vaak prozaïsch, onverwacht en niet volledig controleerbaar – zijn gebruikt door onder andere Edgard Varèse, Pierre Schaeffer en John Cage, en meer recentelijk door Helmut Lachenmann, Catherine Lamb en Marina Rosenfeld. Zogenaamde buitenmuzikale geluiden vertegenwoordigden een vorm van verzet tegen de romantische scheidslijn tussen kunst en het alledaagse. Het maakte kunst levensechter, vergrootte de auditieve horizon voorbij het tonale materiaal, en richtte de aandacht op de fysieke en omgevingssituaties van de uitvoering, en daarmee dus weg van het ideale universum van het muzikale werk. Zoals ik verder beargumenteer, leidt de omgang met deze geluiden ertoe dat musici bepaalde aspecten van hun praktijk gaan bevragen en daarmee uit hun comfortzone treden. Het inbrengen van ongewenste, buitenmuzikale geluiden daagt hun behoefte aan technische controle en hun streven naar een perfect en eindig object uit, terwijl het hen ook ontvankelijker maakt voor de fluctuaties van het moment, voor de invloed van de omgeving waarin ze optreden, en de waarde van improvisatie. De ervaring van het spelen met deze geluiden in hedendaagse muziekwerken heeft me aan het denken gezet over hoe ik de performatieve mogelijkheden ervan zou kunnen overbrengen naar de klassieke muziekpraktijk. Ik heb dit gedaan door voorstellingen van klassieke werken te ontwikkelen met behulp van wat ik 'metaxische versterking' noem, geïnspireerd door het begrip 'metaxie' – dat wat ertussenin zit. Metaxische versterking is dus de versterking, met elektronische of andere middelen, van datgene wat zich tussen het muziekwerk en de perceptie van het werk bevindt: de auditieve omgeving van de uitvoering. Aristoteles gebruikte de term om de rijkdom van het waarnemingsveld aan te duiden, het medium tussen de waarnemer en het object van waarneming. In muzikale termen vertaald kan de auditieve omgeving van de uitvoering een rijk en belangrijk tussengebied zijn voor het vormgeven van artistieke ervaringen.

Tijdens dit onderzoek heb ik twee voorstellingen ontwikkeld voor solo piano en metaxische versterking, *touchez des yeux* (2018) en *Interferences* (2019). Ik beschrijf gedetailleerd de uitdagingen die mijn creatieve processen hebben gemarkeerd, wat nuttig kan zijn voor anderen die geïnteresseerd zijn in het concipiëren van soortgelijke voorstellingen – vooral met betrekking tot de overeenkomsten en compromissen die moeten worden gesloten tussen conceptuele striktheid en praktische realisatie. In plaats van het onderdrukken van bepaalde elementen in de uitvoeringsomgeving of ze louter als perifeer of neutraal te handhaven, richten metaxisch versterkte voorstellingen zich op deze elementen en hun potentiële invloed op de uitvoering en perceptie van klassieke muziekwerken. Omgevingsgeluid wordt performatief in deze uitvoeringen omdat het de omgeving betrekt in de beleving van het muziekwerk. Anders gezegd, het werk wordt niet enkel in en voor zichzelf waargenomen maar als deel van deze omgeving. Op deze manier stelt metaxische versterking een herconfiguratie voor van de uitvoeringsomgeving en van de manieren waarop de aandacht zich binnen die omgeving ontvouwt. Het daagt traditionele noties van muzikale interpretatie en een op het muziekstuk gerichte uitvoeringscultuur uit, aangezien de uitvoeringsmodus die uit deze vorm van versterking ontstaat, niet gericht is op de interpretatie van muziekwerken, maar veeleer op een verkenning van auditieve omgevingen door middel van deze werken. Meer in het algemeen stimuleert metaxische versterking de ontwikkeling van een praktijk waarin muzikale interpretatie, improvisatie en het denken vanuit curatorschap nauw met elkaar verweven zijn. De musicus is niet langer slechts verantwoordelijk voor het uitvoeren van muzikale werken, maar tevens voor het ontwerpen van de omgeving waarin deze worden uitgevoerd, het bepalen van wat er versterkt moet worden, en hoe dat moet gebeuren. In mijn eigen praktijk wijk ik soms ook af van de conventionele interpretatie van een muziekstuk, bijvoorbeeld wanneer ik reageer op de versterkte geluiden en daarmee improviseer.

Ik bespreek mijn bevindingen in de laatste hoofdstukken van dit proefschrift in nauwe dialoog met literatuur uit verschillende vakgebieden, waaronder antropologie, filosofie, psychologie en mediatheorie, en aan de hand van verwante voorbeelden uit de domeinen van muziek, theater en beeldende kunst. Het aangaan van een dergelijke brede dialoog genereert theoretische en artistieke inzichten die nuttig kunnen blijken voor uitvoerders, curatoren en docenten op het gebied van klassieke en hedendaagse muziek zowel als daarbuiten. Zo ontwikkel ik op basis van het werk van de antropoloog Anna Tsing het begrip 'meerstemmige aandacht'. In tegenstelling tot klassieke definities van aandacht, zoals bijvoorbeeld voorgesteld door de psycholoog William James, waar aandacht wordt gezien als het opzettelijk losmaken van een object uit zijn context om daarmee zijn individuele eigenschappen beter te kunnen onderzoeken, moedigt meervoudige aandacht een open vorm van luisteren aan die een auditief landschap bestrijkt dat breder is dan dat van de muziek. Geïnspireerd door de muziekfilosoof Marcel Cobussen en de antropoloog Claude Lévi-Strauss, onderzoek ik het begrip 'bricolage' als een bruikbare term om het soort improvisatie te conceptualiseren dat voorkomt in mijn metaxisch versterkte uitvoeringen. Opgevat als een vorm van bricolage, biedt improvisatie de klassieke uitvoerder de gelegenheid om zijn/haar speelvaardigheden opnieuw uit te vinden, buiten de traditionele pianotechnieken en de partituur om, en in directe verwijzing naar en in contact met de omgeving: reageren en spelen met omgevingsgeluiden in plaats van alleen een vooraf bepaalde interpretatie te leveren. Ten slotte verken ik uitvoeringen van

MusicExperiment21, Lucia D'Errico en het Ictus Ensemble, alsook de *Kunsthalle for Music* van Ari Benjamin Meyers en de experimentele enscenering van klassieke teksten in theater. Dit stelt me in staat om mijn eigen artistieke werk te contextualiseren binnen een groeiende tendens om muziekwerken te benaderen als aanleiding voor gedifferentieerde esthetische en perceptuele ervaringen, in plaats van als het enige en uiteindelijke doel van de uitvoering. Deze tendens impliceert een nieuwe houding ten opzichte van muzikale traditie, een houding die ik toelicht in het bredere licht van de verantwoordelijkheid van een musicus voor, en zijn/haar positie binnen de relatie tussen heden en verleden.

Curriculum Vitae

Luso-Brazilian pianist, curator and artist researcher Heloisa Amaral was born in São Paulo in 1981. She completed a Diploma in Music Teaching (main subject piano) and a Diploma in Historical Performance Practice (main subjects: harpsichord and fortepiano) at the Hochschule für Musik Freiburg, Germany, in 2003 and 2006, respectively. Following this she moved to Oslo, where she received a master's degree in piano performance from the Norwegian Academy of Music in 2007. After completing two years of continuing studies in ensemble conducting at the same institution, she became an associate researcher of the MusicExperiment21 artistic research cluster at the Orpheus Institute, Ghent, where she remained a member until 2016. In 2015, she enrolled in the docARTES Doctoral Programme in the Musical Arts. Heloisa has completed her doctoral research with a scholarship from the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT). While enrolled in docARTES, she has written several essays and articles related to her research subjects for academic and non-academic publications. In parallel to these activities, Heloisa is active as a performer and curator in the contemporary music field. A former member of ensemble asamisimasa (2003-2009), her musical partnerships today include Duo Hellqvist/Amaral and Ensemble neoN. As a soloist and within the aforementioned chamber music constellations, she has worked with composers and musicians such as Helmut Lachenmann, Joanna Bailie, Far East Network, Simon Steen-Andersen, Catherine Lamb et al, including releases for Aurora, HUBRO and Grappa. Former curator at Ny Musikk Oslo and programmer of outreach and discursive activities at the Oslo Ultima Festival until 2015, Heloisa has been an advisor of DEFRAGMENTATION – Curating Contemporary Music, a project of the German Federal Cultural Foundation. In addition, she has engaged in teaching workshops on curatorship, artistic research and feedback techniques for musicians. Currently, Heloisa is co-coordinator of the European network ULYSSES lectures in curatorial practices in music at the Royal Conservatory of The Hague, where she also supervises artistic research and undertakes research on curriculum development in higher musical education.