Artistic practices of historical sound: memory, imagination, and mimesis in contemporary composition and historical performance

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1_Two Icons of Cartesian Musical Practice

Introduction

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Imagine two ideal forms of musician. One is an omniscient historian, the other an omnipotent artist. This imagined historian has all possible information about all actual musical practice throughout all of eternity. They travel freely through time to experience historical sound in full animation and detail, they discuss theory and technique for long hours with well-respected musicians of the past, and they return periodically to the present to imitate what they heard and learned for the benefit of their peers—they sound *the past as it actually was*. The imagined artist, meanwhile, knows all forms and interpretations of all music ever made, and is boundlessly skilled at evading mere imitation of these extant sound worlds. Their music springs forth fully formed from their soul, which is itself born of its own proprietary essence. Every action they take as an artist is purely original, and they grace those of us trapped in the present with *the future as what has never been done before*.

In Christian mysticism, such portraits of an unattainable form of humanity in the image of Christ serve as rhetorical devices for the faithful. Though the perfection portrayed is impossible for any individual to achieve, it provides a model that one *attempts* to emulate, hoping to move *toward* the salvation such divinity promises. Similarly, my imagined perfections of historical and artistic musicianship present similar practical impossibilities and similar objects of idolatry for practicing musicians and scholars today. No historian can travel back in time and no artist can make something from nothing. Yet historians so often nevertheless *strive* to represent the past in perfect and complete detail; to be neutral assemblers of true historical facts and authentic historical objects into simulacra of actuality. And composers so often nevertheless *strive* to make music like it has never been made before; to conjure a music that is unique to themselves and unique among other music. Some might suggest that these categories are *good enough* to be used and *useful enough* to be considered good, and that there are many other criteria by which music can be evaluated and many other reasons for which it's made. This is

considered, in some interpretations, the settled result of the fierce critiques each faced in the 1980s from, most famously, Richard Taruskin on historical performance, and Rosalind Krauss on contemporary art.

But I'm not interested in advocating this sort of impotent striving toward unattainable ideals. Instead, I'd like to pair them together toward a quite different purpose. Viewed together, these dual icons can instead be seen to generate an intriguing paradox. If music can be neither fully original nor perfectly historical, does that mean it's always some combination of these two, or somewhere in between? What form do these myths take today, and what types of documents, cultures, and aesthetics do they quietly render invisible, impossible, impractical, or even unthinkable to this day? Or, better yet, what types of practice might emerge if a musician can escape this binary segregating invention from mimesis?

In this dissertation, I extend this question from fairly specific re-evaluations of the scholarly integrity of certain practices—such as the speculative representation of musical pasts about which only the most barren traces remain—to broader, more meandering explorations of wholly theoretical realms—such as whether and how one might rebuild value systems for musical practice around a framework or frameworks *other than* an invention-mimesis binary. Naturally, this work draws on a multitude of existing theoretical writings and artistic practices. Critical theory has a strong presence, particularly in its forms of postcolonial and anticolonial historiography from authors such as Ann Laura Stoler, and broader emancipatory political projects from others such as Bernard Harcourt. But also important are the deeper foundations of the field as a reconsideration of and challenge to extant hegemonies of power, knowledge, interpretation, and identity, as for example in the writing of Michel Foucault. Postmodern historical theory and art theory are also important resources, representing initial attempts by their participating scholars to disentangle their respective fields from universals of historicity and originality. In historical theory, the long published exchange between Hayden White and Paul Ricoeur over many decades, as well as among specialists of music historiography such as Daniel Leech-Wilkinson and Richard Taruskin, offer crucial exposition and initial reckoning with the epistemological, ontological, and narrative difficulties of the standalone historical discipline since its 19th-century inception. Likewise, art theoretical writings from Stephen Wright alongside compositional philosophies of John Cage and Brian Ferneyhough provide essential insights into the entanglements of artistic practice with what I understand to be specifically *capitalist* modes of production and reproduction, commodification and optimization, and

standardization and museumification. I also draw on many artistic researchers for both foundational disciplinary thought as regards epistemology and methodology in theory and practice, and for specific reference points as regards ideas of historicity and creativity in contemporary music.

Woven through the conceptual work introduced above is my own artistic practice, which at present consists of seeking out, collecting, assembling, and in various ways processing extant historical manuscripts into scores and performances that frustrate and/or supersede classification as either historical or contemporary. These can be anything from the lightest of performance notes on a historical score such that it's unclear whether any composing has been done at all—play Vivaldi three times faster than possible—to the densest of compositional collages of disparate music such that hardly any of the source material's identity remains—play twelve late-Romantic orchestral climaxes simultaneously. And the performative approach is as much part of the question as the compositional/notational remit. In the case of my 2022 album *The Aviary*, which I use as a case study throughout this dissertation, I founded what I called an experimental baroque orchestra—Stile Nu—specifically to attempt these wild types of interpretive exploration. Allowing much further leeway than a typical ensemble of 'historically-informed performers' on historical replica instruments, Stile Nu allowed for a very hands-on, improvisational approach to my theoretical questions about historical epistemology and music ontology, firmly situated in the acoustic realm. This work has been as much an engagement with and critique of ensembles of historical performance as of contemporary composers and performers. Part of the practical and theoretical framework at which I've arrived through my writing about and making of this work involves explicitly drawing from historically disparate reference points in one and the same artistic action. As such, the performances of Stile Nu draw as much on contemporary composer(-performer)s such as Ferneyhough, Merzbow, Heiner Goebbels, and Richard Ayres, and contemporary artists such as William Kentridge and Jean Tinguely, as on the work of Early Music ensembles including the Freiburger Barockorchester, Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin, Dufay Collective, ACRONYM Ensemble, and many others. The simultaneous distance and closeness across these (assertedly) 'new' and 'old' practices is a characteristic of the essential paradox introduced above, and one that has been hugely productive toward my own ability to generate complex and invigorating music, regardless of its intellectual claims.

The structure of the text is as follows. Chapter One casts the problem area of this dissertation—a bifurcation of historicity and creativity in music—as part of a broader set of dualisms initiated by the philosophy of René Descartes [1596–1650] before introducing examples from my own practice that complicate these dualisms. Chapter Two presents an overall research question and begins to unfold many of its underlying theoretical influences, while at the same time serving itself as a further practical experiment intended to complicate a dualistic relationship between authorship and quotation. Chapter Three investigates how my research question may in part find answers in the discipline of *rhetoric*; it begins with an early 18th-century refutation of Descartes by the Neapolitan philosopher Giambattista Vico [1668–1744] before presenting several theoretical and practical examples spanning the long 20th century that in diverse ways suggest a relationship to Vico's defense of rhetoric. In Chapter Four, I perform similar operations a bit closer to home, looking at the possibilities for contemporary practices dealing with historical music to benefit from work within the much younger discipline of critical theory, which I see as very closely related to if not a direct outgrowth of rhetoric. This discussion produces the impetus to look closely at historical fragments of music notation, which play a major role in much of the practical work I present in this dissertation, as a kind of off-ramp from both the ability and the desire to make a hard distinction between historical and creative practices in music. In Chapter Five, I return to Vico for an overview of his most well-known work, the third edition of *The New Science* [1744], in which he presents what can be understood as a detailed methodology and theory for historiographical pursuits in which the subject matter is significantly obscured either by great temporal distance or by a severe shortage of documentary evidence. Though this work of Vico's is quite bizarre in many ways, a number of useful lessons can nevertheless be drawn from his text for developing a new theoretical paradigm to accompany my practical experiments with historical fragments of music notation. Finally, in Chapter Six, I present an extended case study from this new practice of mine, in this case based upon selections from the large but often fairly opaque personal music collection of the English poet, musician, and naturalist John Freeman Milward Dovaston [1782-1854], in an attempt to synthesize and further apply the diverse lines of argumentation developed through the preceding chapters.

The overall project here is one that might be considered a somewhat idiosyncratic critique limited to a fairly small subset of musical practice. And on the surface it is indeed pointed very specifically at the

respective roles of historical performance and contemporary composition within institutions of classical music. But there's a deeper level of concept work at play here that I believe to be of vital importance to musical, artistic, and historical practices writ large, and possibly even to more deeply-seated cultural systems of value and of knowledge. At its core, the relationship between impossible replication and impossible originality is for me emblematic of more fundamental questions about what it means to make or to use, to own or to borrow, to participate or to control, to be or to perform as. How one makes these distinctions, or perhaps sometimes refuses to make them, is what sits beneath so many of the vexing social, political, and economic issues of the present moment. A project of artistic research such as this one, distantly sequestered as it is from the more controversial or sensitive aspects of these problems, has the potential to serve as an essential space of experimentation towards alternative core modes of knowledge and systems of value that may later fold back into a broader cultural network to yield unexpected solutions further afield.

The impossibilities of replication and originality introduced above will serve as recurring touchpoints for this work. Like Christian icons, these images are taken to be perfect ideals of the fields they depict, unattainable in reality yet also nevertheless models for and justifications of real contemporary practices. I start with idealized forms of these fields not because I think anyone actually believes they're achievable, but because they may nevertheless still serve as inconspicuous or instinctive guides to local decision-making on the part of performers and composers as well as their many administrative and intellectual interlocutors. My instinct upon starting this research was that there is something amiss in a great many practices of historical performance and contemporary composition that will never be solved by merely further and further optimizing their current, ideal-seeking forms. The problems exist at the level of their foundational theory, and so must be addressed—at least in part—at that same level. By re-evaluating and perhaps re-structuring these foundations, we may find another path.

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Alongside this dual idolatry, another constant point of reference will be a concept that is, ironically, often understood as quite antithetical to a Christian worldview: the *cogito* of René Descartes and the

intellectual methodology he builds upon it. The *cogito* is the thinking self, understood as the only thing that can be known with certainty to exist. To derive this concept, in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* [1641], Descartes first calls *everything* into question:

> Anything which admits of the slightest doubt I will set aside just as if I had found it to be wholly false; and I will proceed in this way until I recognize something certain, or, if nothing else, until I at least recognize for certain that there is no certainty. [...] I will believe that my memory tells me lies, and that none of the things that it reports ever happened. I have no senses. Body, shape, extension, movement and place are chimeras. So what remains true?[1]

Because he has experienced moments wherein formerly held beliefs were proven to be incorrect by some phenomenon of happenstance—he believes himself to be walking through town only to wake up and find that he was actually in bed dreaming—he tries to identify everything he associates with his own selfhood and then to separate out those that are certain from those that are uncertain. He identifies the body, the senses, the imagination, emotions, judgment, and reasoning. One by one, each of these human attributes is questioned and found to be of uncertain existence or reality, except for the last. The thinking mind alone is identified as the only characteristic of humanity certain to be real.

> Thought [...] alone is inseparable from me. I am, I exist—that is certain. [...] I am a mind, or intelligence, or intellect, or reason [...] I am not that structure of limbs which is called a human body. I am not even some thin vapour which permeates the limbs—a wind, fire, air, breath, or whatever I depict in my imagination; for these are things which I have supposed to be nothing. Let this supposition stand; for all that I am still something.[2]

Though any idea gained through perception can be called into doubt—for example, one might be dreaming rather than awake—the fact of one's thoughtful existence is certain. One may not know for certain about any correspondence between one's thoughts, imaginings, or perceptions and the 'real' world

[1] René Descartes, trans. John Cottingham, *Meditations on First Philosophy* [first published 1641] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 35.

[2] Ibid., 37.

outside oneself, but one can always be certain that one does indeed think, imagine, or perceive those things.

If one values and seeks out understanding of the 'real,' as Descartes does, this leads to an intellectual method wherein more and more complex understandings of reality must be built up only from this mere fact that one thinks, perceives, and imagines; not of any objects of those thoughts, perceptions, or imaginings in themselves. Basic arithmetic provides an easy example.

> [P]hysics, astronomy, medicine, and all other disciplines which depend on the study of composite things, are doubtful; while arithmetic, geometry and other subjects of this kind, which deal only with the simplest and most general things, regardless of whether they really exist in nature or not, contain something certain and indubitable. For whether I am awake or asleep, two and three added together are five, and a square has no more than four sides.[3]

One can determine laws of addition and subtraction by grouping together and moving around any number of like objects. And one will find these laws to be immutable—*always* true—regardless of whether those objects 'actually' exist. No matter what object one subjects to the procedures of addition and subtraction, the results of their calculations will always follow those same laws. They are true independent of the veracity of our perceptions of the physical world, which Descartes will always call into question. From here, one can deduce further mathematical laws. From the laws of addition and subtraction, which can be learned by manipulating physical objects in a corporeal world, one can figure out the laws of multiplication and division, which are often much more opaque in terms of their relationship to physical phenomena. And so on and so forth.

This type of logical, objectivist move lies at the heart of modern science, and many humanists and social scientists adopt it within their own research practices to produce a similar sense of authority in their own work. I have no desire to disparage scientific inquiry at large, as building up complex ideas from immutably true statements and isolated repeatable phenomena is essential to establishing dependable understanding of a great many aspects of the natural world. But I will suggest that this approach is not necessarily effective within inquiry that takes human culture as its object, and should therefore not be

[3] Ibid., 27.

applied to certain types of practice. Music is one such practice. Cartesian reasoning is founded upon the idea that greater truth is produced in an observation by eliminating perceptual idiosyncrasies on the part of the observer. Perception is vulnerable to illusion, so to discover a universal truth one must therefore eliminate reliance on perception. But what is music about if not these exact vagaries of perception? Knowledge of and knowledge within music are manifestly different than the type of knowledge foregrounded in scientific research. One *must* engage perception to study music—unstable as it may be.

Descartes himself leaves a door open to the possibility of a kind of *science of perception* in the initial pages of his *Meditations*. In describing how he can't trust that his perception corresponds to reality, he accepts as true the mere fact that he perceives what he perceives.

> [E]ven if, as I have supposed, none of the objects of imagination are real, the power of imagination is something which really exists and is part of my thinking. [It is] the same 'I' who has sensory perceptions, or is aware of bodily things as it were through the senses. For example, I am now seeing light, hearing a noise, feeling heat. But I am asleep, so all this is false. Yet I certainly *seem* to see, to hear, and to be warmed. This cannot be false; what is called 'having a sensory perception' is strictly just this, and in this restricted sense of the term it is simply thinking.[4]

This acceptance of his perception as part of his true existence is just as full as his acceptance of his thinking as part of his true existence. But he does not follow this acceptance of his perception much further, choosing instead to explore the correspondence between his thinking and the immutably true outside of himself. The problem arises in regard to the correspondence of this thought or perception to an outside reality that is true independent of him. Conceivably, he could learn as much about himself by studying his perception as he could about the 'real' outside world by studying his thought. He decides to follow his thought, then, because he *values* this outside more highly than himself.

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[4] Ibid., 41.

In studying historical music, especially of the 19th century and previous, it is always the case that one lacks the full picture. If one wishes to *play* such music, this becomes a problem. Can I play a pitch without an articulation? Can I perform a harmonic progression without it acquiring a rhythm? The problem of historical theory in musical performance is not about *if* these gaps in knowledge are filled but *how*.

It's tempting in such situations to simply separate out what is known from what is not known and use combinations of the former to triangulate plausibilities for the latter. As I understand it, this is common practice in both historical performance and mainstream classical music, and I'd consider it to be generally Cartesian as follows. In looking at notation, one can separate out the correct notes from the errors by amassing many different copies of the same notation and weeding out the idiosyncrasies. In developing an interpretation of that notation, one can study several treatises on ornamentation contemporaneous to the notation in question, find the closest correlation to the marking and context at hand, and combine the two in practice. And so forth through every aspect of interpretive decision making. This approach is believed to dissociate the will or identity of the artist-historian practitioner from the known-authentic historical artifacts they study—scores, books, instruments, and so on. It compiles novel assertions only from known-true premises on the assumption that this authority transitively passes from the former to the latter. Even in methods nominally critical of this steadfastly objectivist approach, such as that of James Grier in the editing of music or of John Butt in performative interpretation—among many others—the basic principles remain unchallenged that one must look at sources objectively and arrive at decisions logically with the composer's intentions as the principle motivating concern.[5] The editor's or performer's self is only valued in such a practice insofar as it is understood to inevitably somehow colour one's idea of the original authorial intent of the historical object of study. This approach is certainly useful, but it has dangerous blind spots, and it precludes the possibility of many potentially vibrant and meaningful musical practices.

Firstly, we must ask ourselves what we're trying to achieve and why. Do we actually care how a composer expected their music to be played? Do we actually want our musical practice to be historical? Even the mere fact that the answer to these questions is overwhelmingly assumed to be 'yes' without a

[5] James Grier, *The Critical Editing of Music: History, Method, and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); John Butt, *Playing with History: The Historical Approach to Musical Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

moment of reflection is reason enough to investigate. Is it not one of the most vital and foundational principles of academic research to challenge one's most basic assumptions? And beyond this, I can share that sometimes answering 'no' has given me some of the most artistically, aesthetically, and even spiritually gratifying experiences of my life. Besides which, what happens when the composer's intentions and the historical reality are contradictory? Are we loyal to the past in itself or to a past idea of a future never realized? For the purpose of this chapter, I'll stop this first line of contestation here, allowing it to serve merely as a disclaimer that a musician need not be obedient to historical precedent if they don't want to be. Daniel Leech-Wilkinson has written about this at length in his recent book, *Challenging Performance*.[6]

If we do decide at this juncture to proceed on the historical route, there is a second issue to consider. I'll begin with two observations. The first is from John Locke [1632–1704], *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* [1689]:

> [T]he ideas we receive by sensation are often in grown people altered by the judgment without our taking notice of it. When we set before our eyes a round globe of any uniform colour, e.g., gold, alabaster, or jet, it is certain that the idea thereby imprinted in our mind is of a flat circle variously shadowed, with several degrees of light and brightness coming to our eyes. But we having by use been accustomed to perceive what kind of appearance convex bodies are wont to make in us, what alterations are made in the reflections of light by the difference of the sensible figures of bodies, the judgment presently, by an habitual custom, alters the appearances into their causes: so that, from that which truly is variety of shadow or colour collecting the figure, it makes it pass for a mark of figure, and frames to itself the perception of a convex figure and an uniform colour; when the idea we receive from thence is only a plane variously coloured, as is evident in painting.[7]

The second is from Maurice Merleau-Ponty [1908–1961], *Phenomenology of Perception* [1945]:

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[6] Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, *Challenging Performance: Classical Music Performance Norms and How to Escape Them*. 2020, version 2.14 (17.vi.22), accessed 22 June 2023, https://challengingperformance.com/the-book.

[7] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* [first published 1689] (New York: Prometheus Books, 1995; originally published ca. 1689), 93-4.

> The background continues beneath the figure, is seen beneath the figure even though it is covered over by it. This phenomenon (which encompasses the entire problem of the presence of the object) is itself also concealed by empiricist philosophy, which treats this part of the background as invisible in accordance with a physiological definition of vision and reduces it to the status of a simple sensible quality by supposing that it is presented through an image, that is, through a weakened sensation. More generally, real objects that do not make up part of our visual field can only be present to us through images, and this is why objects are nothing but the 'permanent possibilities of sensations.' If we abandon the empiricist premise that prioritizes the content of perception, we are free to acknowledge the strange mode of existence of the object behind us.[8]

Writing 256 years apart, Locke during a period that many historians and performers of music passionately study, Merleau-Ponty at a moment when those disciplines of historical performance and musicology were crystallizing into the forms we recognize today, both arrived at a similar conclusion when it comes to our most basic perception of the outside world, historical artifacts included. In short, we cannot see, hear, taste, smell, or feel except through our *whole* selves—memories, instincts, habits, desires, aspirations, and all. Thus we do not merely analyse historical artifacts in themselves but co-create *with* them their meaning, their historicity, and even their bare physical shape every time we take a new look. Music is not possible without the self.

Now consider the following:

[8] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, trans. Donald A. Landes, *Phenomenology of Perception* [first published 1945] (New York: Routledge, 2012; originally published 1945), 26.

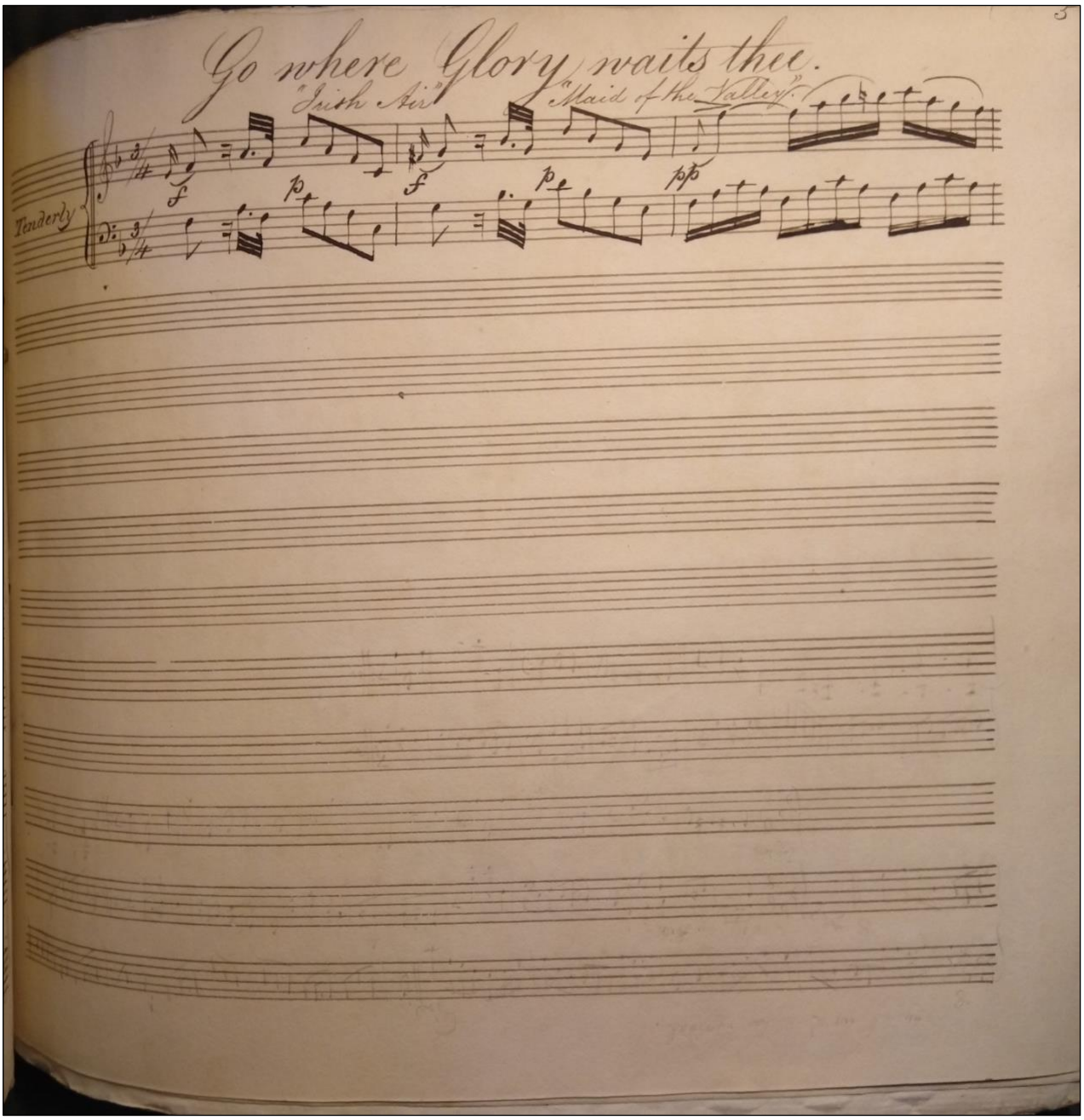

Figure 1.1: A page from "...a very choice and excellent bundle of many beautiful & genuine compositions," compiled by John F. M. Dovaston (West Felton, England, ca. 1805), showing a page with three measures of music titled "Go where Glory waits thee;" Add. MS 63818, British Library, London.[9]

[9] A song with the title "Go where Glory waits thee" appears in printed collections of Irish music as early as 1796 (Edward Bunting, *General Collection of Ancient Music of Ireland*, 1796, no. 47, 26), but each of these examples appears to be of an entirely different arrangement than this one.

Anyone who is musically literate will feel an absence here; a sense of something missing. But why? Just because there isn't a fourth bar? This isn't specific enough. There also isn't a pencil sketch of a bird, but no one feels *its* absence here. So why do we want a fourth bar?

The omniscient historian knows what was supposed to come next. We, on the other hand, only have a sense of memory in which is stored countless examples of three measures in a row followed by a fourth and a fifth and beyond, but few or no examples of three measures standing alone. And anyone who is musically literate will see that this notation, which memory also demonstrates to be within a particular musical style, has at its end something that is not a cadence; not an ending. It also appears within a volume containing other notation, some complete, some incomplete, giving a sense of what style or styles the scribe tended to write down. This volume also sits within an archive that presents a certain amount of information about it, and wherein it is grouped in various ways with other volumes considered by the archivists to be similar. Upon seeing this very small thing, this single piece of paper with ink on it, a whole world of anticipation is produced.

Just as our eyes cross past the threshold of the final notes, we see or perhaps even hear phantasms of music that isn't there, and we are thrust into an acute awareness of the fact that we had actually been perceiving, remembering, and imagining simultaneously the whole time. For a historian of music, the example above is a particularly vexing one. And there are certainly many other pages—in this volume and others—that one can look at which don't present such a glaring impossibility as this one. But I choose it to illustrate a point about our perception of music notation that does indeed extend even to complete pieces, though it may well be less apparent at first. When looking at a complete piece of music—all parts accounted for, every measure from beginning to end filled in, relatively few possible errors of transcription, and so on—it is easy to fool oneself into believing that we only see what is objectively on the page. In considering the *vast* amount of currently extant historical notation that is *not* presented in the form of complete pieces, as in the example above, the illusion is suddenly revealed.

Additionally, this example is only an introductory accompaniment with no clear similarity to melodic patterns present in the tune published by Bunting or others.

Over the past few years, I have been developing a musical practice that investigates the boundaries of this phenomenon by collecting and manipulating fragmentary and anonymous musical notation—primarily archival materials committed to paper during the mid-18th century in England.[10]

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In the track "Three," on *The Aviary*, an album I made with Stile Nu in 2022 using the above notational fragment among many others, there are three moments when the ensemble lifts away into silence and a single voice remains, fixed in arpeggiation for several seconds:

[10] I mean this literally. In other words, I specifically mean to include music composed by individuals not resident in England but whose compositions circulated within England.

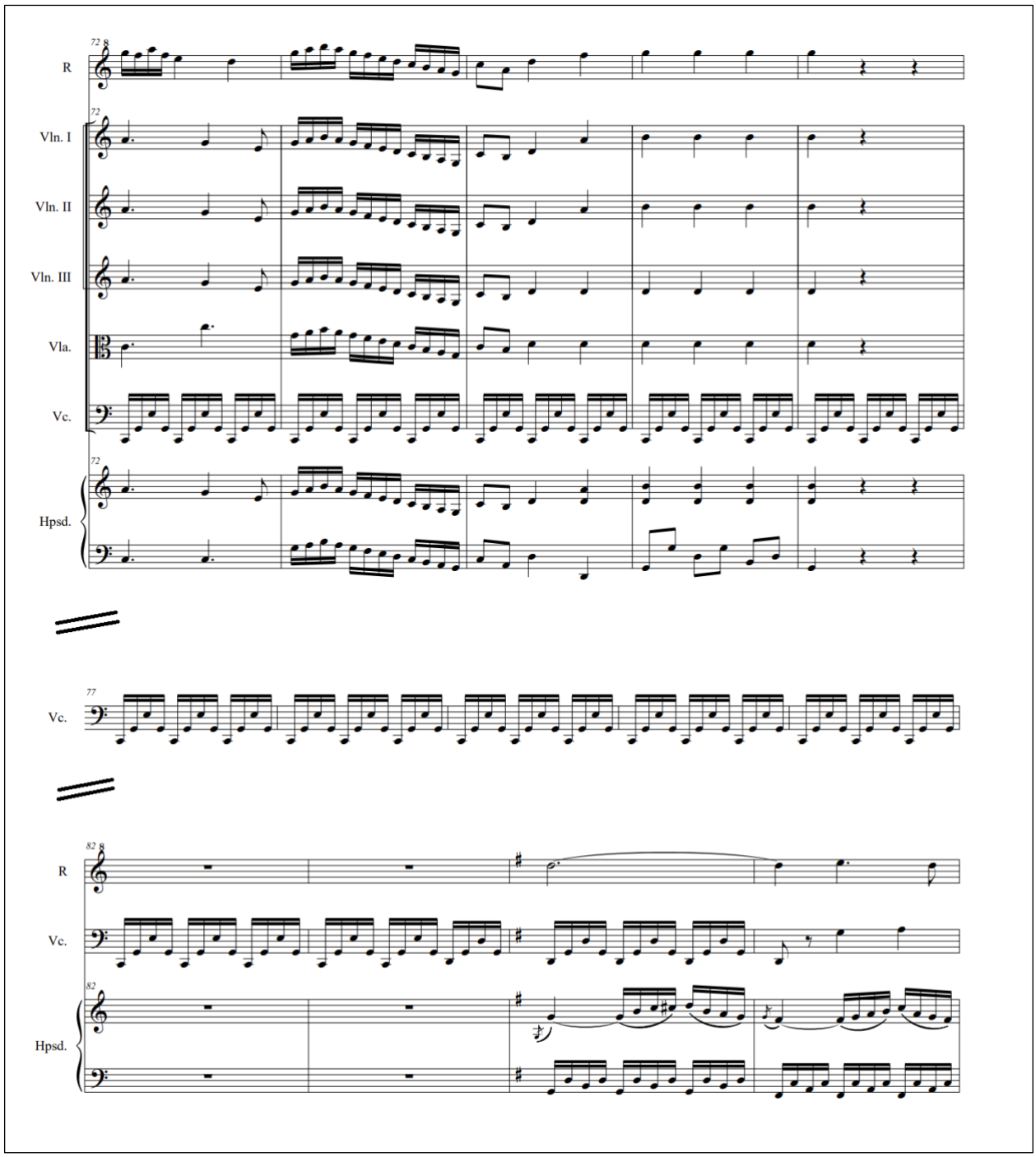

Figure 1.2: Measures 72–85 of the score used for "Three," from *The Aviary* (2022). For a recording, see https://carlodiaz.com/music/the-aviary; the excerpt shown here begins at 01:33 of the track called "Three."

As six of seven musicians lift away, a sense of propulsion can be felt. The idiom of the music just preceding this lift might conjure an expectation of its imminent return. A dancer leaping into the air on an upbeat is just as briskly impelled by nature back to the ground on the downbeat. Such a leap and

return is for this reason idiomatic to dance. The leap of a dancer is a metrical figure—a fourth beat produces a first. Yet what is meter but a name for the type of movement each of us learns from the ways in which we are embodied—the cycle of breathing or the momentum of walking? If such an idiom is anywhere to be heard in this music, such balance, completion, and perhaps symmetry—a return of the dancer to the ground—is surely to be expected upon this lift. So for the first fraction of a second as six of seven musicians lift away an imminent return might be expected. In this first instant it is a leap to be followed by return.

What does it feel like when this doesn't then happen? A ball is thrown up into the air and then nothing. It moves upward and that's it, only upward. The seventh musician began this first measure of their arpeggiation as an idiomatic leap into the air that should certainly bring them promptly back to the ground but then does not. Their colloquial gesture of giving a sense of breathing room to the busy saturation of the full ensemble is transformed into something else in the space of that instant where the ball thrown into the air does not slow down and change direction. The aesthetic paradigm cracks, temporality fails to render, the bodily space of the music starts to dematerialize, a mode of listening that may well have served understanding earlier is denied validation. A listener might be stretched in this moment.

Stretched into what? Before I can speak of the endpoint of this transformation I should speak of the transform*ing* itself—the possibility, the rupture, the uncertainty, the grasping for—even if no one can definitively say what it might be like for others. Perhaps mere humanity impels one to grasp for an explanation, but it's one particular background and context as an individual that determines what exactly that explanation looks like. For me, the corporeal experience of dance triggered by the idiom of the music thus far is carried forward into a fantastical form of itself, transcendent of the dancer's physical capability as mass: leap continues on into flight. A feeling of weightlessness emerges. I find myself to be suddenly weightless in the ether. The dancer flies away from their historical idiom. There's an exhilaration to this.

But perhaps it might also be a sudden uneasiness. Walking in an open field I thrust myself into the air and then perhaps I'm not flying but there is simply no longer ground beneath my feet. Has a leap turned into a fall? I feel my insides lurch upwards, I feel adrenaline, I grasp, I fear, I reach up further. Terror. I thought I understood the field in which I stood only to be surprised quite suddenly by something awful.

But then I don't fall, this discomfort recedes, and I find that instead of flying I'm just in featureless space. The physical world is gone so I can no longer be either grounded or afloat, just an abstract something in an undefinable nothingness.

As one falls or floats, fails to grasp, and discovers that it's not the end but rather that movement continues—the ear continues to be fed—one then eventually grasps something. After the initial transformation of perception occurs from the pseudo-historical idiom through its disruption, another transformation of perception occurs into an emergent stasis. That music with which one is left by the seventh musician can be confronted on its own. It transforms from a rupture to a thing, from an event to an object. What is that object once the feeling of rupture has dissipated?

It is static in the sense that it keeps repeating, but it is not static in the sense that it's defined by constant movement. As someone who reads music, I can tell that the performer is probably reading the same few notes over and over again—and indeed the source of this passage is just a single measure of the archival notation shown in Figure 1.1, repeated over and over again. Yet the actual sound coming out of the instrument is different every time we hear that one measure, full of innumerable textures and colours, infinite variation of sonic character in an always slightly ungraspable complexity. Minimalism comes to mind. If the identity of a passage of music is considered to be constituted at any one time by a hierarchical network of characteristics, this passage's musical identity as an instance of Major-key tonic suddenly yields to its identity as the timbral quality of a cello.

One might begin to listen to the instrument as a sound-producing object rather than the music as a piecing together of meaningful symbolic gestures. In this moment between rupture and emergent stasis, temporality shifts from an overlapping cyclical time of the pre-modern to a universal formal time of the modern. While the earlier music was diverse, this music is monolithic. Figure gives way to line. Ornament gives way to material. Gone are mimesis, cadence, and affect; in their place come duration, speed, register, and density. In itself there is no reason for this music to stop at any particular moment. It stretches out in infinite time. But these passages in "Three" come to an end. Because this is not modern music, only perhaps a modern moment within something else. Just as they were slid into they are let go of—unceremoniously.

Aside from how any of us individually hear these three moments in "Three," what's important is that there's an enormous complexity to the formation of meaning in such cases. What meaning is formed? Are several different meanings considered before one is settled upon? Is any one settled upon? How long does all of this take? If there are several either stages or possibilities considered, what causes the change or changes from one to another? Why do these perceptive changes sometimes correspond to objective changes to notation while at other times they correspond to seemingly uneventful moments in the middle of unchanging passages?

As I decided how long these moments in "Three" should be, all these shades of possible experience were present in my imagination, as was the knowledge that there would be many more I couldn't anticipate. I also knew that prolonging these solo repetitions, a bit beyond that moment at which all this experience has taken place, may push a listener further into boredom or confusion, while leaving them a bit too short might make it not even register as a notable moment at all. I wanted these moments to be just long enough for a listener to experience the expectation, rupture, and just a first tantalizing glimpse of a new stasis before being returned back to the original texture.

I didn't make this decision logically. I did not consider the above questions objectively. I did not catalogue every possibility, rank them according to their correlation to broader trends in musical composition or listening, and combine them to optimize the potency of the experience for the broadest audience. And I have no evidence to suggest that such a sound ever occurred at any point in the 18th century, nor am I interested in suggesting that it's possible it may have.

I had my hands and ears on the material as I worked. My whole being developed an understanding of the propensities in the music as I made it. I decided as a craftsman. I felt the problems and I felt the decisions; feeling here being not a *refusal* to think—as it sometimes is for the Romantic artist, or at least for Modernist caricatures thereof—but rather a *human* thinking. A poetic precision, perhaps.

And yet even though it eschews the common practice among historical performers to strive to do as is known to have been done in the musical past, I adamantly defend that this is nevertheless historical performance. This piece represents the careful and informed selection and combination of genuine historical artifacts and information with the express purpose of communicating a specific and fact-based understanding of the musical past to a present-day audience through musical performance.

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And at the same time, I also adamantly defend that this is contemporary composition. As one and the same expression, “Three” is historical performance and it is new music.

There is a common misconception that composition is a kind of *inventio ex nihilo*, as if new music can be brought into existence entirely from within a composer’s own self, using no notation, concepts, or sounds related from pre-existing music. So because every note in "Three" can be cited back to a specific note in historical music notation, it cannot be understood as either ‘original’ or ‘new,’ and therefore my practice cannot be understood as ‘composition.’ It is not within the style of the omnipotent composer, an impossible style enshrined as a guiding principal in such culturally powerful institutions as, for example, the ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composer Awards. As of 2023, their eligibility requirements state that, “Submission[s] must be entirely Entrant’s original work (e.g. no sampling, etc.).”[11]

It takes very little effort to show how strange this is. Merriam-Webster defines 'entirely' as “to the exclusion of others: solely” and original as “not secondary, derivative, or imitative.”[12] Invent your own instrument that harnesses a completely novel technique for acoustic sound production and that has timbral characteristics unlike any other instrument or music that has ever existed, then write notation for that instrument that uses no rhythmic, metrical, pitch, harmonic, or formal sequences ever used in any other music composed before, and you still won’t satisfy this requirement because you’re relying on pre-existing concepts like ‘acoustic sound,’ ‘duration,’ and ‘frequency.’ I don’t *know* whether this is what ASCAP means, but it’s a perfectly coherent interpretation of the words they used.

It's obvious to anyone who has ever written music that composition is always at least in part a practice of assembling pre-existing ideas—harmonic progressions, melodic figures, textural constructions, metrical patterns, ornamental melismas, affective gestures, and so forth. But if musical compositions are never actually “entirely original,” then, why is it so often said that they are? And what are they actually?

[11] “The ASCAP Foundation Morton Gould Young Composer Awards,” The ASCAP Foundation, accessed 27 June 2023, https://www.ascapfoundation.org/programs/awards/young-composer-awards,.

[12] “Entirely,” *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, accessed 27 June 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/entirely; “Original,” *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, accessed 27 June 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/original.

Furthermore, if there is no entirely original music, then what is the difference between composing a new piece and performing a pre-existing piece? What is the difference between the reuse of pre-existing musical 'things' done by composers versus performers? Finally, and most importantly, what kinds of music do we miss out on if we try to enforce a distinction between "original" and not?

This idea of originality as the foundation of an artistic value system has a clear history, and one that stretches beyond just music. Rosalind Krauss traces it back to Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's [1876–1944] *Manifesto of Futurism* [first published 1909]:

> Marinetti, thrown from his automobile one evening in 1909 into a factory ditch filled with water, emerges as if from amniotic fluid to be born—without ancestors—a futurist. The parable of absolute self-creation that begins the first Futurist Manifesto functions as a model for what is meant by originality among the early twentieth-century avant-garde. For originality becomes an organicist metaphor referring not so much to formal invention as to sources of life. The self as origin is safe from contamination by tradition because it possesses a kind of originary naiveté. [...] The self as origin is the way an absolute distinction can be made between a present experienced *de novo* and a tradition-laden past. The claims of the avant-garde are precisely these claims to originality.[13]

This context adds some telling details about the value system behind a focus on originality as the defining feature of contemporary art. Behind the more abstract idea of 'creating something from nothing' lies a perceived tension between pure organicism and accumulated traditions. There is a parallel here to the purity of God's original creation versus the corruption of humanity's own culture as planted by Satan. In a way, Marinetti's crash into a ditch filled with water is a *baptism*, washing from his soul the original sin of humanity so that he might enter new life on a blank slate. However, instead of the purity of God giving salvation from the cruelty of humanity's own corrupt culture, this time it is one human culture offering salvation from another. Modernism offers salvation from the remnants of the *Ancien Régime*. In one sense, this originality can be seen merely as a pushing away of the old, regardless of whether what replaces it has pure newness. And in another it can be seen as a mimesis of a different kind of purity: mechanical

[13] Rosalind Krauss, "The Originality of the Avant-Garde," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), 6-7.

technology as an analogue to the perfect synergy of organic life. To aggressively cast off received traditions of artistic practice and embrace the raw physicality of mechanized urban spaces as a kind of new aesthetic building material is to be reborn as a naive, pure, liberated, and altogether new form of life.

We are now far beyond the confines of art 'in itself.' It's not difficult to trace a path from here to fascism, for example, founded as it was on principles such as an anti-exceptionalism that considers each individual human to be as individually unremarkable as each of the individual gears in a machine, while at the same time absolutely vital to that machine's collective function. Here too, a received traditional order—this time aesthetic—was violently pushed away in favour of a new one inspired by organics and mechanics.

Likewise, traces of this logic can be found in musical futurism. In *The Art of Noises* [first published 1913], Luigi Russolo [1885–1947] sets up a proposition that musicians embrace mechanical noise as the new raw material for composition by conjuring an analogous image of an ancient world devoid of musical sound:

> Ancient life was all silence. [...] In this scarcity of noises, the first sounds that men were able to draw from a pierced reed or a taut string were stupefying, something new and wonderful. [...] Thus was born the idea of sound as something in itself, as different from and independent of life. And from it resulted music, a fantastic world superimposed on the real one, an inviolable and sacred world.[14]

The invention of a new type of sound anticipates its capture as an autonomous art form superior to the ordinary world of sound. In this formulation, it is its mere difference from the sonic past that enables musical sound to become "inviolable and sacred." Likewise, Russolo states that, "[i]n the 19th Century, with the invention of machines, Noise was born."[15] Thus it becomes the case that,

[14] Luigi Russolo, trans. Barclay Brown, *The Art of Noises* (New York: Pendragon, 1986), quoted in Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (eds.), *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2004), 10-11.

[15] Ibid., 10.

> [m]usical sound is too limited in its variety of timbres. [...] [M]odern music flounders within this tiny circle, vainly striving to create new varieties of timbre. We must break out of this limited circle of sounds and conquer the infinite variety of noise-sounds.[16]

Again, the invention of a new type of sound—this time mechanical noises including what Russolo identifies as "explosions," "hissing," "gurgling," and "screeching"—anticipates its harnessing as a new type of art form, the value of which derives solely from the fact that its sonic character is so drastically different than anything heard before. This is music that is good insofar as it is original, and original by virtue of bearing no resemblance to music of the past.

But again, we are not only talking about originality as mere difference or uniqueness in itself. Here, originality is a metonym for freeing oneself from an oppressive past. And the fuel for this revolution is the same fuel that had by then been used for many other revolutions over the preceding 148 years: objectivity. Again, the antidote for an oppressive received society based on centuries of normal and traditional sedimentation was an objectification of nature, both because it is in this case believed to be independent of and contradictory to human culture, and because it can one-up culture's claim to inevitability. We're raising up a new music of mechanical noise, but more specifically, a music of rationally engineered, operationally synergistic, precisely standardized and fully utilitarian combinations of manufactured parts.

It's astonishing how expansive and long lasting this approach has proven to be. Returning to Rosalind Krauss,

> if the very notion of the avant-garde can be seen as a function of the discourse of originality, the actual practice of vanguard art tends to reveal that 'originality' is a working assumption that itself emerges from a ground of repetition and recurrence. One figure, drawn from avant-garde practice in the visual arts, provides an example. This figure is the grid.[17]

Here, Krauss turns to a direct attack upon the discourse of originality. If such work is based upon repetition and recurrence, in what sense is it original? The concept of originality now very much needs its

[16] Ibid., 11.

[17] Krauss, 7.

subtext of being, instead, the revolt of pure logic against an accumulated traditional culture. This logic, this purity of nature, this objectivity toward the outside world, is what is offered by the figure of the grid. And Krauss names an extraordinary number of artists whose work has relied upon it: Kazimir Malevich, Piet Mondrian, Pablo Picasso, Jasper Johns, and Sol de Witt, to name only a few. Taking the example of Malevich, the eponymous painted shape of his famous *Black Square*, from 1915, is an imitation of the basic shape of the canvas that in turn swallows into the artwork the inevitably rectilinear architectural shapes of any typical gallery space. This serves to entirely divorce Malevich's practice from the recent history of painting as a practice of pictographic representation of the three-dimensional space of reality on the two-dimensional plane of a canvas, instead transforming it into a bare exposition of physical space and allowing Malevich himself to claim absolute difference from all other painters. In the case of Malevich, the figure of the grid is somewhat hidden. Each scale of this rectilinear mimesis can be mapped onto the same universal grid, from the smallest painted square up to the largest architectural quadrangle. For others, like Agnes Martin or Mark Rothko, the use of the figure of the grid is more literal.

There are many similar examples in music as well: fantasy upon the natural harmonic series as in the spectralism of Gérard Grisey and Georg Friedrich Haas; equal distribution of pitch, rhythmic, timbral and other aspects of sonic diversity according to mathematical permutations of a sequence of numbers as in the serialism of Anton Webern, Milton Babbitt, or Pierre Boulez; subtle variation around an otherwise very small set of materials repeated ad infinitum as in the minimalism of Philip Glass or Steve Reich; and so forth. As in the case of the 'noise-sound' music of Russolo's futurism, these later compositional styles also arose at least in part as means of casting off an oppressive received culture—serialism of tonal harmony and of melody's stirring of toxic nationalism; minimalism, ironically enough, of serialism's unrelenting monotony. The grid may now—100 years later—be a shared reference point among so many different schools of artistic expression that the mere fact of using it is no longer original in itself. But its absolute neutrality relative to human culture and subjectivity on the whole remains quite the contrary: an inexhaustible resource for those wishing to shed a received practice. It can serve as a stand-in for a simple return to roots—a challenge to cultural sedimentations of meaning. As Krauss puts it,

> [t]he absolute stasis of the grid, its lack of hierarchy, of centre, of inflection, emphasizes not only its antireferential character, but—more importantly—its hostility to narrative. This structure, impervious both to time and to incident, will not permit the projection of language into the domain of the visual, and the result is silence. This silence is not due simply to the extreme effectiveness of the grid as a barricade against speech, but to the protectiveness of its mesh against all intrusions from outside. [...] For those for whom art begins in a kind of originary purity, the grid was emblematic of the sheer disinterestedness of the work of art, its absolute purposelessness, from which it derived the promise of its autonomy.[18]

Alongside faith in God, which may or may not be tenable for a given individual, it's the only absolute truth to which one can return in order to distance oneself from the mediocrity of pre-existing human inventions. It's the primal stew from which one can draw anew the most basic truths about nature and humanity.

The ghost of Descartes *blazes* through these words. Descartes was of course also a mathematician, dealing quite often with that discipline's grid-based form, geometry. And he himself drew the importance of mathematics from its lack of reliance on the uncertainty of perception, the contingence of empiricism, and the transience of judgment. Mathematical principles are true forever and always, and can be accessed in all their perfection despite our own imperfection as mere humans. The three corners of a triangle add up to 180 degrees not because of anything to do with Descartes, but as an absolute, universal, and necessary truth. Like Marinetti and Russolo, Descartes is able to push away and rise above dominant cultural values by situating his work wholly external to those values while simultaneously giving it an autonomous identity external to himself. Only, in Descartes's case, those dominant values are not in neoclassicism as an expressive ideal but in theology and scholasticism as sources of true knowledge.

My concerns with this as related to contemporary composition are more or less the same as my concerns with it as related to historical performance: firstly, that it creates a false binary of original versus unoriginal practices, and secondly, that it's not *actually* possible in the case of fundamentally perception-based activities such as music. Picking up where we left off with John Locke earlier in this chapter, he goes on to share a hypothetical from an exchange of letters with the philosopher William Molyneux [1656–1698]:

[18] Ibid., 7.

> Suppose a man born blind, and now adult, and taught by his touch to distinguish between a cube and a sphere of the same metal, and nighly of the same bigness, so as to tell, when he felt one and the other, which is the cube, which the sphere. Suppose then the cube and sphere placed on a table, and the blind man to be made to see; query, Whether by his sight, before he touched them, he could now distinguish and tell which is the globe, which the cube?
>
> [...] Not. For though he has obtained the experience of how a globe, how a cube, affects his touch yet he has not yet attained the experience, that what affects his touch so or so, must affect his sight so or so; or that a protuberant angle in the cube, that pressed his hand unequally, shall appear to his eye as it does in the cube.
>
> [...] This I have set down, and leave with my reader, as an occasion for him to consider how much he may be beholden to experience, improvement, and acquired notions, where he thinks he had not the least use of, or help from them.[19]

Without any previous experience of sight, one would be unable to gain anything but the faintest idea of what one sees, regardless of how well one may understand it through any other sense. It is Locke's steadfast position in his *Essay* that it is only through perception that we come to have any ideas at all. His first axiom is that there are "no innate principles in the mind."[20] We can only come to understand something by first perceiving something. All knowledge comes from the outside, and is channelled through our perception. Even "complex ideas," invented in the mind of an individual, are only possible through the recombination in novel ways of all our memories of past perceptions. In all acts of creation, we are inextricably fused to our past.

In his "Letter on the Blind" [first published 1773], Denis Diderot [1713–1784] could almost have been replying to the very same hypothetical, and he references his point explicitly in relation to Descartes:

> Should a philosopher, who has been blind and deaf from his birth, ever make a man in imitation of that of Descartes, I dare affirm, Madam, that he will place the soul at the fingers' ends; as from thence deriving his principal sensations, and all his lights. And who will put him in mind, that his head is the residence of his thoughts? If the labours of imagination impair our brain, it is because our effort in imagining is pretty similar to that which we exert in perceiving very near or very small objects. But it will not be so with him who has been

[19] Locke, 94.

[20] Ibid., 12.

> blind and deaf from his birth: the sensations which he has derived from the touch will be, as it were, the mould of all his ideas; and I should not be surprised that, after a deep and close meditation, his finger should be as much tired as our head.[21]

In both Diderot and Locke, it seems to be comfortably admitted that Cartesianism can indeed reveal clear and distinct truths about the outside world, but unlike Descartes, they hold that these truths will always be framed in relation to one's individual perceptive nature, and to one's perceptive memories. Even in situations of absolute, universal, immutable truths such as mathematical first principles, we have no ability to come into an idea unless we have already perceived *something*—and remembered it. Regardless of whether an idea is true or false, it is only out of those *memories of perceived somethings* that it can be *made* at all.

Should it not follow from this, then, that a musician can make music by no other method than by reconfiguring what they have already heard? New music is made by imitating older music. But this imitation is not mere duplication. The imitation must be different enough that the new music is perceived by its listener to not simply *be* that older music. The issue at hand is precisely the nature of the relationship *between* the old and the new. I don't suggest that new music should not be novel, surprising, clever, creative, poetic, or many other such things often also described as 'originality,' only that this doesn't require a total independence from all other music. Instead, I tend to prefer thinking of composition as an act of *being in* those relationships, and as evolving those relationships into something else, and then something else again. To be sure, futurism, spectralism, serialism, minimalism and many other discourse-of-originality-based musical practices are extraordinarily valuable and meaningful contributions to the field, but that does not warrant forcing the isolationary aspects of their value systems onto all compositional practices whatsoever.

The good news is that the New Music world is no longer quite as hostile on this front as it seems to have been a few decades ago, though the discourse of originality can indeed still be found within certain large institutions such as the Morton Gould Awards. Still, much work remains to be done. Without continuing to reconceptualize compositional practice as we also retool it, we'll be unable to confront the

[21] Denis Diderot. *Letter on the Blind* [first published 1773], accessed 30 March 2024, https://archive.org/details/literatureonblin00unse, 22-23.

significant ideological impediments that do remain, such as the current interpretation of copyright law in relation to musical sampling, which is premised upon the idea that what a musical author makes belongs to them alone. We composers with lineage in the Western classical music tradition may be uniquely well situated to do this, owing to the fact that so many of our reference points are squarely in the public domain. And I'd suggest that the way out of this might lie precisely in this relationship we have to our classical lineage, and specifically in the complementary problems that the discourse of originality has created in its other sub-fields of practice.

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The questions here are twofold. Firstly, how can practices of contemporary classical composition contribute to the formation and reformation of musicians' and listeners' relationships to classical music at large? And secondly, what exactly is the nature of the line between producing new music (composition) and reproducing old music (performance)?

In 2017, I composed a seven-movement piece called *visions of small-minded Men*, which was premiered by the Nieuw Ensemble and conductor Ryan Bancroft at the Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ in Amsterdam.[22] This piece draws on my relationship with pan-European and American brass band music from the turn of the 20th century—a type of music for which I have a strong affinity, tied both to my national identity as an American and my playing in concert bands and marching bands as a kid, but which I also recognize has often been instrumentalized in the name of an exclusionary and homogenizing form of patriotism. In this piece, each movement takes notation written between 1880 and 1920 as compositional source material in an attempt to isolate the different characters of this music, to weave them through, across, and against each other, and to tease out for myself whether it's possible to express sincere love for this music without inadvertently bolstering the toxic politics it's often used to propagate. Six movements are based on marches:

[22] Carlo Diaz, *visions of small-minded Men* (2017). For a recording, see https://carlodiaz.com/music/visions-of-small-minded-men.

1. "Death or Glory," by Robert Browne Hall
2. "Radetzky Marsch," by Johann Strauss
3. "The Stars and Stripes Forever," by John Philip Sousa
   & "Hail to the Chief," by James Sanderson
4. "Barnum and Bailey's Favourite March," by Karl King
5. "Badenweiler Marsch," by Georg Fürst
6. "Eclipse Gallop," by Karl King

The seventh movement is based on a hymn:

7. "Abide with Me," by William Henry Monk

These pieces were notational starting points for me—raw materials *with* which to try and understand my own musical background and preferences, and *from* which to extract their own constituent influences and characters. And my approach differed for each piece above, both in the amount and the type of alteration to the source material.

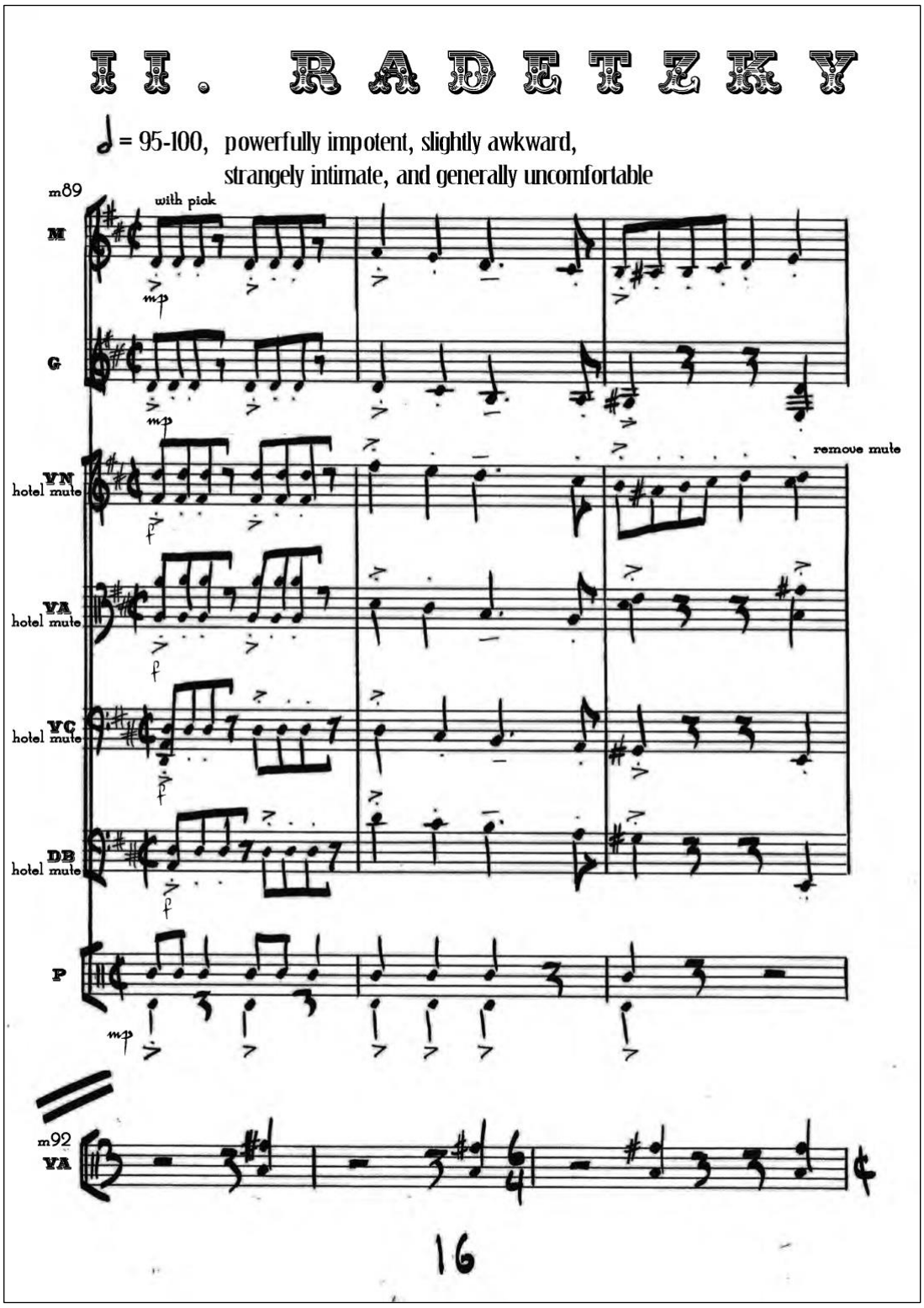

Figure 1.3: Measures 89–94 of the score used for the second movement, "Radetzky," of my piece, *visions of small-minded Men.* For a recording, see https://carlodiaz.com/music/visions-of-small-minded-men; the excerpt shown here begins at 02:37.

Though most marches of this period are composed for orchestra, concert band, or brass band, *visions of small-minded Men* uses a very different instrumentation: mandolin, classical guitar, string quintet, and a single percussionist. Even if this group were to simply play the seven compositions listed above 'as written,' one could already start to see a critical commentary on the source material. This instrumentation produces a sound that is much quieter and much darker than an orchestra or band. The mandolin and guitar have relatively delicate sounds, and are without sustain, so the bowed strings and percussion collaboratively adapt their playing to match. Marches can indeed typically be both bombastic and gentle, but in this case they're almost forced into the latter even when it might not seem appropriate.

But these instruments don't simply play this source music 'as written.' I adjust the notation in various ways. In the first movement, based on "Death or Glory," I remove the brief melodic introduction of the original so that we enter unceremoniously into a brief section of accompaniment with no melody, which repeats in short, inconsistent segments for a little while, changing orchestrations here and there a few times, with small interludes of the percussionist flicking a small cymbal with his finger. We only get five or six measures of the original march, all told, but it's almost as long as the original, there are almost as many unique character changes, and the overall form is not significantly different than the original relative to its own melodic and harmonic materials. The movement is cyclical and somewhat unremarkable, but also incredibly soft and easy to understand. My hope is that it's kind of gently pleasant but also strikingly plain. It's clear that this music is based on a march, but not much happens. It's a very simple opening.

The second movement is quite different. Based on the well-known "Radetzky March," it's a bit more of a straightforward parody. The piece's original melodies, harmonies, and form are more or less unchanged, though the piece is shortened overall. The real divergence is in its orchestration. There's portamento and ricochet in the violin part; the harmony can primarily be heard in the mandolin playing chords in tremolo while the other strings provide the rhythmic 'oom-pa'; the sole percussionist is given a bass drum, a snare drum, and a cymbal (all positioned awkwardly far apart) and is asked to play only using his bare hands; and after a few seconds the guitarist starts clapping like it's New Year's Eve in Vienna. It's not at all difficult for anyone familiar with the "Radetzky March" to understand what's going on here. This is basic pantomime, in good fun.

So far, these changes to the source material have been fairly maximal. Beyond their adaptation to a different instrumentation than they were initially written for, I've made significant changes to the notes themselves. In the third movement, however, this is no longer the case. Looking particularly at the first part of the movement, based on "Stars and Stripes Forever," I sought to make a relatively neutral arrangement, though I made exactly one crucial divergence from this neutrality by moving the melody one beat earlier than the harmony for the duration of the piece. Though a very small and simple adjustment from the perspective of notation in itself, the result creates as meaningful a difference in comparison to the usual sound of the piece as do either of the previous two movements. Though subtle, what we end up hearing is music that sounds almost like a straight-ahead performance of "Stars and Stripes Forever," but that also sounds chaotic or sloppy in a peculiarly elusive way, and that has somehow lost the powerful rhythmic drive that is typically one of its most characteristic features. Though each of the performers is playing their part exactly as I wrote it, the result sounds like just the opposite. This is by design. I have the utmost respect for the musicians of the Nieuw Ensemble, but I needed a way to divorce this piece's identity from its aesthetic overtures to militaristic power. Sousa knew what he was doing (I presume this from the way he composes), so this piece sounds louder and prouder the more skilful the musicians are who play it. The only way to deflate such power is to disrupt this construction. And in so doing, my hope is that its sweetness and tunefulness come to the foreground. Perhaps this is a way to indulge in the joy of this music without endorsing its militarism? Perhaps it's a way to become aware of the way these two abstractions—joy and militarism—elide in a traditional performance of this piece? It's not up to me to decide whether this is the experience of those who listen to this music, but I hope this description can provide some clarity as to what I was hoping for and how I worked toward it.

The significant question here is not to do with the artistic intent of this piece, anyway, so I won't present further analysis of the remaining movements. What I'm interested in is whether such music is impeded by the traditional binary of composer as creator of original music versus performer as transparent conduit for past music, and if so, how one's understanding of these roles of composer and performer might evolve in confronting this impedance. In a way, the expressive form of the piece is that of a *critique*, and if a prerequisite to any critique is the identification of its objects, there's immediately a problem with respect to this composer-performer distinction. If I must identify the object of my critique

as a specific musical practice, I must in at least some limited way replicate that practice in my music, and thus exclude myself from the discourse of originality. So perhaps this is just a performative expression, then; an interpretation, and not a new composition. But if a critique is also an investigation, a dissection, a problematization, or a confrontation of its object, then I cannot merely replicate this musical practice as a performer would, always deferring to a demonstrable historical act or intent. So where am I?

In a musical culture where composers invent original music and performers recite existing music, this project is not just prohibited, it's conceptually invisible. There are not even words with which to specifically condemn it. It's simply inconceivable, though often quietly allowed to sit alongside other compositional works thanks to a somewhat agnostic stance toward originality and reuse adopted by many involved in New Music today. There are certainly many examples of such music beyond my own—Ralph Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, Charles Ives's *New England Holidays*, Luciano Berio's *Sinfonia*, Wolfgang Mitterer's *Inwendig losgelöst*, Max Richter's "recomposition" of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, and Lucia D'Errico's "divergent performances," to mention just a few—but for the time being I'd like to leave them sit. The central problem is that, insofar as composition is the production of original music and the performance of those compositions is the replication of existing music, we lack the ability to effectively name musical practices such as these.

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Coming back to Cartesian reasoning, we find in this example the inverse of the problem of historical objectivity. In trying to divorce ourselves from all outside influence in order to create an entirely original new music, we find that there's actually nothing within ourselves except what has shaped us from the outside. Just as we cannot perceive outside things except through the unique idiosyncrasies of own perception, that unique perceptive mechanism that constitutes our self is nothing other than a complex sum of those same outside influences. The self and the other are inescapably synergistic, so no musical practice can exclusively engage only one or the other. And so we find ourselves in a situation where contemporary composition is ejected from its claim to the originality (or perhaps subjectivity—that originating exclusively within the individuated self) of the omnipotent composer, just as historical

performance is ejected from its claim to the objectivity of the omniscient historian, and both are found in the same ambiguous middle ground between their traditional, idealized conceptualizations. The idol-forms of these practices will only drive one to madness. It is tempting, then, to begin proposing new definitions for each that hold up independent of these impossible perfections of form, but I'd instead like to hold course for a little while longer so that we might find what kinds of music have gone missing in the space between these spaces.

I see it as one in which the ubiquitous expression is the *mimetic*, understood with an eye toward Paul Ricoeur:

> If we continue to translate mimesis by 'imitation,' we have to understand something completely contrary to a copy of some pre-existing reality and speak instead of a creative imitation. And if we translate mimesis by 'representation' [...] we must not understand by this word some redoubling of presence, as we could still do for Platonic mimesis, but rather the break that opens the space for fiction.[23]

Mimesis here is not remaking only with the intent of creatively changing or of faithfully relaying, but something much broader than that. In order to say anything, one must be able to make clear what one is saying anything *about*. This demonstration of the *about what* is precisely the mimetic gesture at issue. In language, this is where we can use names—of genres, of styles, of composers, of melodies, and so forth. But in music itself we have no such luxury. We cannot merely point at what we critique. We must in some way *produce* it anew. Whether I mean to neutrally convey something, critically analyse it, or generatively expand upon it, I must first in some way replicate it for my audience. The nature of this replication, at first agnostic of its relation to existing musical disciplinarities, then building up an idea of the cultures within it and the purposes to which it can be instrumentalized, is the topic of my research. In this context, I look to Maurice Merleau-Ponty for useful ways to understand how self and other—subject and object of study—elide in the perceptive faculties of the artist and historian. I read Paul Ricoeur, Hayden White, and Ann Laura Stoler to understand the co-production of temporality through memory and imagination. I adapt the writing of Stephen Wright for meaningful new ways to conceptualize musical

[23] Paul Ricoeur, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin & David Pellauer, *Time and Narrative, Vol. 1* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 45.

things—whether in sound or notation—tying together objectively different experiences into abstractly comparable classifications. I adopt Bernard Harcourt's stance that it is not only a discipline's methodology and epistemology but also its *purpose* that can powerfully circumscribe its identity. And finally, I look to the early 18th-century Neapolitan philosopher, philologist, and historian Giambattista Vico for a potent route away from the characterization of musical practice outlined in this introduction: the fundamentally *Cartesian* paradox of historical performance and contemporary composition as we know them today.