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

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3_Rhetoric, Knowledge, and Asynchrony in Historical Sound

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In his 1709 lecture *On the Study Methods of Our Time*, Giambattista Vico questions the value of René Descartes's "geometric method," which he presents in opposition to the humanistic-rhetorical mode of argumentation common among European elites for the few preceding centuries. Vico describes this method as essentially just deductive logic: meticulous, step-by-step reasoning that builds from small points of certainty to larger ones, from simple immutable facts to assertions of truth about more complex particular issues. Descartes asks what he knows with certainty, and answers that he knows that he exists, which is the same as knowing that he thinks (*cogito ergo sum*, "I *think*, therefore I *am*"), and then proceeds into a chain of 'therefore x, therefore y, therefore z' about geometry, the mind-body relationship, and so on. The geometric method generates knowledge that is objective, or that is true in every place and at every time regardless of the subjectivity from which it is considered. For example, the three angles of a triangle add to 180 degrees. It is universal, immutable, and self-sufficient. This method is what would eventually merge over the course of the 18th century with a long tradition of empiricism to form what we now know as the scientific method.

Vico criticizes it on four fronts. Firstly, it is used by philosophers to treat *all* objects of study, despite being properly applicable only to questions of *natural* philosophy (studies of the non-human). Secondly, it creates a tendency to cloud matters of *judgment*, impertinently and ineffectively rendering them matters of *fact*. Thirdly, it has an inefficacy of practical application, making the use of its knowledge within refined crafts both onerous and ineffective. And fourthly, it is introduced by teachers too early on in the education of young people, detracting from their natural, plentiful, and useful faculty of imagination. In its place, Vico advocates a renewed focus on rhetoric and judgment.

In these critiques, Vico would be by no means alone among today's critical theorists and historians. Many recent authors have similarly demonstrated the fallibility of an overemphasis of objectivity in history and advocated for a renewed focus on the political and aesthetic judgment implicit in historical work. My aim here in giving an overview of Vico's rehearsal of this argument, though, is not to bolster

recent discourse in historiography and critical theory with a supporting perspective but to demonstrate the similarity between Vico's position and this discourse such that Vico's later work might be situated as a possible model for overcoming a vexing impasse faced by critical theory, historiography, and, by extension, historically-informed performance today. In raising these qualms with the geometric method, Vico prefigures his later desire for an altogether different conception of knowledge that can provide the strength Descartes sees in certainty and immutability without succumbing to the pitfalls that are their unattainability and inflexibility in actual practice.

To begin, by pointing out that, "the invention of arguments is by nature prior to the judgment of their validity,"[1] Vico both situates his reader in the vocabulary of classical rhetoric and positions rhetoric ahead of analysis. He argues that before one can "cleanse [one's] fundamental truths not only of all falsity, but also of the mere suspicion of error,"[2] one must know what those fundamental truths are and whence they came. In other words, while it's all well and good to be able to answer difficult questions with precision, clarity, and certainty, the value of such a skill is limited without a distinct method by which to decide which questions are worth answering and why. If "the only target of our intellectual endeavours is truth," we will inevitably "devote all our efforts to the investigation of physical phenomena, because their nature seems unambiguous." This means that, by default, we will also "fail to inquire into human nature which, because of the freedom of man's will, is difficult to determine."[3] In other words, because the geometric method is better able to answer questions dealing with the physical, analytical philosophers tend to neglect questions dealing with the human. This is an ethical crisis for Vico—ethical questions being those which "treat of human character, of its dispositions, its passions, and of the manner of adjusting these factors to public life and eloquence."[4] Its result is that, "our young men [...] are unable to engage in the life of the community, to conduct themselves with sufficient wisdom and prudence, infuse into their speech a familiarity with human psychology or permeate their utterances with passion."[5] By devoting themselves exclusively to the geometric method, philosophers detach themselves

[1] Giambattista Vico, trans. Elio Gianturco, *On the Study Methods of Our Time* [first published 1709] (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 14.

[2] Ibid., 13.

[3] Ibid., 33.

[4] Ibid., 33.

[5] Ibid., 33.

from the world. They render themselves incapable of discerning what is relevant in their society and what is meaningful to their peers.

But even if we excuse this ethical crisis for a moment, even if an analytical philosopher somehow did happen upon a question worth answering within their society, the geometric method wouldn't necessarily enable them to answer it. And this is the case for a far broader range of questions than those "human" questions mentioned above:

> [A man] built a ship the proportions of which had been carefully calculated beforehand according to the rules of analytical geometry, expecting it to be the swiftest vessel in existence. But as soon as the ship slid from the docks into the water, it sank to the bottom of the sea and remained there as motionless as a rock. Perhaps the reason is that, just as pieces of music composed in accordance with a mathematical formula give no pleasure, so machines built according to the principles of analytical geometry are of no practical use.[6]

The geometric method, in other words, is too abstract for its own good. Because it deals with universality and immutability—that which is true at every moment in time and every point in space—it is unable to be of any practical use in the constantly shifting environment of nature. Though it may succeed in laying out true generalities, it fails to provide any guidance as to how those generalities might be mapped onto particularities. It can tell you the ideal shape, size, and mass for a ship but it cannot tell you how to adapt that scheme to the idiosyncrasies of the actual wood you are using to build it, which differs from tree to tree and board to board.

It may seem that this is an argument for embodied knowledge—good craftsmanship—but Vico's focus throughout the lecture remains intellectual. The plea he makes is for an agility of the mind:

> Those who know all the loci, i.e., the lines of argument to be used, are able (by an operation not unlike reading the printed characters on a page) to grasp extemporaneously the elements of persuasion inherent in any question or case. [...] In pressing, urgent affairs, which do not admit of delay or postponement [...] it is the

[6] Ibid., 29-30.

> orator's business to give immediate assistance. [...] Our experts in philosophical criticism, instead, whenever they are confronted with some dubious point, are wont to say: 'Give me some time to think it over!'[7]

Because geometric analysis is so rigid, it is unable to adapt quickly to new and unfamiliar situations. Instead of allowing one to recognize familiar patterns within new situations and then simply adapt memorized, archetypal lines of argument to those new particularities, the geometric method demands a fresh start each time. The effect of this is that by the time it yields a result, the moment in which that result would have been relevant has already passed. Because it only deals in the immutable, it does not allow adaptation to continual change over time, which, from Vico's perspective, is all that is available to us in the real world.

Furthermore, even for those meaningful questions it *is* able to answer, Vico argues in a later lecture that, "such a method is so subtle and drawn out that if by chance attention to one proposition is broken, it is completely lost to whoever is listening to comprehend anything of the whole of what is being said."[8] The rigidity and plainness of the geometric method, in Vico's view, "constitutes a hindrance in the way of an eloquent exposition,"[9] such that it will never be effective as a mode of *communication*. In this position, Vico once again reveals himself to be fundamentally a humanist. He believes that arts and sciences are created by and for humans. A science that can produce pure, immutable knowledge is of no value if it cannot frame that knowledge in such a way that it can be communicated from one human to another. But Vico is also a rhetorician:

> [I]n the art of oratory the relationship between speaker and listeners is of the essence. It is in tune with the opinions of the audience that we have to arrange our speech. It often happens that people unmoved by forceful and compelling reasons can be jolted from their apathy, and made to change their minds by means of some trifling line of argument. Consequently, in order to be sure of having touched all the soul-strings of his listeners, the orator, then, should run through the complete set of the loci which schematize the evidence.[10]

[7] Ibid., 15.

[8] Ibid., 87.

[9] Ibid., 24.

[10] Ibid., 16.

Not only must we defend our position according to what is true, we must learn to develop awareness of the beliefs, desires, and emotionality of our audience so that the truth of what we are saying finds its way to their hearts. Philosophical analysis, being solely concerned with 'pure' truth and falsity, is unable to do this. It is too abstract.

In summary, at the same time that it is unable to determine which questions are meaningful and unable to answer questions that are too practical, the geometric method is also unable to deliver truth in a way that is compelling. And because of this—because it is "impossible to assess human affairs by the inflexible standard of abstract right"[11]—we must look elsewhere for "human wisdom," which is the ultimate goal of study. In 1709, it is the orator who holds the ideal method to attain this goal. In 1744, Vico passes through his idea of poetic wisdom in order to build a new and improved knowledge system, a 'new science,' upon these rhetorical foundations.

Applied to the practice of history, this early defence of rhetoric by Vico can be seen as analogous to an opposition of objectivist-empiricist historiography to historically-grounded political judgment as defines, in part, the discipline of critical theory. Through both of these domains—critical theory and Vico's defence of rhetoric—as through Vico's later writing, we may be able to find a key to reframing the musicological discourse that began with a question of historical authenticity in performance at the beginning of the 20th century and had evolved by the beginning of the 21st century into the field of historically-informed performance. Instead of pursuing a doomed-to-fail quest for the sound of a musical past in itself, we might begin to ask, "How and why might a historian perform as their musical self and other, as the musical past and present, in one and the same gesture?"

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Asynchrony is a hot topic among musicians interested in historical performance practice, particularly in reference to later 19th-century music, where it can be clearly heard in readily-available phonograph recordings by well-known Romantic composers and their students. But it can be extremely difficult for performers with modern musical training to replicate such non-metronomy. I'd like to use this problem

[11] Ibid., 34.

to illustrate a case in which a rhetorical (Vichian) historiography might yield a more accurate historical representation than an objectivist (Cartesian) approach.

Pianist Anna Scott has shown the drastic difference between simply imitating these recordings verbatim and any outcomes of the traditionally text- and notation-based research methodologies of historically-informed performance,[12] while musicologist George Barth has traced a clear path from this asynchronous pre-modern performance style between the early 1900s and the 1950s to the rhythmically- and metrically-standardized modern style common today.[13] By Scott's classification, this asynchrony includes upward and downward rolling of chords, temporal dislocation of the left and right hand, local stretching of time, unwritten rushing and slowing of global tempo, shortening and lengthening of individual rhythmic values, placement of individual notes earlier than indicated, or even the addition and omission of notes altogether.[14] Contrasting recordings of Franz Liszt's third *Liebestraum* [1850], as shared by Barth, and as performed by pianists Frederic Lamond in 1936 and Arthur Rubenstein in 1950, illustrate similar effects.[15] While Lamond was revered for "sometimes floating a melody above a more metrical underpinning, at other times playing all parts freely against an assumed regularity, or dispensing with regularity altogether," Rubinstein "perform[ed] every verticality [...] as a simultaneity, while adding a few more of his own by studiously ignoring every one of Liszt's arpeggio indications."[16] Listening across these two recordings, one can hear the same sea change into modernism as Rosalind Krauss described through the figure of the grid. Rubinstein quantizes his rhythms to this very same type of idealized, perfectly consistent temporality. And he does so with the very same disdain for received traditions as Marinetti and Russolo's Futurism, imitating the perfect consistency of modern technology in his

[12] Anna Scott, "Romanticizing Brahms: Early Recordings and the Reconstruction of Brahmsian Identity" (Doctoral thesis, Leiden University, 2014), accessed 27 March 2024, https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/29987.

[13] George Barth, "Effacing Modernism, or How to Perform Less Accurately through Listening," *Historical Performance*, Vol. 1 (2018), 148-189.

[14] Scott, appendices, xvii.

[15] Frederic Lamond, 1936, accessed 27 March 2024, https://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/media/t34s55nn1n; Arthur Rubinstein, 1950. accessed 27 March 2024, https://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/media/s06415qk0x.

[16] Barth, 154.

performance practice as a way of asserting moral superiority over much more fluid inherited interpretations.

And even though phonographic recording only dates to the late-19th century, an eerily similar "waywardness," to use Barth's metonym for this phenomenon, can be heard in barrel organs, flute clocks, and music boxes from throughout the 18th century. Consider contrasting versions of "Mi paventi il figlio indegno" from Carl Heinrich Graun's 1751 opera, *Britannico*: one from a *Flötenuhr* built around 1790, and another recorded by soprano Julia Lezhneva and Concerto Köln in 2017.[17] While the latter is undoubtedly a skilful and virtuosic performance, it exhibits none of the divergences from a literal understanding of notation as does the former, which incidentally are many of those same features Scott and Barth point out in early 20th-century recordings: rolling of chords, dislocation of hands, shortening of rhythmic values, and irregular rushing and slowing. One could argue that the fidelity of such machines to actual 18th-century musical performances is less than reliable given the age of the extant examples and the difficulty of their manufacture and maintenance, but given the ubiquity of such interpretive quirks among mechanical instruments of the same era, the similarity of these quirks to those described by Scott and Barth in reference to 19th-century pianism, and the clarity with which Barth demonstrates their falling out of fashion over the course of only a few decades in the middle of the 20th century, this seems implausible. I'm almost certainly missing some nuanced amount of difference between Lamond's Liszt and this Graun *Flötenuhr*, but perhaps it's the same kind of nuanced difference I'm missing between Rubinstein's Liszt and Lezhneva and Concerto Köln's Graun, because those two sound pretty similar to me as well.

So if one is interested in imitating musical performance styles of the 18th century, there is sufficient reason to attempt such asynchrony as Scott and Barth describe. How might one go about this? Performer-scholars such as Neal Peres da Costa have expended significant effort to identify such recurring patterns of asynchrony in historical recordings in order to plausibly overlay them onto music of

[17] Anonymous flute clock [ca. 1790], "Britannico: From the Opera," in *Flute Clocks in the Nydahl Collection* (Robert Holmin Ljud & Bild, 2014), accessed 27 March 2024, https://youtu.be/ao74cfto1pI; Julia Lezhneva and Concerto Köln, "Britannico, Act II, 'Mi paventi il filgio indegno,'" in *Graun: Opera Arias* (Decca Music Group Limited, 2017), accessed 27 March 2024, https://youtu.be/0MqZnEGdXXcW.

which we're not so lucky to have recordings contemporaneous to the date of composition.[18] Though slow and taxing, such work can result in quite remarkable music. But obstacles remain. Firstly, beyond the extreme commitment of time to study and precisely replicate historical musical asynchrony, this becomes significantly more complicated with ensemble music, where there is no longer an *individual* who has full control in real time over every detail of their performance. Yet it's clear from both Barth's article and other early recordings that such rhythmic and metrical diversity was common in larger ensemble settings as well. Secondly—and perhaps the more vexing issue—such performance aesthetics are extremely foreign, and often bewildering or unsettling, to both casual listeners to, and fellow performers of, 18th- and 19th-century music. Yet historically-informed performance has never been a reclusive, fully academic discipline, but one actively involved in public recording and concert-making activities. Each in their own way, these two problems are ones in which a rhetorical approach such as that advocated by Vico in his early writings can pull us beyond the limitations of a more objectivist Cartesian value system.

In 2017, I began experimenting with Stile Nu toward the use of such asynchrony in music for baroque orchestra, one of the more successful experiments of which, "Nine," ended up as the penultimate track on our 2022 album, *The Aviary*.[19] This is a performance of the third movement of "L'Estate" from Antonio Vivaldi's *Le Quattro Stagioni* [1725]. I approached this notation—and my desire to hear it with a degree of musical asynchrony—from the perspective of a composer rather than a performer, albeit a composer who, as described earlier, understands composition not as the creation of original music but as the curation, arrangement, and processing of pre-existing historical and contemporary musical practices through the medium of music notation and other forms of written and verbal communication with performers.

[18] Neal Peres da Costa, *Off the Record: Performing Practices in Romantic Piano Playing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[19] Carlo Diaz and Stile Nu, *The Aviary* (2022), accessed 28 March 2024, https://carlodiaz.com/music/the-aviary

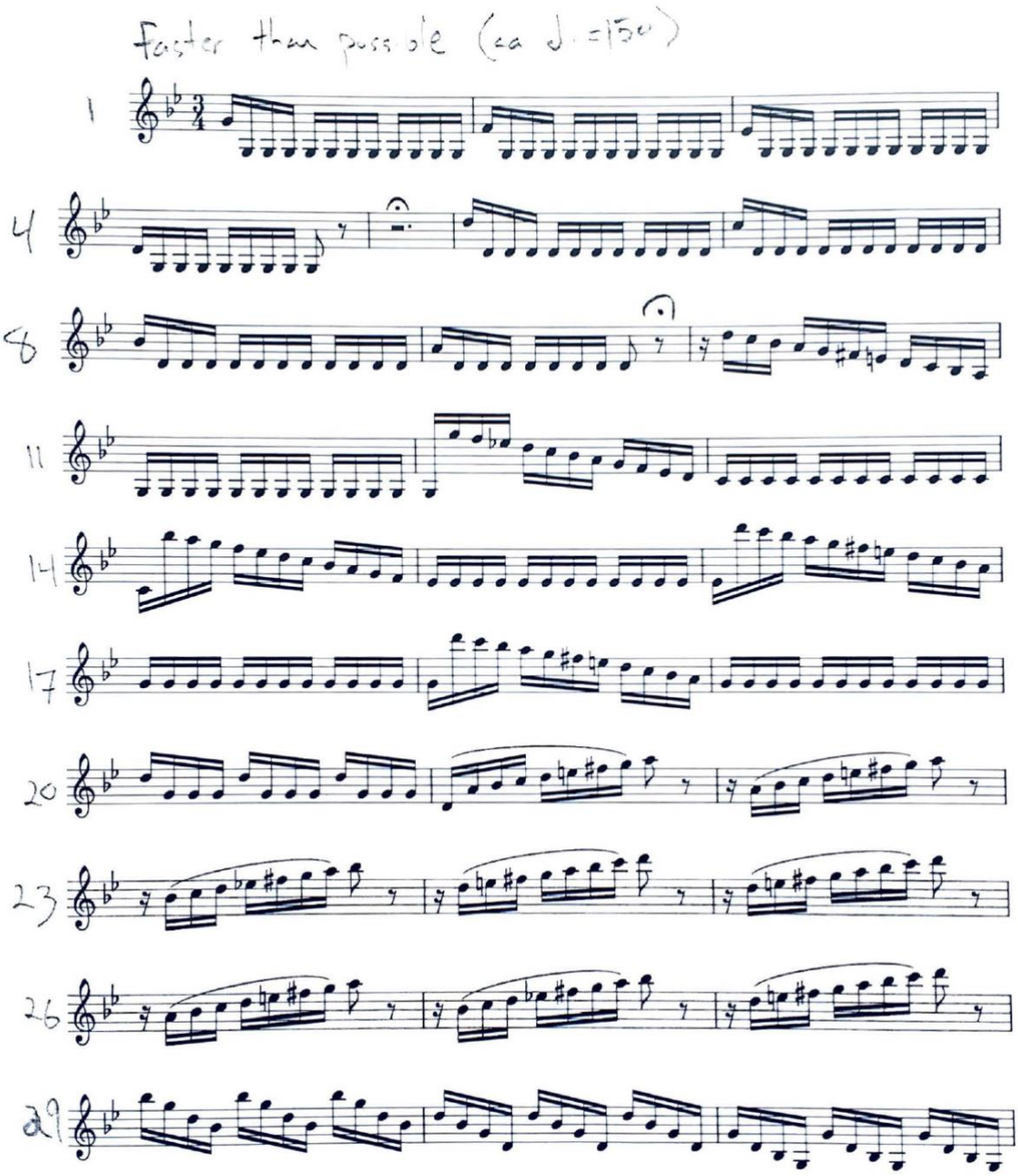

Figure 3.1: The beginning of the Violin 1 part for "Nine," by Carlo Diaz and Stile Nu; or, the beginning of the Violino Solo part for Antonio Vivaldi's *Violin Concerto in G minor*, RV 315, "L'Estate," Mvt. III, with an interpretive note written at the top. For a recording, see https://carlodiaz.com/music/the-aviary; the excerpt shown here is the beginning of the track called "Nine."

For this piece, I simply wrote "faster than possible, ca. [dotted half note] = 150" at the top of an otherwise unaltered edition of the score. This may seem to be an insignificant intervention, but it profoundly disrupts a typical understanding of the piece, as other recent experiments such as Daniel Leech-Wilkinson's and Ji Liu's "transgressive" triple-time performance of Ludwig van Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" have demonstrated.[20] But in the case of "Nine," the idea of 'possibility' is central. If clean and precise recitation of written notes is a classical musician's *de facto* approach, one way to investigate an alternative aesthetic is to disable the possibility of that instinct. In other words, one way to force innovation is to put oneself in a totally unfamiliar situation. One's instinctive strategies for negotiating problems are suddenly untenable, so new instincts must be discovered. At the same time, one's existing framework of aesthetic judgment is called into question, as the standard idea of a 'good' performance is no longer possible. Done in the abstract, this can be an incredibly powerful endeavour for any musician. Done within the context of a marriage to music that one typically understands outside the context of such types of experimentation, the impact becomes even bigger. One must find a new idea for a familiar beauty, and a new way to produce it.

Merely by allowing oneself to sincerely attempt such an impossibility—perhaps absurdity—the composition's polyphony dislocates in time, the placement of each note is sometimes earlier or later than written, dozens of notes are omitted and perhaps some others sneak their way in through the chaos, and there is a rushing and a slowing that keeps everyone vaguely near the same moment on the page. With almost no effort, all those characteristic trappings of 20th-century metronomic and structuralist performance styles—anachronisms to 18th- and 19th-century music—simply disappear. We certainly haven't fully achieved a replication of the above-mentioned historical performance practices, but have we placed ourselves closer? Have we created a new, different kind of blank slate from which to work towards them?

Perhaps one is interested by this experiment in relation to historically-informed performance, perhaps not. It is nevertheless at best only a novel method for disrupting one's anachronistic contemporary interpretive instincts in what is otherwise still simply the practice of discovering and replicating older, historical performance practices wholesale. It's still merely a different methodology for

[20] Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, *Challenging Performance: Classical Music Performance Norms and How to Escape Them*, (2020), 23.1, accessed 22 June 2023, https://challengingperformance.com/the-book-23-1/.

the very same objectivist historiography that I'm trying to problematise. But there's more to unravel. Consider an analysis of a much more recent composer than Vivaldi:

> In [Brian] Ferneyhough's case, [...] [i]t is not just the listener, but the work itself that escapes the composer's control. Ferneyhough mentions the work's autonomy and 'subjectivity:' 'a work entering into conversation with the listener as if it were another aware subject.' At the same time, he stresses that in conflict with the 'figural energies' embodied by a composition, the composer by no means gains the upper hand: 'when one composes, one is constantly in dialogue with one's means and, in order to enter into fruitful concourse with them, there has to be some common denominator, on the basis of which the equality of conversation partners can be assured.'[21]

This is musicologist Ewa Schreiber describing (and sometimes quoting) Brian Ferneyhough [1943–], famous since the final quarter of the 20th century as a composer of music often labelled "New Complexity." In Ferneyhough's music, the "escape of the composer's control" occurs in the limited physical properties of musical instruments and the limited bodily agency of the musicians who play them.

[21] Ewa Schreiber, "In the Face of the Other: Contemporary Composers' Reflections on the (Ideal) Listener," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (December 2017), 231.

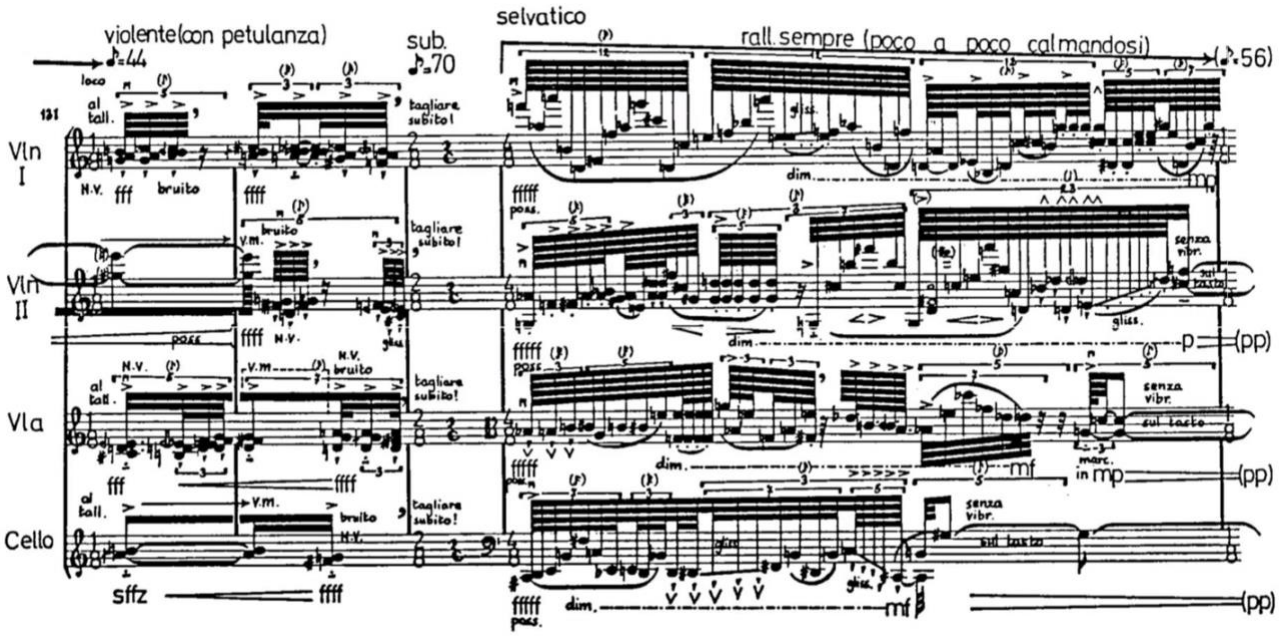

Figure 3.2: Measures 131-134 from the score for Brian Ferneyhough's *String Quartet No. 2*.

In scores such as that for his *String Quartet No. 2* [1979/1980], Ferneyhough provides vastly more information than can possibly be replicated precisely in musical performance. Even in measure 131 alone, as shown in Figure 3.2, gradations in rhythm between 8th notes and 64th notes are augmented by tuplet markings of 3, 5, 7, 8, 12, and 23, which are themselves sometimes nested within each other. Dynamic markings from *pp* to *fffff* imply the differentiation of loudness into no less than nine distinct, identifiable gradations. And if all that weren't enough, the sheer speed of all this variation could be seen as an impossibility in-and-of itself, the first violinist alone being asked to play forty-seven notes in about five seconds. The purpose of this extreme notational specificity is to create a situation in which it is no longer possible for what composer Sam Hayden describes as "a linear progression from the composer's sublime thoughts, through their representation in notation, to their perfect rendering in performance, 'communicating' those thoughts directly to the listener."[22] Facing an overabundance of specificity, a performer must choose *among* the indications in front of them, and might even decide to choose a new path through the notation each time they play. The composer is no longer in sole control of the music

[22] Sam Hayden, "Complexity, Clarity and Contemporary British Orchestral Music," *Tempo*, Vol. 70, No. 277 (July 2016), 77.

that is made, but enters into a discursive relationship with the performer on the topic. This creates an ephemerality to each performance of a kind one might associate more closely with improvised music, wherein no performer or listener has heard any part of the performance before it actually happens. It's unpredictable to a certain degree. And the instruments themselves contribute to this unpredictability as well. Asked to sound particular frequencies for less time than is minimally needed to form their resonances within their physical, vibrating bodies, we sometimes hear the 'non-musical' sound-production capacity of those instruments leak out. Strings squeak instead of resonating clear pitches, the bow ricochets off the strings instead of running along them, the left hand's fingers audibly percuss against the neck of the instrument instead of merely determining the length of string for the bow to sound. The impression of stasis created by a modern musical *work* is disrupted. No longer is it the case that each notational marking is merely communicated from composer to performer to listener, or that any performance can be sonically indistinguishable from any other.

This interpretation of Brian Ferneyhough's music was a significant part of the inspiration behind my "faster than possible" indication at the top of the performance parts for "Nine." And it is also the case in "Nine," I believe, that this designed impossibility prevents us from giving the false impression that we've somehow found *the* static, settled, uniform identity of this music. The notated rhythms, dynamics, and articulations remain very straightforward, but to Ferneyhough's aforementioned forty-seven notes in five seconds, "Nine" asks for one hundred and one. Again, one is faced with an absurdity so far beyond possibility that the only option is to find a narrow, barren, far-from-perfect reduction of what's on the page and *throw* yourself at it.

The decisions made in such a situation demonstrate how one makes sense of the compositional structures at hand. The first three measures each contain twelve notes but only two unique pitches, so one might decide to clearly articulate those first two notes of each measure, a high and a low before sustaining a tremolo on the lower note until the next measure comes along. Then beginning at measure ten, some descending scalar patterns come in, and again a decision might be made to merely preserve the highest and lowest points of these patterns and to merely approximate the downward motion as more of an articulated glissando figure than a precise series of individual pitches. And so on and so forth. One might call this a structural approach, as it prioritizes those notes that give a sense of the broadest, most

zoomed-out curvature of a melodic line—this is a choice, and it is tied to a value judgment that is not necessarily inherent in the notation itself but in the person who reads it. One further decision we made along these lines, as a group, was to stay as close as possible to each other in the notation at all times. At this extreme tempo, it's quite difficult to keep one's eyes moving ever forward, wilfully omitting and omitting and omitting information at one's fingertips, but we found it necessary in order to retain the identity of the piece. It turned out to be inevitable that some degree of elision between harmonies would emerge—a slight elision was of course one of our initial goals, as it's a form of the musical asynchrony described by Barth and Scott—but we found that there was a limit to the width of these elisions beyond which the music began to sound a bit too much like a somewhat shapeless cluster chord instead of gestural melodic figures within a specific harmonic structure. In the end, it was gesture and harmony that became the guiding features of this music for us. Freed from the imperative to 'play all the notes correctly,' we found ourselves solely concerned with drawing shapes in the air, and with the broader patterns of resonance discoverable within our source notation. Again, we found ourselves with a new, different kind of blank slate than usual from which a door was opened to make music out of sound.

We performed this piece on two separate occasions and recorded it in a studio on a third. Over the course of these activities, I reflected on the experience and on the sound, and arrived at the conclusion that one of the most interesting things about it was the way it sustained such a powerful forward motion. I started to hear what I had understood George Barth to mean by the idea of a musical "floating," and a sensation of weightless not dissimilar to what I attempted to describe earlier in my reflection on the sudden breaks into arpeggiation in "Three," so I wanted to push further into that character. If you've listened to "Nine" while reading this, you'll probably have noticed that there's another significant set of changes to Vivaldi's notation that I haven't mentioned yet—large sections of the score have been omitted, and others are often overlapped by a beat or two. Wanting to really focus in on this feeling of perpetual motion, I produced a version of the score that isolated it.

Even if one permits the extreme tempo as simply an interpretive choice, one might still ask whether these larger-scale changes to the structure of Vivaldi's notation constitute more an act of re-composition than performance. Indeed, this is the moniker used by composer Max Richter [1966–] for his own

treatment of this music in *Vivaldi's Four Seasons: Recomposed by Max Richter* [2012].[23] Though he works in a somewhat different aesthetic idiom than me, Richter's descriptions of *Recomposed* share some similarities with mine.

Shortly after the album's release, he's quoted in an article in *The Guardian* as saying that, "*The Four Season*s is something we all carry around with us. [...] It's just everywhere. In a way, we stop being able to hear it. So this project is about reclaiming this music for me personally, by getting inside it and rediscovering it for myself—and taking a new path through a well-known landscape."[24] Though my own impetus behind "Nine" was a more squarely historical question—how might musical asynchrony as heard in early recordings of piano music and early mechanical instruments be replicated in live ensemble performances—instead of a desire to breathe new life into a piece thought to be worn out by its ubiquity in contemporary popular culture, we share the idea that our work represents a coming together of our contemporary subjectivity as musicians, and the piece's long history of being performed or otherwise presented in ways that feel somehow lacking. And the internal structure of our work with Vivaldi's notation is not necessarily dissimilar either.

In another article in 2015, Richter says that, "Just 25% of Vivaldi's original notes remain. [...] But that's not to say the DNA of Vivaldi isn't all over the place [...] He's there all the time, but in terms of dots on the page he's almost never there!"[25] Overall, the score and parts for "Nine" also contain fewer than 50% of the notes from Vivaldi's composition, but the identity of "Nine" as at the very least a *version* of Vivaldi's piece is nevertheless unmistakable. One could question to no end whether a more significant change is constituted by omitting full sections wholesale versus rearranging notes internal to each section while leaving the overall form untouched, by my drastic increase in tempo, or by Richter's repetitions

[23] Max Richter, Daniel Hope, Andre de Ridder, and Konzerthaus Kammerorchester Berlin, *Recomposed by Max Richter: Vivaldi, The Four Seasons* (Deutsche Grammophon, 2012).

[24] Tom Service, quoting Max Richter, in "Max Richter spring-cleans Vivaldi's The Four Seasons," *The Guardian*, 21 October 2012, accessed 11 July 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/oct/21/max-richter-vivaldi-four-seasons.

[25] Susie Burge, "Back to baroque: Max Richter's Vivaldi remix comes full circle in Sydney," *The Guardian*, 6 May 2015, accessed 11 July 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/may/06/max-richters-vivaldi-remix-comes-full-circle-in-sydney.

many times over of certain of Vivaldi's phrases, but the fact remains the same that each of us selected *from* the notes on the page instead of merely reading them all through.

The role of Richter's *Recomposed* as a conversational exercise also comes through. In an interview with NPR, Richter states:

> [M]y piece doesn't erase the Vivaldi original. It's a conversation from a viewpoint. I think this is just one way to engage with it. [...] The first thing that was sort of difficult—and I wasn't expecting this, actually—was trying to understand who I was at each moment of writing it. [...] That sounds a bit crazy, but in the piece, there are sections which are just Vivaldi, where I've left it alone. I've done sort of a production on 'Autumn,' but I've left the notes. And there are other bits where there's basically only a homeopathic dose of Vivaldi in this completely new music. [...] So I have to figure out how much Max and how much Vivaldi there was going on at every moment.[26]

Though the aesthetic paradigms are again *drastically* different, this sentiment is not at all dissimilar to the idea that Brian Ferneyhough's notational impossibilities induce a conversational relationship with the composition on the part of both performers and listeners, an idea that's carried into my approach to "Nine" as well. Questions of artistic originality and individual identity come through: 'Is this my music or someone else's?' If each composition is never *purely* original and each performance is somehow unique, how does one decide what's a premiere of a new piece versus a performance of an existing one?

In summary, it's clear that, for Richter, *Recomposed* represents a discursive interaction between himself and his understanding of Vivaldi's music. It also represents a desire to reflect, as an avid listener to classical music himself, on the effect of canonization upon such works. Through *Recomposed*, Richter can be seen to articulate a distinction between the fossilized traditional forms of popular masterpieces and alternative, either aesthetically autonomizing or historically contextualizing approaches to them. What's also clear is that these explanations offer no precise reasoning behind the use of the term 'recomposed,' and furthermore admit a sincere ontological anxiety around what exactly such a project is.

[26] "Max Richter recomposes 'The Four Seasons,' *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio (NPR), 21 November 2012, accessed 11 July 2023, https://www.npr.org/sections/deceptivecadence/2012/11/21/165659291/max-richter-recomposes-the-four-seasons.

Again, we find a conceptual insecurity when classical music's foundational boundaries between creation and representation are approached. I don't yet have any evidence to suggest that 'recomposed' is anything more than an expedient marketing strategy to indicate to consumers that this music is something like 'Vivaldi but also not Vivaldi.'

It is for this reason that I want to delay too rigidly defining "Nine"—and especially to avoid defining it as a 're-composition'—in favour of exploring its function as a complex *rhetorical* expression within the context of both historical and creative fields of musical practice. Anna Scott enters her doctoral research with an intriguing observation:

> I began to wonder [...] why modern historically-informed (HIP) and even recordings-inspired performances (RIP) of [Johannes] Brahms's music sound nothing like Brahms as captured on [historical recordings]. [...] The[se] stylistic gaps [...] suggest that there is an unseen process of selection being carried out with regards to what types of historical evidence are deemed authoritative, while some guiding framework is dictating how this evidence should come together to form a meaningful whole.[27]

What so often speaks through encounters with early recordings is the deep *foreignness* of their expressive character. There are extant recordings of Brahms [1833–1897] playing his own music, yet performances of the same music by recent proponents of historical performance often bear little resemblance to them.[28] Confronted with an incongruity between historical artifact and contemporary historiography, an unequivocal 'this is how Brahms played his music' adjacent to an entirely different-sounding existing practice of 'trying to play Brahms's music in historical style,' we grasp for some explanation—not only that we haven't made a grave error in our historiography, but also, much more importantly, that we haven't done all this historical work only to find that the answer isn't what we wanted to hear. It isn't a lack of knowledge but of *understanding* that's preventing sincere use of historical recordings as models for historical performance.

Though an objectivist approach to historiography has yielded an answer to the question of how Brahms played his music, its sheer factuality alone is not enough to stay our *indignance* toward it. In a

[27] Scott, vi-vii.

[28] Scott, 305.

sense, we have an answer with no explanation—'how could someone think this sounds good?' This is a problem precisely because historical performance is not concerned with *knowing about* but rather *performing as* the musical past. The foreignness of early historical recordings is quite simply scary, discomforting, and confusing. This is where history must not be scientific but rhetorical. Per Vico,

> in the art of oratory the relationship between speaker and listeners is of the essence. It is in tune with the opinions of the audience that we have to arrange our speech. It often happens that people unmoved by forceful and compelling reasons can be jolted from their apathy, and made to change their minds by means of some trifling line of argument.[29]

It is not enough to simply arrange true facts into a coherent argument. One must understand that this is not a situation of depicting a reality divorced from human subjectivity but of communicating one form of human subjectivity to another, a perceived beauty in unfamiliar and linguistically slippery sonic patterns to an imperfect, impassioned, and often prejudiced (being traits we all possess as humans) audience.

Vico follows this up with the suggestion that, "[c]onsequently, in order to be sure of having touched all the soul-strings of his listeners, the orator, then, should run through the complete set of the loci which schematize the evidence."[30] Here, loci schematizing evidence refers to the rhetorical canon of *inventio*, or the 'discovery of arguments,' wherein the geometric path is only one among many. Per Cicero,

> the mind will more easily come upon 'inventions' if one examines frequently and carefully one's own narrative of the events and that of the opponent, and eliciting any clues that each part may afford, ponders why, with what intent and with what hope of success each thing was done […] When the mind studies so attentively every part of the whole affair, then the topics mentioned above which are stored up will come forth of their own accord; and then sometimes from one, sometimes from a combination of topics definite arguments will be produced, part of which will be classed as probable and part as irrefutable.[31]

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[29] Vico, *Study Methods*, 16.

[30] Ibid., 16.

[31] Marcus Tullius Cicero, trans. H. M. Hubbell, *De Inventione* [first published ca. 85 B.C.] (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949), 46 (II, XIV).

For me, the analogy to Ferneyhough's music was an outgrowth of my own such schematization of the problem area surrounding a hypothesized historical asynchrony in performance of Vivaldi's *Quattro Stagioni*. The type of anxiety Scott describes in recent performers of Brahms is a type of anxiety I knew from experiences with a very different kind of music. Early encounters with contemporary music can produce this type of reaction as well.

The early atonal harmony of composers such as Anton Webern, for example, can give the impression of a simple randomness, implying a meaninglessness or apathy. Neither of these impressions is sustained for very long, however, if one simply studies the music and its historical context. In context, one might listen to his 1905 and 1939 string quartets across each other and hear their increasing harmonic complexity as part of a broader historical transition following after such music as Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* [1865] or Alexander Scriabin's *Poeme de l'extase* [1908]. At the same time, anticipating such music forwards into art historical time might yield other meaningful experiences. Consider the way tone-row compositions such as the 1936 *Variations for Piano* evenly distribute pitch content across the keyboard and rhythmic variety across a wide array of durations. This can be understood as a kind of methodical anti-representationalism anticipating Clement Greenberg's identification, in the 1960s, of modernist art as that which performs self-critique of the most basic physical attributes of its medium.[32] In this way, one can learn to hear such music not as the artistic creation of an individual composer using the piano as an instrument, but as a kind of blank exposition of the acoustic physicality of the piano in itself, an unmediated display of a physical object that divides the audible spectrum into twelve distinct pitches repeated at the octave, and that allows a performer to make them resonate through a mechanical linkage of wood, felt, and steel.

Ferneyhough's music can be seen in part as an outgrowth of these examples, taking aboard the complex and widely diversified rhythm and harmony of earlier atonal music while further intensifying the focus on the core physicality of the instruments and musicians involved. And this time, instead of only the traditionally, culturally representative role of music being called into question, it is the even deeper building blocks of those traditional musical languages that are challenged; namely, the specific delineations of frequency, time, and tone that music notation is typically used to precisely codify. In one

[32] Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," *Art & Literature*, No. 4 (Spring 1965), 193-201.

sense this can be seen as a fairly intellectual exercise, simply taking the next conceptual step beyond questioning harmony by raising the same questions about pitch and clarity. In another sense it can be seen as quite expressive, by newly aestheticizing auditory experiences typically classified as 'mistakes' in mainstream classical performance. There's genuinely a profound beauty to be heard in this music, if only one can figure out what it feels like to hear it. This beauty instead sits latent within the notation as an unwritten subtext.

The Romantic notation described by Scott and Barth also contains this type of subtext. Only in this case, it remains permanently hidden unless a performer knows it's there and competently attempts to do something with it. What's especially interesting about Ferneyhough's subtext, though—and what makes it relevant to music such as "Nine"—is that, though invisible on paper, it forces its way out into the sounding world whether or not the performer wants it to. Ferneyhough does not ask for a wild, wayward, messy, noisy, or chaotic sound in his scores, he instead creates a situation in which these aesthetic features are the only possible result of a fastidious attempt to exactly replicate the notation in sound. Aligning again with Greenberg's model, Ferneyhough locates his music's critical function within the most basic physical materials and methodological operations of music itself. He problematises notation's ability to fully concretize musical sound as static visual information, and he pushes towards the limits of the physical sound-production capabilities of the instruments and musicians for whom he writes.

Upon first reading about and listening to asynchrony in 18th- and 19th-century musics, I immediately saw viable pathways through the problems surrounding their contemporary revival because I had already seen and been working within such a revival for what is, at least on the surface level, a very different kind of music. Many musicians I've worked with regularly jump back and forth between historical and experimental musical practices within their broader careers, and so shared this reference point. Thus, we could very quickly and effectively communicate with each other about possibilities for an asynchronous Vivaldi by making analogies for each other to problems in notating and performing New Complexity.

"Nine" is not only about exactly what Vivaldi certainly or even plausibly did or didn't do, should or shouldn't sound like, it's a rhetorical turn of phrase within a broader conversation among and between musicians and listeners about the ways in which we're controlled by our habits and assumptions, and about how we might discover something new about the past and ourselves by disrupting those habits and

assumptions. I don't mean to say that extreme tempo and haemorrhaging of notes is the right way or the best way to play Vivaldi, I mean to illustrate just how important it is to ask ourselves how little we know about what's right or what's best in this music.

To listeners, "Nine" reveals how one might hear beauty, meaning, and intention in a performance of Vivaldi that is considerably messier or more 'wayward' than usual. To musicians, "Nine" provides an accessible starting point from which to step beyond an explicit and metronomic interpretation of notation. All the while, that old stalwart of historiographical apologism that "this *might* have been a plausible interpretation in Vivaldi's time" could even remain on the table as well. Furthermore, understood in relation to the performances of others—whether traditional or not—such a divergent approach serves, in following Vico's advice to run through the complete set of topics, to only further diversify the historically-grounded perspectives through which one might confront this music, such that many more possible 'soul-strings' might be 'touched.'

"Nine" can represent the idea that one might perform, embody, become a foreign musical identity while simultaneously releasing oneself from any obligation or desire to merely replicate it. We don't recreate Vivaldi, we *become* an idea of him and then act according to how that conjoined monster of a new subjectivity sparks our imagination to act. We speak *through and as our understanding of him*. And in so doing, we communicate to our audiences an idea of Vivaldi not as a static, settled, uniform historical plausibility but as a complex field of particular certainties and uncertainties about his musical historicity.

It may be important to make clear that "Nine" is merely my own result of this, and one that was tied to a particular moment in my artistic development and in collaboration with a particular set of individuals comprising the ensemble we performed as. If such a practice is the speaking of one's subjectivity *through and as* one's object of study, the result will vary significantly from subject to subject, practitioner to practitioner. Each individual's version of this practice will sound as different from each other as each individual *is* from each other. I have little ability to guess what music others might arrive at through the same reasoning, but I'd be eager to find out.

All this is not even the only front on which such a rhetorical approach to historical performance has potency, but we'll need more than only Vico's advocacy, and more than only "Nine" as an example, to reveal it fully.

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There's a big problem with conceptualizing historical performance as rhetorical: its disciplinarity as history can quickly recede. Simply put, if history is accepted to be 'study of the past,' and historical performance in music is then accepted to be something like 'study of the past *in and through* musical practice,' then it's very easy to exclude such rhetorical practices as "Nine" from the disciplinarity of historical performance in music based on the mere fact that it's not *exclusively* to do with the particular musical past in question. Such music gets classified as 'new' and therefore puts forward no problems or insights relevant to what might be considered to be these other, 'properly' historical practices. The good news—for me, at least—is that this type of conceptual manoeuvre (rhetorical in itself, really) has been imposed upon other historical methodologies and epistemologies in the past, so there are some useful examples to consider in trying to overcome it. Historical theorist Hayden White [1928–2018] described something similar:

> For better than a century many historians have found it useful to employ a Fabian tactic against critics in related fields of intellectual endeavour. [...] When criticized by social scientists for the softness of his method, the crudity of his organizing metaphors, or the ambiguity of his sociological and psychological presuppositions, the historian responds that history has never claimed the status of a pure science. [...] But when reproached by literary artists for his failure to probe the more arcane strata of human consciousness and his unwillingness to utilize contemporary modes of literary representation, the historian falls back upon the view that history is after all a *semi*-science.[33]

One could read from this that history merely sits somewhere in between science and art, and one who reads this way might also happily admit that it is nearly impossible to define where exactly the boundaries

[33] Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 27.

are at either end of that spectrum. Yet White rejects this suggestion, instead outlining a much harsher interpretation that this rhetorical manoeuvre is no more than a strategy of diversion to insulate the historical discipline from conceptual accountability.

Clear analogies can be drawn from White's characterization of the 'harder' or 'softer' aspects of historical practice and many issues raised around the epistemology and disciplinarity of historical performance in music. A "failure to probe the more arcane strata of human consciousness" can be analogised to an interpretive strictness, treating notation not as collections of structural and aesthetic schemata for a sensitive musician to *make music out of,* but as a rigid and precise fossilization of *the music itself*. The ambiguity of music notation is seen as a bug rather than a feature, an imperfection that must be resolved by finding external evidence that allows for triangulation toward an appropriate interpretation. Therefore the generative capabilities of the ambiguity of notation are rendered impotent. Notation can no longer serve as a productive interface through which a musician stretches their intellectual, feeling, and instinctive self. One does not probe one's own instincts as a historian in and through one's work in history because the self is believed to be irrelevant, or even a direct hindrance, to a 'plausible' musical result. Yet at the same time, one can see what White described as the "softness of [...] method, the crudity of [...] organizing metaphors, [and] the ambiguity of [...] sociological and psychological presuppositions," in the many impossibilities of such aspirational objectivity in the historical performance of music. One invariably lacks the amount and specificity of information necessary to achieve a genuinely scientific result. Descriptions of ornamentations are extrapolated across half the length of Europe and applied several decades out of date. Tuning systems are simplified and homogenized to increase the efficiency of contemporary concert-making. Yet somehow the mere *idolization* of scientific precision is assumed to nevertheless bestow its intellectual authority upon historical performance.

To be clear, I don't suggest such practices aren't valuable, historical, or artistic. But operating within such a practice while simultaneously pushing away adjacent practices as 'not historical'—differently flawed and differently insightful as they are in their historicity and their anachronism—seems short-sighted, hypocritical, and frankly anti-intellectual. White implies that he sensed a similar frustration within academia broadly construed at the time he published *Tropics of Discourse* in 1978:

> The opinion seems to be growing among non-historians that, far from being the desirable mediator between art and science that he claims to be, the historian is the irredeemable enemy of both. In short, everywhere there is resentment over what appears to be the historian's bad faith in claiming the privileges of both the artist and the scientist while refusing to submit to critical standards currently obtaining in either art or science.[34]

These words—White's here, and mine above—are aggressive, sharp, fighting words. And they've been fought through many times before among musicians. I don't wish to re-tread that ground. Quite the contrary, it's my impression that the result of the authenticity debates of the 1980s was not and never will be to solve the *problems behind* calling certain practices 'authentic,' but simply to produce new strategies for deflecting scholarly criticism while still continuing to do exactly the same thing as before. The problem was identified, confessed, and further entrenched.

But something different happened in history more broadly. And the reason for this difference is crucial to the conceptual and methodological framework I'd like to suggest for sincerely trying to move past it within music as well. White suggested that,

> the current generation of historians will be called upon [...] to expose the historically conditioned character of the historical discipline, to preside over the dissolution of history's claim to autonomy among the disciplines, and to aid in the assimilation of history to a higher kind of intellectual inquiry which, because it is founded on an awareness of the *similarities* between art and science, rather than their differences, can be properly designated as neither.[35]

This has been achieved since then in significant ways, though perhaps not to the full extent White suggested. There is certainly still an academic discipline called history—no doubt about that—but the discipline's traditionally objectivist or neutralist approach is no longer the status quo. Recent titles including Paul Reitter and Chad Wellmon's *Permanent Crisis: The Humanities in a Disenchanted Age*, Adom Getachew's *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*, and Ann Laura Stoler's *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in our Times,* as well as now-classics such as Benedict Anderson's

[34] Ibid., 28.

[35] Ibid., 28-29.

Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism and Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,*[36] indicate both a connection between the past and present and an intention to operationalize historical understanding toward immediate ends. Other volumes in more traditional forms sometimes find the need to explain those now rarer means, like Jonathan Israel's *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights, 1750-1790.*[37] History has not been erased by this dissolution of its autonomy, but merely synthesised in various ways with anthropology, sociology, psychology, economics, political science, philosophy, art theory, and many other disciplines. Now, history is not only understood as the pursuit of true knowledge about the past in and of itself, but also as a way to enrich research within practically any other discipline by investigating their topics *through* time.

Far from a radical tirade against a great many scholars' means of livelihood, White's argument is one in favour of simply correcting what he described as a historically contingent attitude underlying the writing of history.

> Since the middle of the nineteenth century, most historians have affected a kind of wilful methodological naivete. Originally this naivete served a good purpose: it protected the historian from the tendency to embrace the monistic explanatory systems of a militant idealism in philosophy and an equally militant positivism in science. But this suspicion of system has become a sort of conditioned response among historians which has led to a resistance throughout the entire profession to almost any kind of critical self-analysis.[38]

[36] Paul Reitter and Chad Wellmon, *Permanent Crisis: The Humanities in a Disenchanted Age* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2021); Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); Ann Laura Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Michel Foucault trans. Alan Sheridan, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

[37] Jonathan Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights, 1750-1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1-8.

[38] White, *Tropics*, 28.

In the face of an environment wherein grand theories of human nature and comprehensive schematizations of all time were commonly published—consider for example Lewis H. Morgan's [1818–1881] *Ancient Society, or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization* [1877]—a more sober, specific, and localized objectivist approach may well have been an appropriate corrective.[39]

The same corrective was performed in music performance studies as well. One can read a similar narrative as outlined by Morgan in relation to societal "progress" toward an ultimate goal of "civilization" in Francois-Joseph Fetis's [1784–1871] *Outline of the History of Harmony* [1840].[40] Fetis traces the "progress" of music from a "barbaric system of diaphony"[41] to "a [metaphysical] principle, both subjective and objective, [that is] the necessary result of the sensitivity that perceives the relationship of sounds, and the intelligence that measures them and deduces the results."[42] He routinely describes particular historical systems for the theory of musical harmony as "arbitrary and false"[43] and "destined to

[39] Lewis H. Morgan, *Ancient Society, or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1877).

[40] Francois-Joseph Fetis, trans. Mary I. Arlin, *Esquisse de l'histoire de l'harmonie* [first published 1840]*; An English-Language Translation of the Francois-Joseph Fetis History of Harmony* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1994).

[41] Ibid., 1.

[42] Ibid., 158-159. Per Fetis:

> If it is recognized that these foundations of the system are deceptive, that they have misled all those who have taken them as a point of departure, and that they are powerless to support the edifice of tonality, it is evident that there remains no other principle for the construction of the scale and of tonality than the metaphysical principle; a principle, both subjective and objective, the necessary result of the sensitivity that perceives the relationship of sounds, and the intelligence that measures them and deduces the results. [...] The ear perceives the sounds; the mind compares their relationships, measures them, and determines the melodic and harmonic conditions of a tonality. This laid down, the science of harmony is all done.

[43] Ibid., 2. Per Fetis:

> It would take too long to examine the principles that led Franco [of Cologne], or rather his contemporaries, to such a classification. But it is evident that these principles were arbitrary and false, because the *tone*, as well as the semitone, is a dissonance, and sixths bring nothing but a sense of concord to the ear and do not imply a necessity for resolution.

search for some elements of interest,"[44] while early signs of a harmonic ontology similar to those of the 19th century are either said to have "presented [certain chords] in their true character,"[45] or are celebrated as "cause to marvel."[46] Overall, there is a clear moralizing intention running throughout Fetis's *Outline* that presumes the present state of harmonic understanding to be the perfect and complete state, imbuing all others leading up to it with the inevitability of a secularized notion of divine providence, or in other words, scientific progress.

In 1915, Arnold Dolmetsch [1858–1940] looks to provide an antidote to this universalism and historical disdain. He ends his introduction to *The Interpretation of the Music of the XVII and XVIII Centuries* with a piece of advice for readers: "We should take warning from the 18th century connoisseurs, who declared Gothic architecture barbarous, or the early 19th century art critics, who could see no beauty in pre-Raphaelite art."[47] Isn't Fetis's *Outline* a perfect example of an early 19th-century critic failing to see

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[44] Ibid., 23. Per Fetis:

> Such are all the consonant and dissonant harmonies used by these composers in the second half of the fifteenth century. [...] Limited to such a small number of harmonic combinations, it is easy to understand that musicians were destined to search for some elements of interest for their works in a sequence of musical ideas richer in variety.

[45] Ibid., 47-48. Per Fetis:

> The theoretical science of harmony made progress in the hands of Friedrich Erhard Niedt. [...] [I]t cannot be denied that he imparted a salutary impulse to harmonic theory with the first two parts of his book on this science. The first, *Guide musical*, contained a *basso continuo* treatise. [...] The natural dissonant chords of the seventh and ninth are presented there in their true character, i.e., as able to be attacked without preparation.

[46] Ibid., 103. Per Fetis:

> Truly there is cause to marvel at seeing that, guided by analogy and the musical feeling that was in him, Roussier foresaw the possibility of making good use of certain harmonies that only Mozart's genius and a small number of his contemporaries and successors had known how to bring into play.

[47] Arnold Dolmetsch, *The Interpretation of the Music of the XVII and XVIII Centuries* [first published 1915] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), viii.

beauty in pre-15th-century music? Dolmetsch's refrain throughout *The Interpretation* is that, though one may be able to intuit appropriate interpretive decisions about their own contemporary music—as related to, for example, tempo, rhythmic execution, or ornamentation—the same will not necessarily be true for older types of music. Thus, one should "guard against prejudice and so-called tradition" in order to avoid "committing the most glaring absurdity when 'old music' is concerned."[48] It's the classic assumption of an aspirationally neutral, objective approach to historical interpretation in the face of moralizing, assumed-superior presentist readings as described by White in *Tropics*. By deducing plausible historical interpretations from written sources contemporaneous and geographically proximate to a musical practice in question, one can determine how such music was 'intended to sound.'[49]

But strangely enough, a very similar historiographical ideology can be seen in the early writings of Heinrich Schenker [1868–1935], better known for his later, again, universalizing methodology for the formal analysis of 'common practice' tonal music. In his 1904 *Contribution to the Study of Ornamentation,* Schenker uses very similar reasoning to Dolmetsch:

> For C. P. E. Bach, richness of ideas is paramount. It is this richness alone that bestows on his ideas the gift of sounding spontaneous—eternally improvised. It allows for his use of the technique of group formation; it permits his concomitant use of the resources of tonality and rhythm. It allows him to rise above the mechanical aspects of modulation and frees him from all concern for 'form.' In short, his entire technique is derived from this richness; ideas are everything to him. Change, mobility, and freedom are everywhere; the schematic and the purely mechanical are nowhere to be found! [...] How the presence of this freedom, which was indeed the highest ever attainable, could have been overlooked during the past century remains one of the deepest riddles in the history of art. Musicians lost their ability to appreciate such freedom and even thought it necessary to draw on new resources in order at last to give music its true liberty. Suddenly, the form of all quartets, symphonies, and sonatas were seen as nothing more than mere 'sonata form,' a supposedly rigid form, fixed and unalterable as given—in short, a formula. One listened to works for nothing but their

[48] Ibid., 27.

[49] Ibid., 7.

> cadences, half or full; one imagined that the form of such works could be reduced to a combination of the so-called first, second, and closing themes, development, and recapitulation. What a misconception![50]

Here again, it is a distancing of oneself from one's contemporaneous knowledge systems and aesthetic paradigms that generates new and vital appreciation for historical arts. One can learn to see them as if on their own terms. Schenker disparages universal concepts such as the idea of sonata form prevalent at his time of writing, which he understood as reducing the formal characteristics of 'common practice' tonal music to a select few assertedly pivotal moments towards and out of which *all* other musical content was supposed to develop. Instead, he praises the "freedom" and "spontaneity" in the music of C. P. E. Bach [1714–1788], a quality one might be able to imagine Fetis naming as an "arbitrary" construction.

This would seem to stand in the face of Schenkerian analysis more broadly construed, but already in this 1905 text on ornamentation, inconsistencies in his neutrality can be seen. Schenker's introduction suggests that C. P. E. Bach is not *really* what he's interested in:

> A welcome new edition of C. P. E. Bach's *Versuch uber die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen* has appeared. It is a pity, though, that the otherwise praiseworthy editor, Dr. Walter Niemann, thought it advisable to abbreviate certain chapters in Part II which according to him, were 'from the present point of view technically or theoretically obsolete or contained nothing that was new or unusual for the period.' [...] Beethoven himself, not only in his youth, but even at the time of the Ninth Symphony and the *Missa Solemnis*, drew instruction and enlightenment from precisely those chapters that are now imparted to us only in extracts. Surely this proves that we are not dealing with an 'obsolete' point of view, but with one from which knowledge may be derived; one which I think even today could provide useful stimulation.[51]

C. P. E. Bach is given relevance here in relation to a later composer, Ludwig van Beethoven [1770–1827], whose relevance Schenker apparently believes he can take for granted. Because Beethoven was interested in C. P. E. Bach, we have reason to be interested in C. P. E. Bach. It's still unclear *to what* or *for what reason* Beethoven is relevant to anything at all, but some further evidence follows:

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[50] Heinrich Schenker, trans. Hedi Siegel, "A Contribution to the Study of Ornamentation" [first published 1904], *The Music Forum*, Vol. 4 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 33-34.
[51] Ibid., 11.

> The works of the Stamitzes, Cannabichs, Christian Bachs, etc., did not survive, while Emanuel Bach has been held in high artistic regard until the present day. Thus we may wonder why music historians have not taken this fact into account. [...] Fortunately, the power of art and of genius is stronger than that of the historian. Those exhumed by the historian do not necessarily come to life again simply by virtue of the exhumation. [...] Let each professor of history work his way through the Stamitzes—the true history of art can be learned, however, only from the geniuses.[52]

Without exactly stating why or to what Beethoven was relevant, we now know. Schenker is not interested in C. P. E. Bach, or even Prussian *galant* music more broadly, but in seeking out further examples of a chronologically- and geographically-independent character of artistic genius. This character is measured in an individual by their ability to produce works that remain in cultural use in perpetuity and that ought to be celebrated through that very same unceasing perpetuation of use. By suggesting that Beethoven admired C. P. E. Bach, it is suggested that a *known-genius* considered C. P. E. Bach to possess similar merits to himself. In a sense, this is a sort of hybrid form of the earlier, moralizing historiography of a Fetis and the contemporaneous, aspirationally neutral historiography of a Dolmetsch.

The appearance of this type of historiographical hybrid form is one of the reasons why White argues that such an objectivist corrective against "monistic explanatory systems" needs to yield a bit now that a respect for clarity of factual representation and a value for objective methodologies has been re-established. In his words, by the 1970s,

> [t]hat supposedly neutral middle ground between art and science which many nineteenth-century historians occupied with such self-confidence and pride of possession has dissolved in the discovery of the common constructivist character of both artistic and scientific statements. Most contemporary thinkers do not concur in the conventional historian's assumption that art and science are essentially different ways of comprehending the world. [...] [M]odern criticism—mostly as a result of advances made by psychologists in the investigation of the human synthesizing faculties—has achieved a clearer understanding of the operations by which the artist expresses his vision of the world and the scientist frames his hypotheses about it.[53]

[52] Ibid., 12.

[53] White, *Tropics*, 28-29.

In other words, though the objectivist corrective to 19th-century moralizing approaches to historiography may have been necessary in the specific context of such adjacent scholarship, it didn't represent an absolutely ideal concept of historiography more generally. Developments in psychology, such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty's ability to cogently elide the imagined and the perceived, had demonstrated that such a neutrality as practiced by scientists was not actually possible in history, and that it was barely on sure footing in the hard sciences themselves. Instead, as White described in the *Tropics of Discourse* and elsewhere, historians *constructed* ideas of the past in the particular choices they made about which documents or artifacts to study, which analyses to include in their books and articles, and through which conceptual frameworks to assign them meaning and compare them to each other. And not only was the objectivist historiography of the mid-20th century not possible, White argued, it morphed into a kind of toxic knee-jerk reaction on the part of historians to critiques of their self-awareness, or lack thereof. Instead of objectivism itself serving as a critique of moralism, it was a shield against calls for the historian to incorporate sorely needed self-knowledge into their research.