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Publication Date

2021

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Silence as a Personal Practice - Solo Double Bass Compositions by
Eva-Maria Houben, Jürg Frey, and Antoine Beuger

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Musical Arts

in

Contemporary Music Performance

by

Matthew Kline

Committee in charge:

Professor Mark Dresser, Chair

Professor Erik Carlson

Professor Diana Deutsche

Professor Steven Schick

Professor Rand Steiger

2021

The Dissertation of Matthew Kline is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

University of California San Diego

2021

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VITA

- 2013 B.M in Music Composition, Baylor University
- 2015 MA in Music, University of California San Diego
- 2021 DMA in Contemporary Music Performance, University of
California San Diego

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Silence as a Personal Practice: Solo Double Bass Compositions by Eva-Maria Houben, Jürg Frey
and Antoine Beuger

by

Matthew Kline

Doctor of Musical Arts in Contemporary Music Performance

University of California San Diego, 2021

Professor Mark Dresser, Chair

This dissertation will present an analysis of solo double bass compositions by Eva-Maria Houben, Jürg Frey and Antoine Beuger. Each of these composers belongs to the international music collective Wandelweiser, an experimental music group that focuses on the compositional use of silence. The analysis will be centered around the perspective of the performer and highlights the experiences that occur from interacting with these scores. The specific compositions being discussed are *the double bass* by Houben, *accurate placement* by Frey and *calme étendue (double bass)* by Beuger.

Introduction

In this paper I will be discussing three solo double bass compositions by composers Eva-Maria Houben, Jürg Frey and Antoine Beuger. These three composers belong to the international music collective Wandelweiser and share similar musical aesthetics that fit under the group's large artistic umbrella.¹ On a surface level, Wandelweiser composers tend to write music that incorporates long periods of silence, quiet sounds that are monochromatic and sparse musical textures. The composer and trombonist Radu Malfatti, a member of Wandelweiser, provides a statement that could be considered the closest thing to an explanation for what the group is aiming to artistically achieve: "[Wandelweiser is] the evaluation and integration of silence[s] rather than an ongoing carpet of never-ending sounds."²

The considered "evaluation and integration of silence" that is promoted through Wandelweiser has prompted new compositional methods and approaches to performance. Although I will be analyzing the three compositions discussed in this paper as independent and autonomous works, I will also present a broader performance practice that is associated with each composer. An underlying goal in this writing is to share my personal artistic work with the music of Wandelweiser and how it has dramatically reframed how I approach music making. The three composers that I will examine have been an important source of inspiration for me as both a double bassist and composer. This music has expanded my understanding of how a musician practices, performs, listens and interacts with a score.

The experience of the performer is paramount when discussing a performance practice that correlates with Wandelweiser. The three compositions are written specifically for solo

¹ Beuger (n.d.). Wandelweiser. Retrieved from <https://www.wandelweiser.de/>

² Barrett (2011) The Silent Network—The Music of Wandelweiser, Contemporary Music Review

double bass and highlight the singular perspective of the individual musician. There is an inherent flexibility with how a musician may choose to engage with this music. Many Wandelweiser scores promote a type of music making that does not necessitate a concert platform or even an audience, although these aspects are certainly not excluded. The usefulness of a score will be a primary point of evaluation.

Although the technical execution of each work will be discussed, the broader focus will be on what a musician gains from repeated interaction with these scores. Similar to the relationship a reader has with a book, the performer may use the musical text as a site for a private event. Through the long term engagement with this music, a musician is able to ask questions about musical practice, usefulness and possibilities. This practice has the ability to integrate into what Eva-Maria Houben calls the reality of “everyday life.”

Houben states, “In musical practice, we become free to address the threshold (Fischer-Lichte) or the membrane between the music world and the everyday world. This is the basic question concerning orientation in everyday life and in musical practice: Which game are we actually playing here? In what ‘province of meaning’ are we currently lingering? In musical practice, we can ask questions like these more pointedly, because the practice is about the creation of meaning and not about the achievement of a specific purpose.”³

When a performer is able to “address the threshold” within musical practice, the perceived boundaries of practicing, performing, listening and participation may become malleable as well as expanded. This mode of questioning is obviously not unique to the compositions being discussed and has universal application to all areas of music making. However, it is important to acknowledge that the “pointed” awareness of how a musician engages with musical practice is a central interest of Houben, Frey and Beuger. Their

³ Houben (2019). *Musical Practice as a Form of Life*. Transcript Verlag.

compositions establish unique situations for a performer to address or contemplate specific artistic realities.

The musical practices being discussed cannot be articulated by any one composition on its own. Each of the solo works will be presented in conjunction with writings by the three composers as well as other musicians associated with Wandelweiser. Eva-Maria Houben's text *Musical Practice as a Form of Life* is heavily referenced along with interviews, articles, letters and scores from each composer.

Chapter 1 will establish how analysis is approached from the perspective of the performer. Chapter 2 provides a brief history of Wandelweiser and how the activities of the group influences the individual compositions. Chapter 3 is a personal account of my own performance history and how I discovered the music of Wandelweiser. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are an analysis of *the double bass* by Eva-Maria Houben, *accurate placement* by Jürg Frey and *calme étendue (double bass)* by Antoine Beuger.

Chapter 1 Analytical Perspective

In this section, a brief explanation will be provided for how the analytical discourse is framed throughout. Chapter 2 examines the history of Wandelweiser and shows that the group is centered around the efforts of individuals that identify as both composer and performer. Each of the composers - Houben, Frey and Beuger - are active performers⁴ and their individual compositional processes are significantly influenced from a history of performing both classical and experimental music. A performative perspective is relevant and necessary when discussing this repertoire. Each composers' music is fundamentally understood through the engagement of the performer and my own experience performing each of these solo double bass compositions will be a primary source for analysis.

In *Musical Practice as a Form of Life*⁵, the author Eva-Maria Houben invites the reader to contemplate what it means to engage in a musical practice. As a composer, performer and musicologist, her work is largely centered around musical activities that use notated scores stemming from the western classical tradition. Her writing presents an analytical dialectic that moves away from the 20th century view of the notated composition as an autonomous work that is somehow separate from the performer and listener.

This traditional view of the composition was articulated and promoted by the German musicologist Carl Dahlhaus.⁶ In *Foundations of Music History*, he argues that a separation inevitably exists between the musical 'work' and the 'event'. The physical score is presented as the singular source from which the composition may be objectively understood. "The traditions of genre and form, from which a work springs, belongs to its substance, to the issue itself." For

⁴ Houben - organ and piano; Frey - clarinet; Beuger - Flute

⁵ Houben (2019). *Musical Practice as a Form of Life*. Transcript Verlag.

⁶ Dahlhaus (1983). *Foundations of music history*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dalhaus, the role of analysis is to articulate the objective musical relationships found in the notation.

The composer Antoine Beuger frames this perception, albeit with skepticism, in the following way: “We speak - at least in our musical tradition - about the performance of a piece, not the performance of a score. And we are convinced that, for example, Beethoven’s “Sonata op. 109” somehow exists, even, when it is not being played.”⁷ A composition may supposedly be fully comprehended with the score alone and therefore a sonic realization is not necessary for analysis to occur.

Beuger’s words point towards the limitations of how Dalhaus understands the score and its relationship to the performer: The event clearly takes on a subservient status to the work since the notated score exists as a permanent object outside of the performance. If a clearly defined version of the piece exists separate from a specific ephemeral realization, then each performance of the work will inevitably be a less than perfect representation of the notation.⁸ The performer acts as a medium that translates the composer’s text to the listener. Success is defined by how closely the technical execution matches what is written. Dalhaus even states “The more transparent the medium the better.”⁹ The composer, performer and audience are encouraged to understand the composition in a similar way - A quantifiable ‘substance’ (Dalhaus) that remains fixed, unchanged and in select cases, perfect.

Houben does not see such a clear division between the concepts of work and event. She does not dismiss the views of Dalhaus, but instead reframes the conversation from the performer’s point of view. A central theme in her work as a composer, performer and writer is

⁷ Beuger & Vriezen (2011, February). Asking Questions - Trying Answers. Retrieved from <https://www.wandelweiser.de/VB/>

⁸ Houben (2019). *Musical Practice as a Form of Life*. Transcript Verlag, 36

⁹ Dahlhaus (1983). *Foundations of music history*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

addressing the ‘borders’ and ‘thresholds’ that exist within musical practice. When a musician is able to address these boundaries, the roles of composer, performer and score become less defined and new possibilities emerge. Houben is interested in the act of performance and how a composition provides a space for musical activity. She states:

“Are musical practices forms of life? This question shifts the emphasis from the structure of a composition to the activity of the performers. To a lesser degree the composers and listeners, and to a greater degree the performers, find themselves in a listening situation of doing something and letting something happen. As a performer I am also a listener at the same time...The situation opens the door to events and participation.”¹⁰ Houben’s words are a departure from Dalhaus and open the door for alternative methods of understanding composition. The objective relationships found in the notation are no longer the singular source from which analysis is created. The score may contribute different forms of usefulness to the performer and all aspects of musical participation must be considered. Instead of viewing the event as being in service of the individual work, the score may be understood as an invitation to engage in a musical activity by either performing, listening or doing both.¹¹

The activity of the performers (Houben) places an emphasis on the role of participation within music. This idea connects easily to the term “musicking”¹² - a verb invented by Christopher Small that literally means *to music*. Similar to Houben’s concept of Musical Practice, Small desires a way of speaking about music that both encompasses and connects every aspect of musical participation. He defines the term in this way - “To music is to take part, in any

¹⁰ Ibid., 3

¹¹ Small (2010). *Musicking: The meanings of performing and listening*. Middletown: Wesleyan Univ. Press.

¹² Ibid, 8

capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing.”¹³

Small’s term “musicking” aids in Houben’s concept of musical practice by providing language that prioritizes verbs over nouns. Both author’s challenge the traditional forms of musical analysis that highlight the “thingness”¹⁴ that is perceived when a musical work exists as a self-contained object. Small is more aggressively explicit than Houben when he states with pessimism that classical music leads one to believe that an abstraction (the score) is more real than the reality it represents.¹⁵ Houben points to the writing of Vladimir Jankélévitch¹⁶ as a way of moving past the “thingness” of a musical work. In “Music and the ineffable,” his comparison of the actions “saying” and “doing” helps articulate how music can be understood as a verb:

The Charm’s artwork - the inexpressive *Espressivo* - is not an act of Saying, Rather, it is an act of Doing [...], and in this regard, music is similar to the poetic act. [...] Making is of an entirely different order from Saying. Composing music, playing it, and singing it; or even hearing it in recreating it - are these not three modes of doing, three attitudes that are drastic, not gnostic, not of the hermeneutic order of knowledge? The composer, the performer as active re-creator, and the listener as fictive re-creator all participate together in a sort of magical transaction. The performer works with the first member of this trio, causing the work to come into being as vibrating air during a certain elapsed time; the listener, the tertiary re-creator, works in imagination with the first two, making half-sketched gestures.¹⁷

Jankélévitch recognizes the importance of each type of participant—Composer, performer, listener—in being creators during the *magical transaction* called musical performance. Although these three roles might seem obvious to anyone who has attended a concert where notated music is involved, the suggestion that the responsibility of musical creator is assigned to the performer and even more so to the listener is a truth that is not always

¹³ Ibid, 9

¹⁴ Ibid, 4

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Houben, E. (2019). *Musical Practice as a Form of Life*. Transcript Verlag, 35

¹⁷ Jankélévitch & Abbate (2003). *Music and the ineffable*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

prioritized in traditional modes of analytic discourse. The inclusion of these roles points the analysis away from speaking of the score as a fixed object that is able to present an objective reality divorced from a specific performance. The reality I wish to present here is not only what can be seen in the score from a distance, but the continuous practice that all three creators engage in. The activity of the performers will specifically be highlighted. Theodor Adorno touches on this with the statement “The unique nature of music, to be not an image standing *for* another reality, but a reality *sui generis*.”¹⁸ By describing the unique experiences of the solo participant, the potential and usefulness of each score will be revealed.

The distinct language that is found in each of the composer’s scores will provide specific vocabulary and an approach to writing. In any given Wandelwesier score, a performer may be tempted to separate information that provides objective notational information (such as technical explanations, tempo, duration...) and writing that can be identified with an abstract or poetic accent. For example, in Antoine Beuger’s work *méditations poétiques sur “ma mort future”* for 1, 2, or 3 harpsichords, he indicates that the performer should “consider each tone to possibly be one’s last tone.”¹⁹ This line is embedded within written information that could be considered more immediate or literal to the realization of the score.

Within the musical practice of Beuger’s music though, this message should not be separated off into a secondary category or interpreted with loose consideration. The composer’s words provide an essential context for how a musician participates and the kind of musical activity that will be enacted. This kind of participatory language, especially the words found in the scores of Eva-Maria Houben, will provide the lens in which each of these scores are

¹⁸ Adorno & Tiedemann (2005). *Beethoven: The philosophy of music*. Cambridge: Polity.

¹⁹ Beuger *méditations poétiques sur “ma mort future”* Edition Wandelweiser, 2017

interpreted. The goal of the analysis has as much to do with the representation of this language as it is about the presentation of three specific double bass compositions.

Key Questions

The previous writing sets a foundation for how I will engage in an analytic discourse with the music of Eva-Maria Houben, Jürg Frey and Antoine Beuger. I will be discussing works for solo double bass written by each of these composers. My goal in writing about their solo double bass compositions is to engage with the following questions:

1. How do these works de-emphasize the hierarchy of creative roles that are traditionally assigned to composer, performer and listener? How do these works expand the potential and imagination for each of these roles?
2. When speaking of these three works from the position of critical analysis, how does this music necessitate the point of view of the performer?
3. How do these works create new experiences for the performer and listener? Do these experiences expand how one understands other music?
4. In response to the holistic approach that Christopher Small's term "musicking" or Eva-Maria Houben's *Musical Practice as a Form of Life* brings, what kind of larger musical relationships and types of musical practice do these works create?

Chapter 2 Wandelweiser

The three composers being discussed - Houben, Frey and Beuger - are current members of the international collective Wandelweiser. The term Wandelweiser can be difficult to define due to the permeability of the sources that it describes. All at once the word may describe a group of composers, a specific musical aesthetic (with no clear agreement from any one member on what this may be), a reference to a history of concerts/events, and a music publishing/recording company. The word itself has very little meaning on its own. According to Michael Pisaro the word is a linguistic creation by the founder Burkhard Schlothauer and loosely means “Change Sign Post” or “Change Wisely.”²⁰ This playful word ended up sticking but does not provide much information for what the organization represents.

Wandelweiser was initially founded in 1992 by Burkhard Schlothauer and Antoine Beuger as a recording and publishing company. Beyond just being a music label though, these two composers had a remarkable skill at bringing artists together to converse and collaborate on experimental music. Members of the group would meet together to perform each other’s compositions as well as other contemporary scores. For example, one of the earliest Wandelweiser projects was a studio recording of *Stones* by Christian Wolff and showcases the participating musicians' unique interpretive approaches to this open text score. Although the official Wandelweiser headquarters is based in Germany, the involved artists are an incredibly diverse international group. The early members included Jürg Frey, Chico Mello, Thomas Stiegler, Kunsu Shim and soon after other artists such as Carlo Inderhees, Radu Malfatti, Marcus Kaiser, Eva-Maria Houben, Craig Shepard, André Möller, Anastassis Philippakopoulos would join.²¹

²⁰ Pisaro (2009, September 23). Wandelweiser from https://www.wandelweiser.de/_texte/erstw-engl.html

²¹ Ibid

1992 is also the year that John Cage would pass away. Parts of the early Wandelwesier collaborations can be understood as a group of artists working through the ideas of Cage and exploring them for musical potential. Many of the members believed that composers had barely scratched the surface when dealing with Cage's scores and compositional ideas. Michael Pisaro explains:

[Cage] had died in August of '92 and his name was still very much in the air. At that time – and I think for most of the long period after *Silence* was published (1961) – it seemed musicians were more interested in discussing Cage's ideas than his music. For Kunsu [Shim], the music of Cage, and of those who worked with him and followed in his wake was felt to be more radical and more useful than the writing: because it had so many loose ends and live wires still to be explored (something I would also later encounter with other Wandelweiser composers). Thus 4'33" was seen not as a joke or a Zen koan or a philosophical statement: it was heard as music. It was also viewed as unfinished work in the best sense: it created new possibilities for the combination (and understanding) of sound and silence. Put simply, silence was a material and a disturbance of material at the same time.²²

Silence is a central theme in any discussion about Wandelweiser and is most likely the immediate generalization that comes to mind with any casual mention of the word. Many of the members initially joined because they were experimenting in their own compositions with long periods of silence or simply had questions about the possibilities of how silence may be used. For example, Eva-Maria Houben first contacted Antoine Beuger not as a composer but as a musicologist.²³ She was interested in discussing how silence has been used throughout the history of music. Much of her writing explores how composers such as Hector Berlioz or Anton Bruckner incorporated silence into compositions.²⁴ One review even describes the composer as an “archaeologist of silence.”²⁵

²² Ibid

²³ Barry, R. (2018, April). Eva-Maria Houben. *The Wire*, (410), 28.

²⁴ Houben, E. (2000). *Alte Musik mit neuen Ohren: Schubert, Bruckner, Wagner*, --. Saarbrücken: Pfau.

²⁵ Lee (2017, April 16). Eva-Maria Houben: Piano Music, by R. Andrew Lee from <https://irritablehedgehog.bandcamp.com/album/eva-maria-houben-piano-music>

The early years of the group saw members producing compositions that overtly experimented with extreme durations of silence. Many of Beuger's compositions from the 1990's - *music for marcia hafif*, the *calme étendue* series²⁶ - have durations up to 9 hours and contain more moments of silent inactivity than notated sound. In Michael Pisaro's *mind is moving (iv) for double bass* the performer makes a single and almost inaudible pizzicato once every minute.²⁷ The composer Manfred Werder would write compositions that produced less than a minute of quiet, static instrumental sounds in a performance that would last for hours.²⁸

Although it is possible that these composers could have created similar works without having come in contact with Wandelweiser, the sympathetic interests among the group can be seen as contributing to how each member experimented with silence. A large number of the earlier premieres of Wandelweiser compositions involved members of the group as performers and hosting each other at curated events.²⁹ This presents a situation where the members were directly interacting with each other's work and provided a performance space that encouraged silence to be examined as a performative act.

Many of the early Wandelweiser compositions can be extremely hard to distinguish from one another upon first hearing. Indeed, if multiple compositions contain moments of silence for extended periods of time, it is difficult to argue that there are any major differences in the compositional material. Michael Pisaro views the perceived similarities of the group's early endeavors as a positive. "What might have seemed at first like something of a single narrow stream, has proved to be capable of some variety. Early on, I took pleasure in the fact that I was

²⁶ Beuger, A. (n.d.). Antoine Beuger from https://www.wandelweiser.de/_antoine-beuger/catalogue.html

²⁷ Pisaro *mind is moving (iv)* for double bass Edition Wandelweiser, 1996

²⁸ Saunders (2009). Interview with Manfred Werder from <http://www.james-saunders.com/interview-with-manfred-werder/>

²⁹ Pisaro (2009, September 23). Wandelweiser. Retrieved January 22, 2021, from https://www.wandelweiser.de/_texte/erstw-engl.html

never quite sure exactly whose piece I was hearing. The overlap and the sense of a truly shared language was exciting and inspiring.”³⁰

This “shared language” is born from the abundance of performance activities that the composers participated in throughout the group’s nearly 40 year history. M.J. Grant, in the article “Series and Place”³¹, uses the word ‘place-specific music’ to describe the specificity and prioritization of the performance event for many Wandelweiser compositions. Projects such as *3 years—156 musical events—1 sculpture*, a three year performance series that was curated by the composer Carlo Inderhees and the artist Christoph Nicolaus, would document “details of the performances, the number of visitors, the temperature in the church and the degree of sunlight.”³² The attention that is given to all details of an event calls to mind the term *gesamtkunstwerk* but without the spectacle associated with Wagner and romantic opera.³³ For many Wandelweiser concerts, the observation of all naturally occurring aspects within “musicking” (Small) is a central part of the musical practice.

It is through the shared interests of a community of artists that these special kinds of events are possible. The abundance of performances involving the same group of musicians allows for a real and tangible performance practice to emerge. This is not to say that the efforts of the group produces dogmatic conclusions for how and why silence should be conceived. Instead, the diverse approaches to both composition and performance allow for a wealth of nuanced ideas based around a concept - silence - that can appear deceptively simple.

The relationship the composers have with one another through performance connects to the analytical discourse previously outlined. Wandelweiser is an organization that is centered

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Grant (2011) Series and Place, Contemporary Music Review

³² Ibid

³³ Wolfman, Ursula Rehn (12 March 2013). "Richard Wagner's Concept of the 'Gesamtkunstwerk'". *Interlude*.

around the collaboration between a group of artists that identify as both composer and performer.³⁴ It is essential that an analysis of this repertoire prioritizes the creative role of the performer. Although the compositions still retain the traditional apparatus of western classical music - all three of the pieces being discussed exist as physical scores with a single composer listed - the music of Wandelweiser creates a space where the standard hierarchy of roles for composer, performer and audience is re-evaluated.

The music of Christian Wolff has been identified by many members of Wandelweiser as an important source of inspiration.³⁵ This is logical because his scores create unique situations for performers to interact with one another through notation. Pisaro states that “much of his music attempts to tap into the creative power of performance in an explicit way.”³⁶ Wolff’s composition *For 1, 2 or 3 people*³⁷ showcases this approach to music making. The notation provides symbols that represent long and short durations. The sonic result is not so much about the specific material on the page, but is a product of how the musicians listen to one another.

In her analysis of this work by Wolff, Houben states “A performance of the piece requires a high degree of decision-making ability and responsiveness.”³⁸ This description could easily apply to most Wandelweiser compositions and highlights the creative role of the performer in this repertoire. Wolff’s involvement with the Scratch Orchestra and AMM provide a historical context for how improvisation may be used within a notational practice.³⁹ Although Wolff and the members of Wandelweiser would not specifically use the word improvisation to

³⁴ Pisaro, M. (2009, September 23). Wandelweiser from https://www.wandelweiser.de/_texte/erstw-engl.html

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Wolff *For 1, 2 or 3 people*. New York/London/Frankfurt/Leipzig: Edition Peters 1964

³⁸ Houben, E. (2019). *Musical Practice as a Form of Life*. Transcript Verlag

³⁹ Pisaro, M. (2009, September 23). Wandelweiser from https://www.wandelweiser.de/_texte/erstw-engl.html

describe what happens in their music⁴⁰, this language can be helpful when examining the role of the composer, performer and score.

When reflecting on the influence of Wolff, Pisaro states “the music of Wolff was critical for many of us....At the root...there is an understanding of a composition as a stopping point, as opposed to an endpoint, in the whole process of creating music.”⁴¹ This “stopping point” compliments the understanding that the score is an invitation for musical participation. Notation is an aid for bringing out the creative potential of the performer. The scores of Wolff, Houben, Frey and Beuger are less about fixed compositional materials but may be understood as propositions for performers to engage in a musical activity.

It is fitting to present an examination of these three composers in one document. As will be shown, each composer is clearly influenced by the years of artistic collaborations with one another. These *Wandelweiser* relationships manifest themselves through notational inspirations, shared performance experiences and writing for performers who tend to work with the group as a whole.⁴² The multiplicity of creative sources in these compositions is beautifully summarized by Eva-Maria Houben in the opening pages of her work *nothing more* (2019) for string quartet. She titles the paragraph “the practice of close fellowship:”

performers (also as composers) and composers (also as performers) find ways to meet each other repeatedly and to stay in touch. listeners (also as performers or as composers) join, and they all meet again and again and become a close fellowship. we can no longer distinguish between performing, composing, and listening. our works become parts of a widely spread network all over the world. we can no longer distinguish between music, art, literature, stage art, performance, or other kinds of art. artists die, and other artists feel that many inspirations come by means of works of the past, whether famous or nearly forgotten, as well as by means of utopian ideas of the future. we can no longer distinguish between traditional, contemporary and future works.⁴³

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Houben *nothing more* for string quartet Wandelweiser Edition: 2019

Chapter 3 Personal Reflection

To conclude the discussion of a performer oriented view of analysis, I will present my own history with performing Wandelweiser compositions. It can be difficult to explain why anyone initially chooses to commit to a particular type of music or artistry, but I can identify with the following statement by Michael Pisaro:

I have come to the conclusion that, while it's possible to trace the moments that might have set the stage for such a reaction, the reaction itself is inexplicable. It is, at its root, not logical. It doesn't follow from anything like a step-by-step process. You make a decision in a moment, and suddenly you've turned down one fork in the road. Terrifying and reassuring; strange and familiar; exciting and normal: all at once. There's no reason to love this music. One just does (or one doesn't). Aesthetics and history come after the fact. Essays (like this one) will not make you like it better and will not ultimately defend its continued existence.⁴⁴

Inexplicable is an appropriate word for my own journey and commitment to the repertoire being discussed. This writing is the culmination of seven wonderful years spent in the UCSD music graduate department. When I began my masters in the fall of 2013, my musical interests could be described as polar opposite from a Wandelweiser aesthetic. The first few years of my studies included performances of solo repertoire by Krzysztof Penderecki, Brian Ferneyhough and Vinko Globokar. Although I am still quite fond of these composers, the overt complexity and aggression of this music is far removed from the quiet stillness found in a composition by a composer like Antoine Beuger.

Admittedly, many of my closest peers expressed shock and confusion that my artistic research took such a dramatic turn. These reactions stemmed not only from the fact that I chose to program a noticeably different line up of composers but also from the reality that my performance style and personality also seemed to contradict this decision. I am by nature an

⁴⁴ Pisaro, M. (2009, September 23). Wandelweiser from https://www.wandelweiser.de/_texte/erstw-engl.html

extremely high energy individual and speak loudly with emphatic gestures. When I perform orchestral music or more ‘standard’ contemporary repertoire, I play in a way that is overtly physical and I must admit that I create dramatic facial expressions. I am also a conductor, and my work with the UCSD Chamber Orchestra only contributed to this kind of outward intensity.

So why did I transition to performing music of Wandelweiser composers, whose compositions on the surface are so minimal and austere?

My first encounter with a Wandelweiser composition occurred from attending a concert devoted to Jürg Frey’s second and third string quartets in January 2016.⁴⁵ The two quartets’ long list of performances⁴⁶ show they are some of the most frequently programmed compositions associated with Wandelweiser and proved to be an excellent point of introduction. A clear presence of tonal harmonies is a distinctive feature in Frey’s music and on the surface the harmonic content might seem akin to post-minimalist composers like Arvo Pärt or Henryk Górecki. After settling into the listening experience though the music quickly departs from these basic similarities. In both quartets, single chords followed by a moment of silence are repeated for long stretches of time. The harmonic structure simultaneously creates a hypnotic and frustrating experience for the listener. Frey writes overtly expressive harmonies that always seem on the verge of a traditional repetition or resolution but never quite fulfill these expectations.

Alex Ross summarizes the use of tonality in Wandelweiser this way:

This otherworldly music does not necessarily sound alien. Many Wandelweiser composers feel free to dwell on a sweetly consonant interval or chord. Such gestures are a departure from Cage, who generally allowed tonal materials only as meaningless flotsam and jetsam, and from his ally Morton Feldman, who treated them as melancholy relics. At the same time, Wandelweiser’s ghost tonality never achieves stability; it will frustrate those who expect one chord to lead logically to

⁴⁵ UCSD, Music Department. (2016, January 28). *String Quartets with Jürg Frey* [Press release]. Retrieved from http://music-web.ucsd.edu/concerts/cms_index.php?now=1&query_event_code=20160128-CarlsonSS

⁴⁶ Beuger & Vriezen (2011, February). Asking Questions - Trying Answers. Retrieved from <https://www.wandelweiser.de/VB/>

another. The composers enact a kind of double rebellion, both against a mainstream audience that pines for tonality and against an institutionalized avant-garde that spurns it.⁴⁷

As someone whose musical upbringing consisted of Beethoven, Schubert and Mahler, this music seemed to me both completely new and strangely familiar. Although a sense of nostalgia pervades the quartets, they do not have the plastic and commercial sensibilities that characterizes so much of contemporary classical tonal music. In Frey's compositions, it is the moments of harmonic clarity and melody that are often the most shocking. For example, in his ensemble work *Garden of Transparency*⁴⁸, after a long period of static gestures, a rich and sensual chord progression emerges in the strings. This surprising texture feels decadent and almost like Frey is breaking some kind of experimental rule.

Frey's brilliant ability to transform traditional pitch material into a radical musical landscape was a significant hook for me. As a young musician studying contemporary music in graduate school, I initially perceived that extreme instrumental virtuosity and complexity was the only path to becoming a progressive performer. New compositions that were built upon conventional intervallic relationships somehow did not fit into this aesthetic model. This was obviously a naive belief, but these thoughts inevitably led to creative blocks with the music I was investing in. Frey's music presented alternative avenues for music making that I was previously unaware of. A form of music that openly embraced basic harmonic structures but still managed to operate in an experimental manner was something I felt drawn to.

During this time I became interested in music that is of extended duration. The late music of Morton Feldman was an obvious point of exploration, but I was particularly fascinated by pieces that incorporated long periods of silence. In November 2016, I participated in an all day

⁴⁷ Ross (2016, August 29). The Composers of Quiet from <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/09/05/silence-overtakes-sound-for-the-wandelweiser-collective>

⁴⁸ Frey *garden of transparency* Edition Wandelweiser: 2018

concert marathon that performed selections from Frey's *Wen* series.⁴⁹ The event took place in an abandoned grain silo which provided an intimate but expansive environment. Each of the 23 programmed works consisted of solo instrumentalists playing quiet musical fragments that are surrounded by lengthy stretches of silence.

Each Wandelweiser composer incorporates silence in unique ways and Frey's individual compositional approach can be loosely characterized as using silence to frame specific durations. Over the course of the 10 hour event, I began to clearly perceive Frey's precise measurements of silence and how it articulated the moments of performed sound. For example, in *Wen No. 1*, a silent duration of 4 minutes and 54 seconds is vividly and inexplicably contrasted with a section that is 4 minutes and 9 seconds. The instrumental material, for solo metal plate, can be described as a static, monochromatic drone appearing and disappearing from silence.

Two contrasting musical elements began to emerge as I listened to *Wen*: fragile and ephemeral sounds are sustained through a precise formal structure. This intersection creates a threshold as static material gains movement and direction. Silence is not perceived as a moment of pause or cessation, but articulates a compositional energy.⁵⁰ Listening to this music expanded my understanding of silence and how it interacts with sound. I was able to recognize silence as not just a poetic concept, similar to many interpretations of Cage's *4'33*, but as a tangible and multifaceted performance material.

The process of interacting with scores that incorporate silence helped me discover new modes of expression as a performer. My own performance style up until this point had been largely shaped by repertoire that is characterized by technical complexity and aggressive

⁴⁹ Frey (n.d.). JÜRIG FREY. from <http://jurgfrey.blogspot.com/>

⁵⁰ The subject of threshold will be further discussed in chapter 5.

physicality. I felt that my interpretations were becoming increasingly homogenized by the same approach to demonstrative gestures and my creativity as a performer had stagnated.⁵¹

During preparations of works by Houben, Frey and Beuger, I began to realize that many of these performance habits were not possible to enact in this repertoire. The periods of silent inactivity that surrounded gentle, monochromatic sounds left no room for me to “sell” the performance with a high energy stage presence. I experienced joy in abandoning the type of physicality that projected brutality and left me exhausted at the end of a piece. This type of performance space is characterized beautifully by Antoine Beuger: “Music on the edges of perception shows the value of such small, inconspicuous humble things [...]. Such fundamentally different approaches and modes of action decisively change what music can be - and affect. Gestures of aggression, threat, violence or domination are not possible at all.”⁵²

The music of Wandelweiser was a way for me to positively re-engage my body through performance. This discovery came during a period of recovery after undergoing a series of challenging life events. The resulting trauma would sometimes disrupt my sense of safety in everyday spaces. The works in this analysis offered an unambiguous roadmap for sustained physical and mental attention. Beuger likens the task of the performer to observing many “small, inconspicuous humble things.” And as such, reading through Wandelweiser scores provided a discrete approach to reconnecting my embodied experience—especially in private spaces like my living room—to a reclaimed sense of agency.

Houben describes this re-engagement in relation to silence. “In silence we experience our physicality. ... Here everyone is completely present in their own physical existence.” By shifting

⁵¹ I do not want to suggest that there is a universal performance practice for music of complexity. The composers previously stated (Penderecki, Globokar, Ferneyhough) are very different from one another, but my own personal approach at this time had become somewhat generalized.

⁵² Nauck (2000) “Es darf keine Siege mehr geben...” 118.

focus to the present awareness of the listener, be it performer or audience member, Houben leaves no room for the performing body to be seen as spectacle, as in most canonic solo double bass repertoire. Instead, Houben and others open the possibility in their scores for physical awareness through sound-making without performative constraints. Fine tuning my approach to this praxis has given me a sense of hope. The use of these scores for personal healing should not be overlooked.

The following chapters will examine solo pieces by Houben, Frey and Beuger. Although each work represents a unique compositional approach, shared ideas will emerge throughout the writing. The three composer's artistic proximity to one another and continued collaborations allow for the composer's voices to authentically interact with each other's music. This analysis will also present my own interpretive work with these pieces and a personal perspective on the composer's music as a whole.

Chapter 4 the double bass by Eva-Maria Houben

The double bass is a work for solo double bass by German composer Eva-Maria Houben. I commissioned the composer to write a new solo work and the score was completed in December 2019. Houben has written extensively for the instrument and this is now her eighth work to date for solo double bass.⁵³ In our initial conversations about what the piece might look like, she agreed to a proposal that the composition be a concert length work and would include vocal humming for the soloist⁵⁴. *The double bass* was premiered in San Diego, California on January 15, 2021 in the UCSD Conrad Prebys Music Center.⁵⁵

Concert Length Work

The term concert length work is a loose concept that arose in conversation between myself and the composer. My initial inspiration for this idea came from the music of Antoine Beuger and he summarizes the idea in this way:

“...the idea of long durations had to do with a piece being identical with a concert, instead of being included in a concert. When you go to the theatre, it is very unlikely that you are going to see two or more pieces being performed. Instead, you are going to see *Hamlet* or *Waiting for Godot*. In music you are going to hear a concert by the London Symphony playing this, that and that. I wanted a music performance to be more like in the theatre: one thing, one experience.”⁵⁶

⁵³ Houben’s other solo double bass compositions include *in drei sätzen* (2003), *haiku X* (2004), *verschwindungen I* (2005), *archipelagos* (2006), *nachstück* (2007), *fast nichts nr. 2* (2009), and *listening to yourself* (2019).

⁵⁴ Potential New Piece [E-mail from E. Houben]. (2019, June 28).

⁵⁵ UCSD, Music Department. (2021, January 15). *Matt Kline D.M.A. Recital* [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CKmWyTaXtso>

⁵⁶ Beuger, & Saunders (2020, March 09). Interview with Antoine Beuger from <http://www.james-saunders.com/interview-with-antoine-beuger/>

Beuger's philosophy has less to do with the specific length of a composition, but instead reflects a desire to present the work and the whole of the event as a singular manifestation.

I will designate the term concert length work as a piece of music that is performed at an event where no other musical acts take place. This limitation is what creates the "one thing, one experience". In the context of a traditional concert, where the beginning and end of the show is relatively clear to those who participate, this description can only be applied in connection with the parameters of a specific show. (The term is therefore loose because a piece could be called a concert length work on one program, but then lose this title on another concert where a second piece is performed)

Certain works such as the trio *For Philip Guston* by Morton Feldman, which has the extreme duration of 4 hours 30 minutes, places logistical demands on the performers to set this piece aside as a singular event. *The double bass*, which has a clock time of approximately 90 minutes,⁵⁷ could potentially be programmed next to other repertoire, but the long continuous nature of the music gives the performer a clear option to allow Houben's composition to be realized as a concert length work.

Although Houben does not explicitly state that the piece be singularly placed on a program, the implications that come from performing a 90 minute solo work as the "one thing, one experience" can be quite meaningful. When a piece encompasses the entire program, every aspect of the event can then easily be related back to the single composition. This idea nicely compliments Christopher Small's notion of "musicking" and how every part of the event should be included in our understanding of making music. When enacted, a concert length work has the potential for both the performer and audience member to contemplate the somewhat arbitrary lines that exist between composition, concert and performance.

⁵⁷ This is the duration of my own performance of the piece.

The Score - Single Pages

The score to *the double bass* consists of 27 pages, with each leaf containing a single line of music that is placed below a fragment of text. The amount of blank space on each page contributes to a visual perception that each sheet might be an isolated musical event. In theory, the composer could have saved paper by positioning three (or possibly more) lines of music per page but by doing this the performer would potentially lose specific notational information.

The act of organizing compositional material by the limitations of individual sheets of paper is a creative practice that can be found in works by Houben's Wandelweiser collaborators. For example, Jürg Frey's initial inspiration behind his *Wen* series, which consists of 59 solo works, was to complete each piece on a single 8.5 X 11 sheet of paper⁵⁸. In *monodies pour mallarmé*⁵⁹ by Antoine Beuger, each page consists of four pitches that are surrounded by an endless blank void. The void in Houben's score can give the performer clues on how to interpret the following durational notation:

○ : rather long(er) sounds.

○ and a black arrow: sounding drone, long (significantly longer than ○).

Figure 1: Instructions for *the double bass*

These descriptions do not give precise durational values, but they do encourage the performer to use imagination and trust in a personal intuition on how long a note value should be. If the score was constructed in a way that the material could be seen with greater efficiency,

⁵⁸ This can be compared to the *Postal Pieces* by James Tenney, where each piece is written on a single postcard.

⁵⁹ Beuger *monodies pour mallarmé*, edition wandelweiser 2004

this might prompt the performer to move through each sheet with a sense of regulated or pulsed time as to deliberately unify the material on each page. Within the “landscape of silence”⁶⁰ that exists in Houben’s notation, the performer focuses solely on the material they are able to see in front of them. This discourages any sense of urgency and allows the performer to experience having what the composer describes as “all the time in the world.”^{61,62}

In several instances, a considerable amount of space will be left unused at the end of a line, which could be understood as expanded time created through spatial notation. A nice description for this performative approach can be seen in the introduction to another piece by Houben - *busy. places to dwell* (2019). She writes, “each page a place to dwell. The performer might spend a good time at each place - living for themselves.”⁶³ The act of continuously reading from left to right is partially mitigated by this notational practice. A single page temporarily limits the inevitable procession of information and a musician may experience the here and now. Although a performer’s approach may become somewhat solidified in preparation for a live performance, the presentation of the score will significantly impact how a musician experiments and understands the material.

Text Fragments - Der Kontrabaß

The fragments of text in the score come from the black comedy play with the same title, *Der Kontrabaß*⁶⁴ (1984), by German writer Patrick Süskind. The play features an orchestral

⁶⁰ This is a line from the score of Houben’s work *Symphonia*. This is another piece where one line of music occurs on each page.

⁶¹ This is a line from the score of Houben’s work *images 1 and 2* for female voice.

⁶² This experience contrasts with many scores defined by complexity. For example, in a score by Brian Ferneyhough, the visual experience can be overwhelming for the performer due to the density of the notational presentation.

⁶³ Houben *busy. Places to dwell*, edition wandelweiser 2019

⁶⁴ Süskind (1984). *Der Kontrabass*. Zürich: Diogenes Verlag.

double bassist who gives a monologue directly to the audience while drinking beer and from time to time plays his instrument. This individual is clearly depressed and much of the play consists of him complaining about the kind of musical life the double bass has condemned him to.

When reading through the 27 fragments of text that Houben extracts from the play, the specific story of a middle age orchestral musician disappears, and what is left is a series of abstract musings on the instrument. Houben indicated through written correspondence on how to approach the text: “It should be a piece for musical practice.there are many elements reminding us of scene and theatre. ...the text fragments...are only short inspirations – like the text fragments in Satie’s scores, referring to the performer to give him some inspirations for performing.”⁶⁵

Due to Houben’s explicit reference to the music of Erik Satie, the French composer’s use of text is therefore important to investigate. In the scores of Satie, specific descriptive instructions can be found that go beyond the typical expressive markings of Allegro, Andante or Appassionata. Below is the opening material from the second movement of Satie’s *Descriptions Automatiques*⁶⁶ for solo piano:



Figure 2: Opening of *Descriptions Automatiques* by Erik Satie

⁶⁵ double bass [E-mail from E. Houben]. (2019, December 13)

⁶⁶ Satie *Descriptions Automatiques* Paris: E Demets 1913

It is interesting that Satie includes the traditional type expressive markings found in most common practice repertoire - *Lento* and *Nocturne*, indicating that this will be slow and representative of the common ‘nocturne’ style. I believe this indicates that the text below the opening material is to be treated as something set apart and is to be interpreted differently. Below is the translation of text found in the middle of the staff as well as the rest of the text that is scattered throughout this movement:

*Don't light it yet; there's time
(You can light it, if you wish
Shine a little in front of you
Your hand in front of the light
Take your hand away and put it in your pocket
Shh! Wait (two beats)
Put out the light)*

Several questions are raised when a performer is confronted with this kind of poetic text. Does this text provide information for *how* the piece is to be played? If so, what performative information would be lost if the text was not present? Is this text programmatic? Is the text meant to be seen by audience members or is it for the performer alone? Paul Zukofsky's approach to the 2nd movement provides insight:

If the performer reads and considers this with the least degree of seriousness, how can they not be transported to a mood appropriate for the music? If you do not believe this to be so, perform the following experiment: take this movement and substitute seven word-phrases from a different piece by Satie, while preserving the original placement relative to the music. If the words are as irrelevant as they are purported to be, your feel for and about the music should not be affected by the substitution. I put it to you that the probabilities are high that the substitution will make a difference — that is to say, your subjective impression of the work will be entirely different. It is beyond the scope of this étude to determine whether or not the perception of the performance is in fact different, although I believe that it must be.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Musical Observations, I. (2011). Satie Notes from <http://www.musicalobservations.com/publications/satie.html>

Zukofsky's understanding of the text compliments Houben's earlier statement that the text gives the performer "some inspirations for performing." This suggests that the text is something that provides a type of psychological framework for the performer. The text not only indicates *how* to perform a given passage but a way in which the performer might *experience* the music in real time. Houben's writing on the author Simone Mahrenholz can provide insight into this idea:

Mahrenholz's study allows one to regard music as something pointing beyond itself and at the same time participating in that to which it points....Music and the outer and inner world influence each other. These influences do not occur one-sidedly, but alternately to one another; there is a kind of fluctuation. With reference to Lachenmann, Mahrenholz considers the idea of "pointing" to structures within ourselves and in our surroundings as important: Music is capable of "opening up" realities and possibilities; at the same time, music can "refer" to them while participating in these inner and outer worlds. Transparency between the piece of music and the life-world is created by the listener who becomes the actor...The performer acts as a listener, and "via listening" the processes of opening and manifesting structures of our lives become possible.⁶⁸

What kind of realities are opened up through the interaction with Patrick Süskind's text? The character in the play describes the various actions and activities that a double bassist spends their life participating in. As the monologue unfolds, the audience becomes privy to this musician's "inner life" and the kind of insecurities and perceived failures that the instrument has caused him. A line such as "the mother earth in which we all have our roots; the source of strength that nourishes every musical idea" on its own suggests someone who is praising the instrument's role in creating an abundance of beauty. However, as the play goes on, we learn that these kinds of statements are used to mask the tragic and pathetic fantasies he has over a soprano that is not even aware of his own existence. In Süskind's version, the speaker's ironic incongruities are designed to elicit laughter from the audience. Houben mostly removes the

⁶⁸ Houben (2019). *Musical Practice as a Form of Life*. Transcript Verlag. 87

“comedy” that is found in the text, but the chosen quotations do invite the performer to reflect on the unique relationship a double bassist has with the instrument.

In the opening instructional pages of the score, Houben describes the use of text as “the inner monologue of the double bass player.” This again suggests that a kind of psychological framework is being created. Houben’s extracted fragments of the play present a reality that the performer (double bassist) can relate to from their own history of instrumental playing and music making. A kind of sonic empathy manifests through the material that is played alongside the text, but the larger context is now freed from Süskind’s black comedy implications. A new personal context is created by the individual performing the work. The text describes musical activities that a double bassist would normally find themselves in and the placement in the score is connected to the action they are also literally doing in the moment. For example in pages 10 - 12, Houben places text that reflects on the action of bowing the lowest note on the instrument - the open E string. The three fragments are:

*...now, listen carefully!...hear that? Bottom E...
...bottom E...is more of a sawing than a note...
...E...*

On its own, this text is something that a double bassist can relate to and will mentally conjure up various musical scenarios where this action might occur - The opening drones of Wagner’s *Das Rheingold*⁶⁹ or the double bass soli from Verdi’s *Otello* comes to mind. In the context of *the double bass*, the double bass drones an E for a considerable amount of time. These three pages combined could potentially surpass 15 minutes in length. The text does not provide information on how the piece should be played, but instead provides a space for the performer to ask the following question: What am I doing and what does this action mean to me?

⁶⁹ Technically the bassists play a low E-flat in this opening Prelude, but the low drone can easily be related to this situation.

It is through this question that the performer is able to reflect on the double bass as a sonic instrument (the piece is literally *the double bass*). When listening to this long repetitive action of bowing the E string, the double bass player is able to create new and meaningful relationships with this deceptively complex activity. The process of reflecting on the actions and sounds that are created while playing leads to a kind of performance practice or ritual. The performer is asked to address the reality of participation within music making. Houben describes ritual in this way:

The idea of ritualized activities helps to discuss musical practice by means of useful metaphors. During the performance of a solo piece, or a work for a duo, a trio, a quartet, for smaller and larger ensembles, or finally for an orchestra, the performers can learn something about different relationships to the world and to other human beings and can experience this. Political realities and possibilities can be discovered by way of musical activity. In musical practice we share our memories and hopes, invoking them again and again, rediscovering our hidden forces.”⁷⁰

Through a unique engagement with Patrick Süskind’s *Der Kontrabaß, The double bass* (Houben) is an invitation for the performer to engage in a ritual where they may “share their memories and hopes, invoking them again and again, rediscovering (their) hidden forces.” Houben states that the work “should be a piece for musical practice.” The piece creates a practice for the performer to contemplate the kind of actions and experiences they have with the instrument (*the double bass*). The text aids in revealing this practice and contributing to the “inspirations” that come out of it. The performer may find usefulness with the score as they participate in new musical realities and “rediscover (their) hidden forces.”

Notation

⁷⁰ Houben (2019). *Musical Practice as a Form of Life*. Transcript Verlag. 44

The score to the *double bass* is divided into three staves which suggests three distinct musical actions:

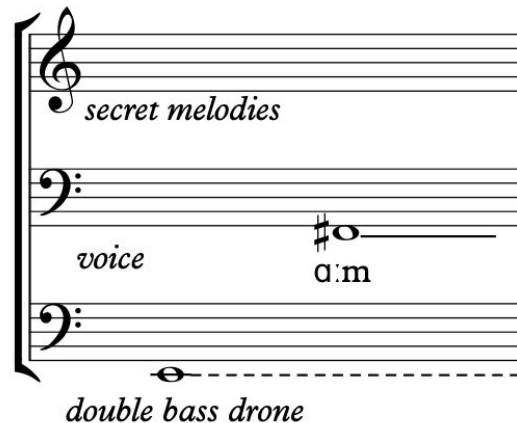


Figure 3: Opening of *the double bass* by Eva-Maria Houben

The descriptive titles as well as the placement of each staff gives important contextual information for how the performer should interpret the specific types of material. The vertical ordering of the staves is interesting because the two outer lines (secret melodies and D.B. drone) contain material produced by the double bass and the inner line (or *inner voice*) is produced from the physical body of the performer. From the perspective of traditional voicing this ordering is logical because it presents a clean display of range from bottom to top. The material for the double bass drone mostly stays in the lowest range: E1 to G2, the voice sits on top of drones: F#2 - E3, and the secret melodies consist mostly of harmonics that span a wide range: D3 - D6.

Similar to a piano or percussion score, the numerous staves do provide an efficient way to organize the wide range of pitch material but the fact that the 3 staves each contain a unique performance mode gives the impression that the score is for an ensemble with multiple instruments. This is reinforced by Süsskind's text where one of the major themes is the role that

the double bass plays in a symphonic orchestra. Lines such as “...it’s the presence of a double-bass that makes an orchestra (page 2), or “...the bass is the cornerstone on which the whole magnificent edifice is erected...” (page 4) reflect the author’s view that the double bass is not only a necessary part of an orchestra but is the source from which the large ensemble is created.

In the play these lines are presented with a great deal of irony since the speaker’s praise of the instrument only masks a genuine frustration with the life that the double bass has given him.⁷¹ In Houben’s *the double bass*, when the incredible range of material throughout multiple voices is referenced in connection with the text, this seems to indicate that the composer not only views the double bass as an orchestral instrument but it is capable of creating an entire symphonic texture by itself. (This texture will be described more specifically in the “secret melodies” section.)

The character in the play states that “*the instrument can do so much...(but) it is never brought out.*” Houben attempts to transcend this pessimism as well as inspire the performer to realize the instrument’s “*absolutely immeasurable potential*” in the context of a solo. Here the instrument is not a large cumbersome burden but is the source of unlimited joy for the performer. Houben’s view of the instrument calls to mind this beautiful quote by Terry Riley describing the playing of the double bass virtuoso Stefano Scodanibbio: “In the distance I could hear the sounds of french horns, trombones, strings and brass all mixing in a beautiful modal ensemble and at the time I thought that Stefano must be playing with a chamber group. I was amazed when I entered the gallery to find Stefano all alone playing his bass.”⁷² The music of Scodanibbio could loosely

⁷¹ The character in the play at one point states that “*The double-bass is the ugliest, nastiest, most graceless instrument ever to be invented. A real pig of an instrument. Sometimes I feel like smashing it.*”

⁷² Riley (1997). Contributions from <http://www.stefanoscodanibbio.com/contributions.htm>

be connected to the double bass writing of Houben in how he uses harmonics and the natural resonance of the instrument to create an immersive space.

Within the context of the orchestra, the double bass may be generally perceived as being in service to other instruments or having technical limitations. Süsskind even describes it as “*an instrument that’s a constant handicap.*” The composer’s presentation of the score alternatively presents an instrument that is not lacking and the notation aids in how the performer may experience the abundance of the double bass.

Listening Into Silence

the double bass begins with a drone on the open E string (figure 3) and the dashed line that extends from the pitch indicates that the sound should be *hovering between appearance and disappearance*. The text that accompanies this introduction highlights the mystery that should be evoked from an extremely soft drone: “*hang on...there...-now! hear that? there! now! did you hear it?...here it comes...*” In the play this quote is referencing the opening passage in the low strings from Johannes Brahms’ Symphony No. 2, but this quiet drone brings to mind the kind of expansive openings in a Bruckner Symphony or the previously mentioned Das Rheingold.

Similar to these orchestral works, Houben’s solo begins with a veiled but dramatic texture that sets the foundation for a large and epic narrative. The experience that this opening evokes calls to mind Theodor Adorno’s description of the drone opening in Gustav Mahler’s First Symphony: “A thin curtain, threadbare but densely woven, it hangs from the sky like a pale gray cloud layer, similarly painful to sensitive eyes.”⁷³ The texture that begins the work establishes both an activity and a space.

⁷³ Adorno (2005). *Mahler - en musikalsk fysiognomik*. Århus: Klim.

It is tempting to view this opening statement as a kind of expression marking similar to how Anton Bruckner writes “feierlich” or “mysterioso.” However, calling back to the private notes in a Satie score, the words here do not describe a generalized image that is about to be created but are instead an invitation for the performer to engage in a musical process. For Houben, a musical practice involves a musician “exposing themselves to (a) certain situation.”⁷⁴ The isolated fragments of text are removed from the original comedic scenario and are presented freely to the performer.

The soloist then “exposes” themselves to the abstract situation and allows a lifetime of personal experiences to connect with the words. These associations should not be dismissed as relative or poetic, but a central aspect of the work’s musical practice. This mode of interacting with the score relates back to the composer’s statement mentioned in the opening chapter: “Are musical practices forms of life? This question shifts the emphasis from the structure of a composition to the activity of the performers.”⁷⁵ This performative approach is supported by the descriptions that accompany the performance instructions:

The drone technique of *hovering between appearance and disappearance* presents the performer with an opportunity to explore extreme levels of quiet dynamics and the instrument's threshold of audibility. Since the drone is continuous - the opening drone is held through page 2 - the moment any semblance of the pitch E arises, this harmonic identity is retained throughout the drone. Even if the E falls into an inaudible range for some time, the continuous motion of the bow on the open string confirms that the E is still present. The drone, which has a character association of stasis, allows the performer to continually reach new depths of quiet playing since

⁷⁴ Houben (2019). *Musical Practice as a Form of Life*. Transcript Verlag. 9

⁷⁵ Ibid

the memory of the E is so firmly established in the mind even when it might not actually be sounding.

The technique that opens the piece is not a fixed sound that the performer tries to keep consistent but is a process of moving closer and closer to silence. For instruments such as double reeds or brass, this kind of process is difficult and minimal since they have particular limits where the instrument stops producing sound. For string instruments though, the interaction between the bow hair and the string allows for a seemingly unlimited range of quiet dynamics when dealing with a continuous drone. It is no wonder Bruckner chose to begin almost every one of his Symphonies with the strings holding a quiet tremolo.

By varying the degree of bow speed and pressure, the performer goes through the process of hearing the presence of the pitch temporarily replaced by bow hair noise or perceived silence, only to discover with patient listening that the E is actually still present and alive. I will borrow the title of a work for solo violin by Houben to describe this process of continuously getting quieter - *listening into silence*.⁷⁶ In *the double bass*, silence is not a fixed material or something that is simply activated similar to turning on a light switch. Silence may be understood as a continual process that is embedded into the musical activity of the work.

Humming

After the E drone is established, the voice enters over it (figure 3) with three iterations of a held F-sharp. As previously stated, one of the requests I made in the initial proposal for the piece was that the composer include material for me to hum while playing the instrument. Although a specific vocal technique is not stated in the score, and this does leave open different

⁷⁶ Houben *listening into silence* edition wandelweiser 2014

possibilities of how to approach the vocal line, I choose to interpret this material by humming the pitches very softly to myself. Since the drone is already being played at a dynamic level that is almost inaudible, humming in a manner that attempts to project the sound would seem slightly out of context. Following the description of the piece being an “inner monologue of the double bass player”, instead of solely focusing on the resultant sound that is produced, I find it more interesting to engage with how the humming produces vibrations in my own body.

When the performer tunes into the physical sensations manifested through sound, one realizes that two vibrations are actually occurring - the vibration from the humming and the vibration of the bass against the performer’s body. This sensation can be a powerful and even healing experience for the individual participating in the process. The double bass becomes an extension of the performer’s own body and the act of making music is the experience of sensing vibrations. As mentioned before, Houben describes this piece as a “musical practice” for the performer and the kind of engagement with the voice can be compared to Pauline Oliveros’ *Tuning Mediations* (which also includes extensive use of humming). Oliveros’ opening remarks for the meditations could easily be applied to the participation of a Houben a score:

“With continuous work some of the following becomes possible with *Sonic Meditations*: Heightened states of awareness or expanded consciousness, changes in physiology and psychology from known and unknown tensions to relaxations which gradually become permanent. These changes may represent a tuning of mind and body...Music is a welcome by-product of this activity.”⁷⁷ In *the double bass*, the soloist will softly hum to themselves and feel vibrations appearing and disappearing from their body. In the absence of sound, an individual will observe their natural state of continuous activity: breathing, heart beating, growing older

⁷⁷ Oliveros *Sonic Meditations* SMITH PUBLICATIONS: 1974

through time. This mode of participation presents another way that the performer may experience their physicality within silence.

Secret Melodies

The following passage from page four highlights the top staff of the score and the notation of “secret melodies:”

5 - 6 - 7 - 6 - 5 - 6 - 5 - 6

secret melodies

double bass drone

Figure 4: Page 4 of *the double bass* by Eva-Maria Houben

The sequential numbers at the top represent the partial number that correlates to the open string on the bottom staff. The open string, in this case E, is not actually played in figure 4 (due to the hollow note symbol) but is used as a reference for the overtone series that follows. The wide space that is given at the beginning of this non-sounding fundamental provides interpretive freedom to the performer. While it is possible to stay inactive until the entrance of the overtones, I choose to bow a muted string (or the top of the bridge) at the beginning of the page so that the continuous bow movements that characterize so much of the work are sustained.

This harmonic notational practice was first introduced by Houben in her solo double bass work *nachtstück*⁷⁸ (2007) and has since been used in her other double bass pieces *fast nichts No. 2* (2009) and *stars and earth* (2018) for two double basses. In these works, the composer establishes different ways of going from the fundamental to the overtones and back. Although *nachtstück* has a slightly different musical context than *the double bass*, the technical descriptions found in this score provide wonderful insight into how Houben understands this material:

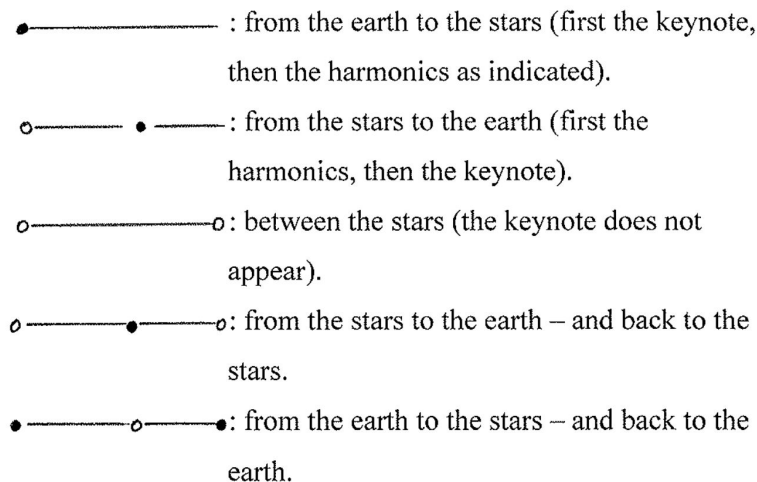


Figure 5: Instructions from *nachtstück* by Eva-Maria Houben

nachtstück provides beautiful imagery of the fundamental (open string) being the earth and the harmonic partials being the stars that twinkle high above in the heavens. If this metaphor is applied to *the double bass*, the fact that the staff for the voice is situated in the middle could be interpreted as the performer’s physical body standing between the earth and the stars. In the duo *stars and earth*, Houben frames this technique with participatory language - “invitations to start

⁷⁸ Houben *nachtstück* edition wandelweiser 2007

for a flight with natural harmonics.”⁷⁹ The overtone series that results from each open string is used as a framework for the work’s musical activity.

Since Houben uses poetic descriptions to describe her musical material, the term “secret melodies” should not have a singular fixed definition. Similar to her use of the Süsskind text though, this “should provide inspiration”⁸⁰ for how the performer approaches the notation. The term melody creates a clear distinction from the material that is marked as a drone. The drone material tends to be an open string that is often held for the duration of one or more pages. I previously used the term “stasis” to describe the drone process since the performer will use an indefinite amount of bow changes and therefore will not have a clear durational sense of when the drone will end. The secret melodies contrast with the sustained note due to the easily identifiable harmonic sequences (usually demarcated by commas). The rate of change between pitches will then inevitably be more noticeable against the protracted drone.

The numerical notation also identifies the fact that the partials are natural harmonics and are derived from the written fundamental (open string drone). The term “secret” may point to the fact that all of the numerical harmonics exist as overtones within the drone. A performer will experience picking out or isolating these pitches that are embedded in the fundamental. This activity creates a pleasant physical sensation as it allows the double bassist to glide through the overtone series with a single finger. When the performer plays the natural harmonics consecutively, they are revealing a private or “secret” sonic world that has been present from the beginning of the drone. This idea can be brought back to the *nachtstück* metaphor of stars, since a star is only a tiny reflection of a much larger celestial body.

⁷⁹ Houben *stars and earth* edition wandelweiser 2018

⁸⁰ double bass [E-mail from E. Houben]. (2019, December 13)

In figure 4, even though the notated drone never sounds, the inclusion below the partials may encourage the performer to focus on how they transition into the harmonics. On the double bass, the E string is made of a particularly thick material and the highest partials (13th, 14th, 15th...) do not speak immediately, especially if you are using a relatively slow bow speed. In a repertoire where clarity of attack and rhythmic precision is prioritized, these partials would become a frustrating task for the performer to solve. In *the double bass*, the slow process of finding and bringing out the high partials is encouraged and the transitional sound becomes just as important as the notated pitch.

These complimentary sounds include the sound of the hair against the string, the potential for both the open string and the harmonic to sound together (in situations such as page 2 where the drone is still sounding), and as Houben writes in *nachtstück*, a natural variation that may occur despite the performer's intended correctness.⁸¹ There is also the strange but profound experience when the performer slowly bows the partial with almost no weight, and one can swear they hear the partial before it begins to project. The performer then experiences moving the bow with more commitment and hearing this pitch become a sonic reality. Houben's solo double bass compositions invite the soloist to participate in a musical activity where technique is not viewed as a means to an end. The inevitable variations that define the production of sound are equally as important as the sound itself.

Houben also uses the more traditional notation of diamond heads to indicate harmonic melodies that are derived across multiple strings. Each note may be performed as a natural harmonic on the G or D string:

⁸¹ Houben *nachtstück* edition wandelweiser 2007

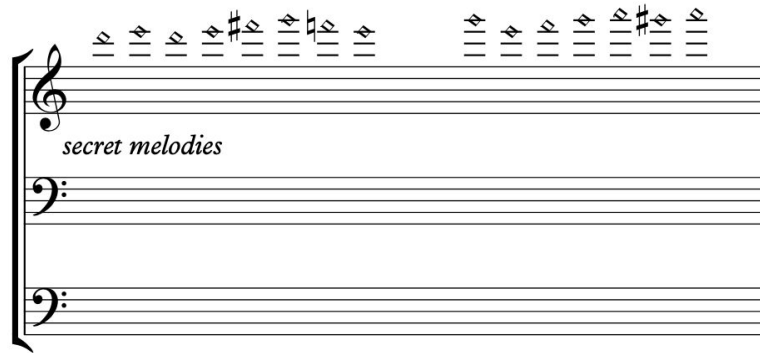


Figure 6: Page 14 of *the double bass* by Eva-Maria Houben

Figure 6 contrasts with Figure 5 because no fundamental is referenced on the bottom staff. If the performer chooses to interpret the opening of figure 5 with a sustained muted drone, the silent gap between the two phrases in figure 6 will be perceived as a new material. The sound of the hair moving across the string may initially be perceived as quiet incidental noise that fades into the background, but the cessation of this action creates an awareness that something is now missing. The absence of the drone or fundamental can create a momentary shock and is complimented by the Süsskind line on page 5: ... *you take out the bass, and you get pandemonium, a musical Babel, with nobody knowing what he's doing...* In the moments of true inactivity by the performer, silence creates new awareness of performed sounds that come before and after.

Ending in Silence

The final three pages abandon specified pitch material and the work continuously moves closer towards total silence. The double bassist is asked to hunch over and quietly rub the bow against the tail piece. After nearly 90 minutes of playing, this physical action may represent the

performer attempting to pull out any remaining sounds from the instrument. “...*there's just enough for me to be able to scrape around...*” (Page 26) The body of both the instrument and the performer become the focus in this moment. As the performer slowly concludes the use of the double bass, the silence creates a space for the soloist (and audience) to reflect on their own body. “In silence we experience our physicality.”⁸² The awareness of our physical existence is a moment of celebration within musical practice.

“...we all do what we can as well as we can...” These are the Süsskind words attached to the final page of the score. The double bassist concludes the work by humming softly to himself as if trying to remember a piece from long ago. Fragmented vocal utterances are enveloped by silence which creates a space of both fragility and calm reflection. The 90 minute work has concluded but the experience from this musical practice will remain with the performer.

The double bass is an invitation for the performer to engage in a musical practice. A performer may experience the borders and thresholds that occur not only between music and the everyday world, but between all acts of music making. (The subject of “the everyday world” will be further explored in chapter 6) This work allows the double bassist to experience the instrument as a site for sustained creativity and personal meaning. I am grateful to Eva-Maria Houben for writing this wonderful piece.

⁸² Houben (2019). *Musical Practice as a Form of Life*. Transcript Verlag. 10

Chapter 5 accurate placement by Jürg Frey

Accurate Placement is a composition for solo double bass by Swiss composer Jürg Frey and was premiered by Dominic Lash in November 2015 at the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival.⁸³ This is Frey's only solo composition for the instrument to date, though he has written for the instrument within the context of ensemble music.⁸⁴ Unlike the other two compositions discussed in this text, (Houben and Beuger) which is music of considerable length, this work has a more modest duration of 14 minutes. Frey has been an active member of the Wandelweiser group since the early 90s⁸⁵, and similar to the other members in the organization his music incorporates large periods of silence. In Frey's compositions, silence is used as a distinct structural component that helps shape the form of the music. He writes:

“We had all been thinking for a long time about sound and silence. One attitude is that silence simply doesn't exist. This is what Cage said. But, for me, I tend to think of silence as another kind of material. It is similar to a square in a town or city. The square may be empty, but it is defined by the buildings around it and the buildings are defined by it. Silence becomes part of the form. This is where I find myself going after the whole Wandelweiser experience. I am very interested in form and the energies which come from form.”⁸⁶ The composer's words point towards silence manifesting as a kind of architectural material. In Frey's music, silence is not only a space to occupy but is also perceived as a formal path.

⁸³ Cummings (2020, January 22). Jürg Frey – Accurate Placement (World Première). from <http://5against4.com/2016/06/27/jurg-frey-accurate-placement-world-premiere/>

⁸⁴ Beuger, A. (n.d.). Jürg Frey from https://www.wandelweiser.de/_juerg-frey/catalogue.html

⁸⁵ Beuger, A. (n.d.). Jürg Frey from <https://www.wandelweiser.de/juerg-frey.html>

⁸⁶ Ross (2016, August 29). The Composers of Quiet from <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/09/05/silence-overtakes-sound-for-the-wandelweiser-collective>

The following sections will examine how Frey is able to create distinct musical structures through the use of silence. Each of his compositions create specific musical activities where the performer interacts with fragile material, precision of time and the threshold that occurs when these two elements intersect.

Wen Series

To properly understand Frey's use of silence, it is important to look at his *Wen* series; a collection of solo works for a wide range of instruments written between 1999 - 2007. In each work Frey develops his use of silence in a highly direct manner. In *Wen*⁸⁷, the composer experiments with different lengths of silence by implementing notated clock times, repeated monochromatic musical gestures and long periods of instrumental inactivity. The incredibly specific and diverse list of time points across the 59 solo compositions creates a kind of lexicon for silent durations. Each composition uniquely showcases how "silence becomes part of the form." Frey considers this series a turning point for him compositionally as it helped him define the basic vocabulary for later works. The composer writes:

I consider *Wen* as for me one of the most important pieces in my oeuvre. Pure material versus melodic and motivic approach is since then a basic topic in my work...to bring formal characteristics more to the experiential level or to keep it very flat, to add long silences, to bring sounds in a temporal proximity, to isolate or to connect sounds, to have presence or absence of activity. In some radical moments, the piece nearly disappears or, in contrast to this, it has its clear presence in time and space. And this process of composition always happened on a threshold, on the one hand to place sounds into a given length of time - and on the other hand a line to develop the music further and further into time from one sound to the next...In *Wen* you may discover some of this two aspects in clear and precise formulations. Looking back, *Wen* became the alphabet for my further work.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Frey *wen*. Edition Wandelweiser, 2007

⁸⁸ Frey, J. (2019, April 28). Questions about *Wen* [E-mail].

In chapter 3, I discussed my personal experience with listening to Frey’s music and the importance of the *Wen* series for my introduction and engagement with Wandelweiser. These works present the essence of Frey’s compositional approach and provide a musician with specific musical activities to interact and learn about silence as a performance material. Although it is not the aim of this paper to explore the entirety of the *Wen* series, it is worth exploring all 59 works as a complete set. The series shows how the composer was able to develop his approach to dealing with silence over the course of 8 years. With each successive composition, the music moves from static instrumental drones to material with distinct intervallic movement. When heard consecutively over many hours, experiencing the totality of the series can be quite powerful.

In *Wen No. 3*⁸⁹ for solo violin, Frey develops the “form and...energies” by writing contrasting durations of silence:



Figure 7: *Wen No. 3* for Solo Violin by Jürg Frey

In figure 7, two types of time are notated: The clock times indicate the entrances for the violinist but the notated pitch material is given the metronomic indication of Quarter Note = 48.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Ibid

⁹⁰ The metronome indications are provided in the opening instructional pages of *Wen*.

These two types of differentiated time can be compared to the categories of *smooth time* (non-pulsed) and *striated time* (pulsed) as described by Pierre Boulez.⁹¹ “Boulez says that in a smooth space-time one occupies without counting, whereas in a striated space-time one counts in order to occupy.” In *Wen*, the performer will experience transitioning between these two occupied spaces and is able to address the “threshold” that defines the composition.

The clock can be understood as *smooth time* because it produces long periods of silence where the performer abandons any sense of immediate internal pulse. Although the clock suggests a pulse of quarter note = 60, the use of an external clock creates a situation where the performer does not need to sense this, especially in the context of durations that last longer than a minute. The metronome marking creates an internal sense of time for the performer (*striated time*), but this mode of tracking pulse is continually relinquished back to the clock time when each notated fragment ends. This alternation between an active and inactive projection of time creates a unique musical practice for a musician. The soloist experiences a loss of control when the clock time takes over and must observe the piece as it emerges and disappears into silence.

“Silence becom(ing) part of the form” is represented in the proportions of clock time. The longer silences (the additional space surrounding the moments of activity created by the numerical clock time) is reflected in the rhythmic contour of the notated pitch material. (figure 7) 0:09 - 1:02 could be reflected as the opening gesture: half note - rest - half note - rest. Following this logic, 1:02 - 1:18 is a reduced amount of space similar to the following two half notes that do not contain an eighth rest. Finally, the large distance between the first and second system (1:18 - 2:40) is a reflection of the space that occurs between each individual line. This final reflection of

⁹¹ Lin “In Search of Time Musical Time and Form in *Dérive 2* by Pierre Boulez.” Issuu, Wei-Chieh Lin, issuu.com/jaylin0/docs/wi-chieh_lin_-_in_search_of_time-.

a reflection could be compared to fractal geometry where form is consistent no matter how far you zoom in or out.

In the majority of Frey's more recent works, he has mostly abandoned the use of prolonged silence, referred to earlier as the "Wandelweiser" experience, and communicates all rhythmic durations through the notation of strict metronomic time. It is interesting to note that this is the opposite path Eva-Maria Houben and Antoine Beuger have followed - many of their earlier works have clear metronomic indications - of which Beuger's *Calme Etendue* is one - but their approach has moved toward a performative freedom in relation to rhythm.

The *wen* series invites the performer to listen to silence with a heightened awareness for formal implications. The soloist tracks the path that is created within their performed material and observes how a composition is sustained even through inactivity. Silent durations, no matter how long, are not experienced as a pause or dead time but as a material that projects form and energies. This performative experience is relevant to the majority of Frey's works and will be applied to the composer's solo double bass composition.

Accurate placement - Rhythm and Form

The *Wen* series helped Frey develop compositional techniques to use silence as an identifiable material. Although clock times are not used to organize durations of silence in the work *accurate placement*, the bars of metered rest project a similar formal organization. This compositional approach is evident in the opening line of the piece⁹²:

⁹² Frey *accurate placement*. Edition Wandelweiser, 2015

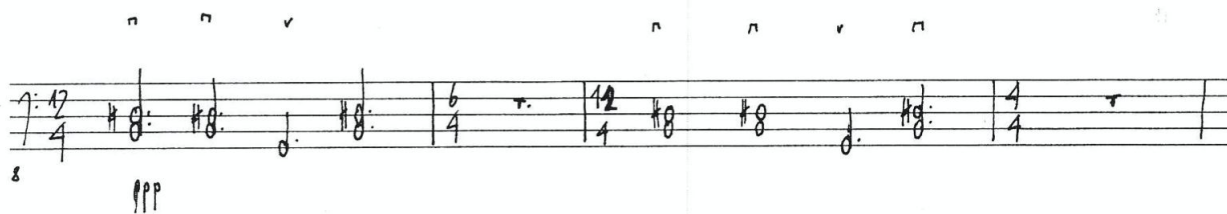


Figure 8: Measures 1 - 4 of *accurate placement* by Jürg Frey

The first appearance of a silent measure (m.2) might initially be experienced by the listener as a moment of pause or stasis that could just as well be communicated by an empty bar with a fermata. The appearance of the silent 4/4 bar (m. 4) shifts the awareness to a more precise measurement of time and retroactively signals that the duration of these two bars are connected to the sounding rhythms found in each of the preceding bars - The 6/4 relates to the opening groups of 3 and the 4/4 is connected to the whole notes in the 12/4. The distinction between rhythmic groupings of 3 and 4 form the basic vocabulary of the entire work through continuous repetition. The metered bars of silence continue the formal rhythmic process of the sounding material but through measured durations of silence. This is how Frey succeeds in presenting silence as “another kind of material” that becomes part of the form.

The composer’s explanation of the work’s title, *accurate placement*, provides further insight for how rhythm and form is used. “The title evokes two possibilities of looking at accuracy. On the one hand, we have here a precise and beautiful placement of material and elements, maybe similar to a quiet architecture in a wide garden. On the other hand, the music demands the accurate feeling for rhythmic precision, similar to a very slow movement of a song. The balance on the threshold of these two contradictory elements gives the piece its fragile

identity.”⁹³ The title of the work points to the kind of musical process occurring within the composition - ephemeral material interacting with the precision of rhythm and form.

In Frey’s essay *And on it went*,⁹⁴ the composer describes this fragile threshold as existing between two experiential worlds: the world of the path and the world of expanse. His music does not oscillate between these two states but is defined by how their coexistence is sustained and developed. “...the precise threshold where static sonic thinking almost imperceptibly acquires direction, where static, wholly motionless sounds meet the onset of movement and directionality of the sound material.” The crossroad where these two “contradictory elements” meet define the composition's fragile identity and establish a musical activity. The title of the work may be understood as a directive to the performer for how they must negotiate or balance between these two worlds. An example of this “threshold” can be seen in figure 9 where a repeated F# is divided into rhythmic groupings of 3 and 4 beats:

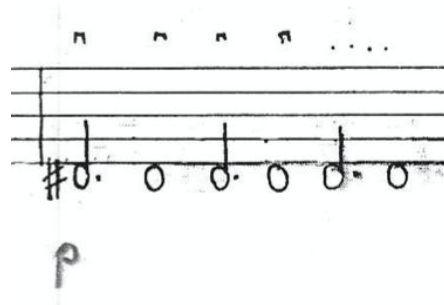


Figure 9: Measure 11 of *accurate placement* by Jürg Frey

In a clearly minimalist situation such as Figure 9 - a total of 23 F# repetitions occur - a performer might be tempted to view the material as austere and perform with a kind of analytical detachment. This would satisfy the requirement of rhythmic precision, but the performance must

⁹³ Frey (2021, January 24). Questions about Accurate Placement [E-mail].

⁹⁴ Frey, J. (2004). And on it went. Retrieved from https://www.wandelweiser.de/_juerg-frey/texts-e.html#AND

also convey music that is “similar to a very slow movement of a song.” When a performer is coached by Frey, an active clarinetist himself, he emphasizes that every note should be approached with the kind of palpable musicality that is required of common practice repertoire. Within a music that is largely defined by monochromatic sounds, this interpretive task may seem contradictory but the process of solving this dilemma ultimately pushes a musician into a rewarding performance space. Dominic Lash relates the following story about working with the composer before the premiere of *Accurate Placement*:

Jürg explained how the three beat notes were like a waltz, whereas the whole notes represented a square 4/4. A three-beat note—so what, it's a note that lasts three beats, right? A waltz—that's something else entirely, beginning of course with the idea of dancing. Is this something that could be audible in my performance? I'm not at all sure, and I don't think that Jürg intended it as part of my job to make it so, but thinking like this certainly increased the vividness of playing the piece and *that*, I'd like to think, can't but have made some difference to the audience's experience.⁹⁵

The unique musical characteristics that are attached to each rhythmic grouping, as described by Dominic Lash, have the potential to be further distinguished by the composer's marking of specific bowings (figures 8 and 9). The physical motion that occurs through the repeated down bows necessitate that a slight space will occur between the two notes. This kind of musical gesture embodies a similar sound as a vocalist taking a breath between phrases or a dancer lifting on beat 3 to plant the feet firmly on the down beat (“like a waltz”).

If the performer does the same motion for each note though, the space between the groupings of 3 and 4 will sound the same which has the problematic effect of blurring any musical distinction. The grouping of 4 will end up sounding like a slowed down version of the 3

⁹⁵ Lash (2016, March 17). The Loneliness of the Nearly Inaudible Bass Player: A Performer's Reflections from <https://www.musicandliterature.org/features/2016/3/17/the-loneliness-of-the-nearly-inaudible-bass-player-a-performers-reflections>

and will not project the “square 4/4” that the composer intends. To solve this dilemma, the performer must differentiate the kind of space that is created between groupings of 3 and 4. If a duration of 3 beats projects the natural space that occurs in a waltz, then the down bow after a grouping of 4 should be quicker and more determined, similar to the precision associated with a march.

The ending to *accurate placement* presents an incredible transformation of the opening rhythmic material. At around the halfway point, Frey increases the tempo from quarter note = 48 to 56 and this signals what could be described as the B section. After concluding a passage of harmonics that slowly go through a process of rhythmic diminution, the opening material returns but with a new profile:

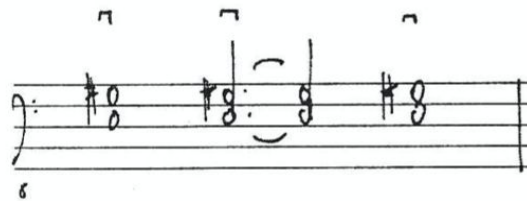


Figure 10: Measure 11 on Page 3 of *accurate placement* by Jürg Frey

The primary differences between figures 8 and 10 are that the descending interval has been removed and the rhythmic groupings have now been expanded to groupings of 4 and 5. The opening double stop third has also been transposed up a fourth into a slightly brighter range on the double bass. Although the piece is mostly ‘tonal’, there is still something shocking about the appearance of this chord. The low F/A pizzicato chord that follows creates a strange dissonance against the E Major harmony. This moment is characteristic of Frey’s use of tonality (as

discussed in Chapter 3) and in my own coaching with Frey, he likened the music to the ending of a Bruckner Symphony.

In the context of the slightly faster tempo, the ‘recapitulation’ is heard as a slowed down version of the opening material. In order for this to be properly communicated, the performer must not be tempted by the perceived rubato, but is required to maintain a clear sense of quarter note = 56. The soloist must simultaneously keep the performance character within this transformed material as well. The previously mentioned association with a waltz (3) is now shifted to groupings of 4, and the march quality (4) is now shifted to groupings of 5. Through maintaining these changing relationships, the performer experiences disorientation. The performer plays the opening material at a faster tempo that results in a slowed down version while maintaining performance gestures that have become ‘unfixed’ with the original numerical grouping.

Disorientation is experienced here as a positive and may be understood as part of the work’s musical practice. Achieving a sense of orientation may not be the goal when dealing with this kind of mental juggling act. The performer instead enters into this situation to learn the process of accepting disorientation as a performance reality. This can be compared to Houben’s experience with performing Beethoven’s Piano Sonata No. 32 Op. 111. “While playing this sonata movement, I do not pretend that I am disoriented, but I rather enter a real musical process, cross over into the realm of musical practice and learn something about disorientation. I learn how disorientation can really be experienced. The sonata movement invites me to participate in a becoming. This succeeds if I trust in the fact that I can always enter a new situation of disorientation.”⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Houben (2019). *Musical Practice as a Form of Life*. Transcript Verlag.

Houben presents an understanding of disorientation where it is not a state of weakness or confusion but is a confirmation to the musician that the work's potential is opening up. The musician situates themselves between two contradictory worlds and learns to embrace their reality. This practice allows the performer to step into the unknown and experience the fragility of a threshold. The lessons learned from experiencing disorientation through rhythm and form will be applied to how a musician produces sound.

Technique and Sound

Frey's notation can be deceptively simple at first glance. For example, figures 6 and 7 have the appearance of a generic bass line found in a classical orchestral score. However, one of the fundamental ingredients that creates the unique and appealing sound world in Frey's compositions is the performer's total attention to the quality of tone that is being produced. The opening line in the performance notes states that "The Sound Is very soft to a fragile timbre." This statement is reinforced with the descriptions for how dynamics should be realized:

Dynamics:

„p“ is a regular very soft sound.

„ppp“ is a pitch/noise sound: „col legno“/“arco ordinario“ mix. Reduced left hand pressure. The sound should evermore have a shimmer of the notated pitches.

Figure 11: Instructions from *accurate placement* by Jürg Frey

The technical instructions connected to the two dynamics are reminiscent of Houben's approach to drones in *the double bass*. The indication that ppp "should evermore have a shimmer of the notated pitch" can be compared to Houben's opening passage where the note is "hovering

between appearance and disappearance.” Both composer’s notational practice prompt the performer to engage the dynamic markings with broader implications than just amplitude. The technique of *col legno/arco* with a reduced left hand pressure creates a haunting texture as well as a state of vulnerability for the performer due to the instability of this action. The “pitch/noise sound” that results from the reduced left hand pressure will elicit quiet overtones from the double bass that are mostly unpredictable, especially at such an incredibly fragile dynamic level. A slight variation of this technique, the half tone harmonic, is used with stunning effect in Frey’s 2nd string quartet.⁹⁷

In an analysis of Frey’s piano work *klavierstück 2*, Eva-Maria Houben provides a beautiful description of the performative experience that occurs when one confronts technical uncertainty:

Jürg Frey’s *piano piece 2* for example requires the courage to do something without knowing exactly what will come out of it. The notation and the sound reality cannot be reconciled easily...The result is different from the notation. The performers follow a practice of asking questions, exposing themselves to the decay of sounds. The performance becomes a celebration of ephemerality. A paradoxical situation: I intend to play a certain sound but cannot decide if the resulting sound will be the one that I intend to play. The inherent possibility for this existential situation is one of the various moments that constitute the usefulness of this piano piece.⁹⁸

The opening gesture may be experienced by the performer as “a celebration of ephemerality.” The fragile and unstable bowing technique colors the alternating harmonies of B/D# and a low G. (Figure 8) Although the action presents a momentary loss of control for the performer, the soloist gains confidence through the repetition of these pitches. This contributes to the musical practice enacted through *accurate placement*. As the performer relinquishes control, the piece is able to emerge with clarity. This experience helps “constitute the usefulness of this

⁹⁷ Lanzilotti, A. (Director). (2021, February 13). *Jürg Frey: HALFTONE HARMONICS* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://vimeo.com/348242960>

⁹⁸ Houben (2019). *Musical Practice as a Form of Life*. Transcript Verlag.

(double bass) piece.” (Houben) A musician gains confidence through performing fragile material, trusting in the precise measurements of time and listening to silence. Frey expands upon this with his own experience as a performer:

“At all times, the interpreter is expected not to want to hold and shape the sounds, but to let go of them as he plays, enabling the inherent qualities of the sounds to become perceptible and experienceable. Time flows through the performer, and he not so much showcases his own presence as he articulates the presence of the overall space. He reacts with seismographic sensitivity to the slightest change, the subtlest crossing of the threshold between monochromely undirected situations and the shaping of time, which suggests direction and a path.”⁹⁹

In Frey’s compositions, interpretation does not come from demonstrative gestures or physical affectation. This should not imply that the performer is merely functional or a “transparent vessel”¹⁰⁰ (Dahlhaus) though. When a musician is able to “react with seismographic sensitivity to the slightest change,” this reveals a situation where the soloist does not project ownership over the produced sounds but is instead interacting or connecting with the material. This approach to performance creates its own threshold within the performer. A state of vulnerability or letting go intersects with the objective reality of form and time. It is here that both the sound and the participation of the soloist become “perceptible and experienceable.”

Musical Practice

When compared to the pieces by Houben and Beuger, *accurate placement* at first glance has a more traditional presentation in terms of notation, set duration and performative decision

⁹⁹ Frey (2004). Jürg Frey from https://www.wandelweiser.de/_juerg-frey/texts-e.html#AND

¹⁰⁰ Dahlhaus (1983). *Foundations of music history*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

making. The musical practice that the performer enacts though can be a strange and transcendent experience. There is a unique astonishment that comes from witnessing Frey's simple handwritten score result in a complex musical activity. Simple gestures such as adding a quarter note beat to a phrase will result in vivid formal contrasts. A quiet concentration is required from playing this music, but the performer is rewarded by participating in the process.

This being a solo work, the individual may embrace this activity with or without an audience present. In Frey's composition *pianist, alone*¹⁰¹, the 90 minute piece harkens back to repertoire intended for a performer to play in the privacy of their home - such as J.S. Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* or *Cello Suites*. Due to the double bass emerging in the second half of the 20th century as a legitimate solo medium, the instrument does not have a deep history with this type of solo music for personal use. Even if *accurate placement* is presented in a concert environment, the work creates a uniquely private space for the performer. (The subject of private performance will be discussed further in chapter 6)

The instrument is no longer the large, cumbersome body that is so often a site for theater or spectacle. Here the double bassist may become alone as both performer and listener. The soloist engages with the double bass in the here and now through the celebration of ephemerality. The role of the instrument is not an accompaniment, one of many or in service of anyone else. Pianist Andrew Lee states "As the music unfolds..., it contains no relation to the past or the present: Frey's music refers only to itself."¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Frey *pianist, alone* edition wandelweiser 2004

¹⁰² Robin (2014, September 30). Jürg Frey: Pianist, Alone, by R. Andrew Lee from <https://irritablehedgehog.bandcamp.com/album/j-rg-frey-pianist-alone>

Chapter 6 *calme étendue* by Antoine Beuger

The composer Antoine Beuger composed a series of 17 solo instrumental works titled *calme étendue* - each one for a different instrument - during 1996 - 97. Throughout the composer's career, his compositional output has centered around works created in a series. A series will consist of a single compositional structure that is implemented throughout many different works. Each piece has a unique instrumentation but the fundamental conceptual approach stays the same. The guiding concept usually consists of a specific numerical ordering for events and a repetitive musical activity. For example, in *ce qui passe* (2002), each of the eight solo pieces are for instruments with non-decaying sounds. Beuger's preconceived structure requires the performer to play 70 tones in a highly specific ordering of repetitions.¹⁰³ The main difference between each piece is the pitch material (usually generated by an algorithm) and the instrumentation. This mode of working allows the composer to extract a large amount of creative potential from a single strict conceptual process.

Due to the focused nature of each series, it is important to understand the *calme étendue* series as a whole and the larger musical ideas that are consistent across each piece before specifically addressing *calme étendue* (*double bass*). The series title roughly translates to "extended calm" and is described by the composer as a study of instrumentation. Each individual work provides a specific musical practice that encourages the performer to listen to their instrument in a unique way. During the compositional process, Beuger would meet with an instrumentalist and watch them play until they found a singular activity that would be satisfying

¹⁰³ Beuger & Saunders (2020, March 09). Interview with Antoine Beuger from <http://www.james-saunders.com/interview-with-antoine-beuger/>

to repeat for long periods of time.¹⁰⁴ He would then apply the designated compositional structure around this specific instrumental action.

The first work in the series, *calme étendue (spinoza)* for solo speaker, inspired the format for each of the 17 compositions and clearly articulates the series conceptual elements. The composition is for solo speaker and was performed in 1997 by the composer over the course of 27 consecutive days. Beuger writes the following about his process for creating and performing the piece:

In my attempt to approach Spinoza's *Ethics* musically, my first step was to copy out all the monosyllabic words of this book in the order of their appearance: a total of about 40,000 words. This method gave me the opportunity to read the text very attentively and carefully from beginning to end, and, without intending to understand each of its details, to experience its force, the plurality of “streams” at work in it, and the clear and life affirming attitude it conveys. In performing *calme étendue (spinoza)*, the words are spoken in a very relaxed tempo (one word every 8 seconds) and with a very quiet voice. The performer should not through emphasis or intonation try and suggest a specific sense to the individual words or groups of words. Spoken sections alternate with sections of silence. In these silent sections, the performer just sits quietly, doing nothing: calm concentration. A complete performance of *calme étendue (spinoza)* lasts about 180 hours. In August, 1997, I had the opportunity to carry out a complete performance of the work at the Museum Schloss Morsbroich, Leverkusen: 26 consecutive days, 6 to 10 hours daily, according to the opening hours of the museum.¹⁰⁵

calme étendue (spinoza) for solo speaker has extremely simple parameters - one word is spoken every 8 seconds - and a performance may be spread out over numerous sessions. The original text by Baruch Spinoza (*Ethics*) blurs the line of where compositional authority lies and Beuger's role can be understood as the curator of an activity. The composer's words suggest a kind of performative neutrality that encourages the musician to disassociate preconceived intentions behind a physical action and the resulting sound. A performer will naturally want to convey meaning through spoken language, but must resist delivering the text with conscious

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

¹⁰⁵ Beuger (n.d.). Notes for "Antoine Beuger: Calme étendue (spinoza)" from <https://www.dramonline.org/albums/antoine-beuger-calme-tendue-spinoza/notes>

affectation. Beuger states that he desired not to “understand” the text, but rather “experience its force” through a special type of reading.

This creates a mode of participation where the reader continuously abandons pre-formed mental associations with the text and allows the resulting sound to generate new meaning. The performer becomes a co-creator of the work not only through interpretation but through the act of listening. It is only through the soloist’s own subjective experience of doing, listening and living that the full composition truly achieves any compositional meaning. This can be compared to the moment in *the double bass* (Houben) where the performer must continually bow the E string for an extended period of time. A relatively basic task is given to the performer but it is through the sustained duration of the act and careful listening that one is able to form new associations with the material. The score provides a unique context for the double bassist to experience the “force” of the instrument.

Beuger’s term - “calm concentration” - provides a clear image of the performer as listener and could have easily been used as an alternate title for these works. It is fitting that the first composition in the *calme étendue* series is for solo speaker. The activity of speaking is a universal action that is developed through a lifetime of repetition. The mental and physical associations one has with spoken language will be recontextualized throughout a performance of the work. An individual will continuously abandon preconceived mental associations and listen to the sound of their own voice.

calme étendue (spinoza) creates a specific performative experience through reading and this unique mode of participation will be translated to the instrumental works that follow in the series. An instrumentalist will temporarily abandon a certain amount of familiarity with the instrument so that they may listen with a new perspective. As will be shown in *calme étendue*

(*double bass*), the double bassist will reimagine their own learned technique and discover new ways of listening to the sounds they are producing.

The 180 hours required in *calme étendue (spinoza)* does not allow the performer (or composer!) to form an interpretation of the work beforehand (or at least strongly discourages it). The reality that the performance took place over 26 consecutive days can be compared to the kind of relationship a reader has with a book. For example, a work such as *Finnegan's Wake*¹⁰⁶ by James Joyce has the potential to be reread multiple times over the course of a lifetime and it is only through slow, careful reading that an individual can achieve an authentic understanding of the work. The following statement by István Zelenka could easily describe the kind of experience one has when performing the music of Antoine Beuger:

“The relation the reader could develop to a book seems to me a very rich one; the reader spends weeks or months with ‘his’ book, which becomes a part of his everyday life; the reader chooses each time length of his daily reading, the tempo and expression of it, and could return to already-read passages of the book, structuring his own personal interpretation. This widely active relation of reader and book is somehow a model in my mind to musical, sounding, physical or mental projects.”¹⁰⁷ Zelenka highlights the usefulness of the text and how the act of reading is a mode of participation.

This type of interaction expands upon the musical practice a performer may engage in with a score and the usefulness of a composition. In a solo work where the audience is not directly engaged in the musical creation, a performance of the work may be embraced as a private event. The soloist is not obligated to justify the piece's existence by performing for

¹⁰⁶ Joyce (1978). *Finnegans wake*. New York: Garland.

¹⁰⁷ Zelenka (2019). 3. Solo. In E. Houben (Author), *Musical Practice as a Form of Life How Making Music Can be Meaningful and Real* (pp. 168-169). Bielefeld: Transcript.

others. The work is created by a single musician and for the musician alone. Each *calme étendue* piece is an invitation for a performer to privately experience relinquishing control through sound and learning to accept what is given back to them. The title of Beuger's composition for solo piano may describe this experience: *pour être seule(e), sans réserve* (Being Alone: Losing oneself, giving oneself up for lost).

Creating a Performance Version

Each of the 17 *calme étendue* pieces are constructed with similar compositional parameters and even share the same opening instructional pages for “creating a performance version.” A performer will follow Beuger's guidelines to set specific parameters for an individual performance. The following section will explain how this initial process is done and the musical implications that come from these guidelines. Each individual work contains the following traits:

- 1. Time Specific** - The duration of the work is predetermined by the performer. In each work, the duration is almost always somewhere between 45 minutes and 9 hours.
- 2. Sounding/Silent Phases** - A list of time points are chosen through chance procedure that determine sections of performing and sections where no activity occurs. (Silence) A sheet with 482 time point options is provided at the beginning of each work.
- 3. Repetitive Actions** - Each piece requires the instrument to perform one specific type of instrumental sound every 8 seconds.

Time Specific

The indication that the performer should determine the duration of the work beforehand allows an individual to develop a personalized version of the piece. The notes on the page can be understood as raw materials but the performer is able to shape the frame of the composition with a time that is judged by its usefulness. If a musician is brave enough to commit to a full 9 hour realization of the work, then it is clear they are seeking a specific performative experience. The extreme conditions that accompany such a monumental task are ones that the performer can embrace as a personal choice. On the opposite end, a 45 minute performance, although still not brief, has the potential to be presented in a conventional concert setting and is a duration that can be repeated with more ease than a 9 hour version. The performer tracks the overall duration of the work with a stopwatch. This aspect will be further discussed under the section sounding/silent phases.

The wide spectrum of durational options also highlights that the material presented during any given performance is an ephemeral realization of the multiplicity of options found in the notation. The written material is in fact an infinite continuum of patterns and this feature is confirmed by how a musician interacts with the score. The performer chooses any spot in the score to begin and loops back around when the end is reached. In a nine hour version, each page will be performed multiple times. For Antoine Beuger, this kind of compositional approach allows the performer to engage with a special kind of music making he designates as “timeless noise:”

The main attraction of taking ‘timeless noise’ or ‘the world’ to be the matter of music is its infinity. So, instead of assuming music to have some finite number of basic elements to start with, I am suggesting the opposite: the matter of music is ‘all that is (sounding)’. The form of a specific music, then, is the way it cuts into

this infinitely dense continuum. This suggests that, in creating music, one is not, as it were, going into the continuum to look for or to discover certain definite things to be taken out and to be used as elements of a composition. There is no way of entering the continuum: because of its density, there is no place to walk around. It seems more appropriate to think of creating music as cutting into this infinity, knowing that even the smallest slice one carves out, again, contains an infinite number of elements. So, asking someone to play an 'a' of a certain duration, a certain volume and a certain tone colour is like asking him to write the number pi: he'll do something more or less approaching something else, which is more or less close to something else again, etc.¹⁰⁸

The performer may experience a kind of existential clarity or joy when confronting the infinite continuum in *calme étendue*. A threshold occurs when the ephemerality of sound is accompanied by repetitive actions. The soloist finds joy in letting sound go precisely because they may return to this process again and again. The act of beginning again or restarting is embedded into every level of participation: Stopping and starting every 8 seconds, waiting for long periods of silence before returning to sound, repeating the entire score and returning to the piece at a later time to perform again.

These actions are not limited to a single performance, but occur over a lifetime of personal interactions with the score. A musician does not perform the work to achieve a clear sense of the work's meaning that one can then return to as a clearly articulated memory. In *calme étendue*, the soloist participates in an activity that promises uncertainty and an unknown future through each repetition. Similar to Houben's experience with Beethoven's piano sonata Op. 111, this musical practice has the musician participate in a becoming.

Houben writes "When Beuger considers silence and events, he does not only refer to long pauses within a piece, but also to the silence before and after the performance. As soon as I leave the concert hall, I walk back into the daily life step by step. When does a musical situation come

¹⁰⁸ Beuger, & Saunders (2020, March 09). Interview with Antoine Beuger from <http://www.james-saunders.com/interview-with-antoine-beuger/>

to an end?”¹⁰⁹ The personal designation of the composition’s duration may point to the work touching the realm of the “everyday life world.” (Houben) The performer accepts that the chosen time is to be their immediate future and musical practice will frame their current reality.

Calme étendue “cuts into the infinitely dense continuum” (Beuger) that is one’s life and carves out a space in which to dwell. Although the chosen clock time will eventually reach a stopping point, there is a recognition that this end is somewhat relative. The work could go on forever, and the performer will transition back into the everyday world with this perspective. This experience confirms that the musician may choose to step back into this reality again and again for as long as one desires.

Sounding/Silent Phases

Each *calme étendue* score contains the same list of 482 different time points between 0:00:24 and 8:59:52. After designating the total duration of the performance, the performer is instructed to implement a chance procedure that chooses between 2 and 25 time points from this sheet. Beuger does not indicate what kind of chance procedure should be used but this lack of specificity gives the performer another way of creating a personal practice with the piece. Just as John Cage found creative meaning through using the I-ching for half of his life¹¹⁰, a performer should not dismiss the creative value in having a system with a personalized stamp on it. For me it is a coin that was collected on a meaningful trip in 2012, and has since been the source of numerous aleatoric realizations. This individualized detail, no matter how trivial, still has relevance within the whole of *musicking*. (Small)

¹⁰⁹ Houben (2019). *Musical Practice as a Form of Life*. Transcript Verlag.

¹¹⁰ Jensen “John Cage, Chance Operations, and the Chaos Game: Cage and the ‘I Ching.’” *The Musical Times*, vol. 150, no. 1907, 2009, pp. 97–102. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25597623.

The time points create markers for sounding and silent phases. This means that if the first phase is sounding, the performer performs material from the score, completely stops performing when the next point occurs and remains silent for the duration of the indicated time. The soloist resumes playing from where they stopped in the score when a new time point arrives. Similar to the overall duration, the distance between individual time points has the potential to be quite extreme. Two time points could be as short as 24 seconds and as long as multiple hours. This creates a reality where the performer will spend large amounts of time in complete silence and inactivity. For Beuger, this is a very special quality that he desires in a solo performance. He writes:

So I think solo music at its best is revealing something about solitude, about seclusion. *calme étendue* (1996-7) in all its different versions to me is an exploration of this situation: someone sitting there, either performing a regular activity on his instrument or just sitting quietly, doing nothing. Silence all around him. No communication, no showing, no presentation of differences to an audience. Just sitting there, all by himself, sometimes doing something, sometimes not...This focus on emptiness and silence, I feel, is absolutely connected to the idea of solo music. Today I would, axiomatically, say that the content of a solo is the void.¹¹¹

The performer is instructed to use a stopwatch to track these time points as well as the overall predetermined duration of the performance. The musician writes out the chosen time structure on a separate sheet of paper and will continuously check in with the clock as they read the notated material. This creates two distinct interactions with time and can be compared to the Boulez categories of time as discussed in the previous chapter. The larger curated time that is tracked by a clock can be identified as *smooth time* (non-pulsed) whereas the more local notated material can be understood as *striated time* (pulsed) due to the performer keeping an internal

¹¹¹ Beuger & Saunders (2020, March 09). Interview with Antoine Beuger. Retrieved August 09, 2020, from <http://www.james-saunders.com/interview-with-antoine-beuger/>

pulse. Similar to Frey's *wen* series, the performer experiences occupying these two distinct spaces and may reflect on the multiple levels of duration being perceived.

The sounding/silent phases are also a macro reflection of the stop and start nature of the individual 8 second phrases. Each phrase contains a specific duration where the physical motion pauses. The use of silence is one of the central areas of artistic exploration among all Wandelweiser composers. *calme étendue* represents a period from the 1990s when the majority of composers would explicitly indicate long sections where the performer is inactive. Each of the three composer's recent works have found more subtle and intuitive means of notation to indicate moments of silence.

It is logical to see Beuger's use of silence as another step in developing the musical ideas that emerged from the work *4'33"* by John Cage. In Michael Pisaro's article on the history of Wandelweiser¹¹², he states that this work was a source of great inspiration for each member in the group. When silence is intentionally implemented in the context of a performance space, this allows those present to become aware of the sounds of the room and incidental noises that might have been initially passed over. In both Cage and Beuger's music, a sense of equality and collaboration is formed between the intended sounds from the score and the wide possibility of sounds that are traditionally seen as existing beyond it. This is reflected in Yuko Zama's review of a performance of *calme étendue (double bass)* by Dominic Lash:

"Dominic Lash's silence did not cause a cooped-up feeling to reject the environmental sounds at all. Instead, it had an openness to accept all other noises heard in the room, like breathing in the air. The naturalness of his silence made me feel that the performer and the audience equally exist here, just like the wind and trees, rivers and oceans equally exist on earth.

¹¹² Pisaro (2009, September 23). History of Wandelweiser from https://www.wandelweiser.de/_texte/erstw-engl.html

Antoine Beuger's compositions seem to welcome any possibility."¹¹³ The performance of Beuger's music points to the reality of the moment, space and participants.

Although Cage's *4'33* is a relevant point of connection, it is important to not generalize Beuger's use of silence. A discussion about the environmental sounds of the room should not ignore the specificity of the composer's notated material. Beuger is interested in highlighting the ephemerality of sound and creating situations where a listener pays specific attention to the emergence and disappearance of a note. For example, in the composer's work *ins ungebundene für Orgel* (1997), the organist will hold a single tone for a duration between 10 and 40 minutes, but the listener's experience of this sustained sound is shaped by the moments of silence within the total duration of 60 to 90 minutes. Eva-Maria Houben describes the work in the following way:

"Compositions by Antoine Beuger repeatedly draw attention to the cessation of sound. Sound resonates so that it can stop. In this music the sound is almost only there so that it can be absent after it has stopped. During his presence, the tone changes with the perception of the listener: The tone is perceived - depending on the registration - as more or less noisy; different partials can be heard over time; the tone changes color when the listener moves the head and body. In the absence of sound, the silence changes."¹¹⁴ Similar to *wen* and *accurate placement* by Jürg Frey, Beuger creates situations where sound and silence define the perception of the other.

In the *calme étendue* series, each piece is centered around an activity that starts and stops every 8 seconds. During the periods of performed material, the moments of silence are embedded into the profile of the instrumental actions. When the music reaches the predetermined point of

¹¹³ Zama, Y. (2013, March). Silence, Environment, Performer from <http://surround.noquam.com/silence-environment-performer/>

¹¹⁴ Houben (2000). *Alte Musik mit neuen Ohren: Schubert, Bruckner, Wagner, --*. Saarbrücken, Saarland: Pfau.

inactivity, the presence of uninterrupted silence may be experienced as a shock. The shorter moments of silence are now amplified in the context of a longer duration. The relationships previously formed between sound and silence are re-examined. In the performed moments, sound is always pointing towards the slices of silence that follow. In the inactive moments, silence is pointing back towards sound. When the continuous interruption of silence is removed, its memory is solidified. Houben states “in the absence of sound, the silence changes.”

Repetitive Actions

Each of the 17 *calme étendue* compositions isolates a single instrumental action that is repeated every 8 seconds. In many cases, this amount of time is divided into precise measurements of sound and silence. For example, in *calme étendue (oboe)* the performer plays individual pitches that last 3 seconds and leaves 5 seconds of silence for each iteration.¹¹⁵ The entirety of the work’s performed material will consist of this single musical gesture. Each work is defined by a musical action that the soloist repeats for long periods of time. Beuger writes the following about his compositional process for the *calme étendue* series:

My task in composing versions for different instruments then was to find an activity on the instrument, say on the cello, which reveals something about what it is to play cello. An activity, in other words, which could be really fulfilling and satisfying for a cello player to be involved in for many hours. I used to meet with the player and just watch him play his instrument, noticing what is going on, sometimes suggesting things, trying things out until we found this one activity, which turned out to be the most revealing and satisfying. These years were in a way another study of instrumentation for me, the focus not being to find out what variety of sounds may be produced on a cello, but to find one single activity, which is really about playing cello, rather than violin or viola or a wind

¹¹⁵ Beuger *calme étendue (oboe)* Edition Wandelweiser, 1996.

instrument etc. The activity was the focus, the sound resulting from the activity its natural result: this is how this activity sounds.¹¹⁶

If a musical gesture is going to be repeated for 9 hours, it is important that this “single activity” has an engaging process that can be sustained for the entire performance. Beuger achieves this by creating unique notational systems that prompt the performer to participate in a technical process where the produced sound cannot be entirely predicted. Varying degrees of indeterminacy are built into the repeated activity. Each work’s designated instrumental technique is designed in such a way that the performer does not have total control over the resulting sound. For example, in *calme étendue (cello)*,¹¹⁷ the score indicates the string as well as a visual approximation of where the left hand should be placed:



Figure 12: extract of score from *calme étendue (cello)* by Antoine Beuger

The fingers touch the string without any pressure and the performer is instructed to not locate a predetermined pitch with the left hand. (This may create a slight cognitive dissonance for string players that have developed muscle memory around specific locations on the fingerboard) Beuger indicates that “not sounds, but actions are notated.”¹¹⁸ When done in the

¹¹⁶ Beuger & Saunders (2020, March 09). Interview with Antoine Beuger from <http://www.james-saunders.com/interview-with-antoine-beuger/>

¹¹⁷ Beuger *calme étendue (cello)* Edition Wandelweiser, 1997.

¹¹⁸ Ibid

correct spirit of the piece, an unknown harmonic partial is produced. The performer then observes how their actions create a new and unpredictable sound.

Due to the complexity of the cello string, a multiplicity of harmonic options may result when the performer allows an imprecise visual designation to guide the hand to an unknown spot on the fingerboard. This process allows the performer to form new physical and sonic relationships with their instrument. Similar to how Beuger is able to open up the possibilities for new understandings by recontextualizing the text of Spinoza's *ethics*, the stop and start nature of these unknown sounds allow the performer to experience the "force" of the instrument and "the plurality of streams at work in it." (Beuger)

This type of notation requires the performer to trust the score as they relinquish control over the produced sound. The more the soloist is able to separate physical action from a preconceived sonic intention, the more they are able to observe the sound as a passive listener. This mode of listening is not a state of mind that one conclusively arrives at, but is a transitional process that the instrumentalist continually re-engages in. Each moment of inactivity or silence within an 8 second phrase is an opportunity for both reflection and abandonment. As the musician listens to the sound disappear, they also look towards the next physical motion and accept that yet again the work's sounding future is unknown. The repetitive actions found in each *calme étendue* are a central part of the musical practice the musician engages in and help construct a sustained private experience for the performer.

calme étendue (double bass)

calme étendue (double bass) was composed in 1996 and is the seventh work in the series.¹¹⁹ The double bass version is unique because it is the only piece in the group that explicitly notates different rhythmic values for each 8 second phrase. (As opposed to figure 12, where the cellist consistently plays 3 seconds of sound and 5 seconds of silence.) The beginning of a rhythmic grouping is the start of a phrase and when the numerical value of the note is subtracted from 8, what remains is the amount of time given to silence. Since the duration of silence is not notated in the form of a rest, this requires the performer to stay focused and calculate the duration for each new phrase. For example, in figure 13 the indicated pulse is quarter note = 60. The first rhythmic value, a dotted half note tied to an eighth note, is 2.5 seconds, so the resulting amount of silence is 5.5 seconds. The second, a whole note, is 4 seconds of sound/4 seconds of silence and the third, an eighth note, is 0.5 seconds of sound/7.5 seconds of silence:

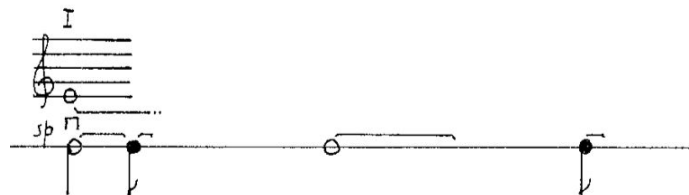


Figure 13: example from page 1 of *calme étendue (double bass)* by Antoine Beuger

The work contains 7 types of rhythmic figures that are grouped into larger sections of 3, 5, 8 and 13 iterations. The larger sections are determined by notated bow movements and change in pitch. It has previously been established that each piece in the series is centered around a

¹¹⁹ Beuger *calme étendue (double bass)* Edition Wandelweiser, 1996.

single repetitive action that is specific to the individual solo instrument. The concept driving the double bass version could be identified as extremely slow bow movements back and forth across the string. When a single rhythmic phrase is completed, the performer must keep the bow motionless on the string and continue with the same bow direction for the next phrase unit. This stop and start motion directly links the physical activity to the notated gestures. Due to the variable amount of divisions within the larger sections, this results in a single down or up bow being as short as 2.25 seconds and as long as 30.5 seconds.

Figure 13 shows a larger phrase unit of 8 rhythmic figures. The phrase begins with the down bow and continues up until the up bow on the second line. This results in 20.75 seconds of performed sound:

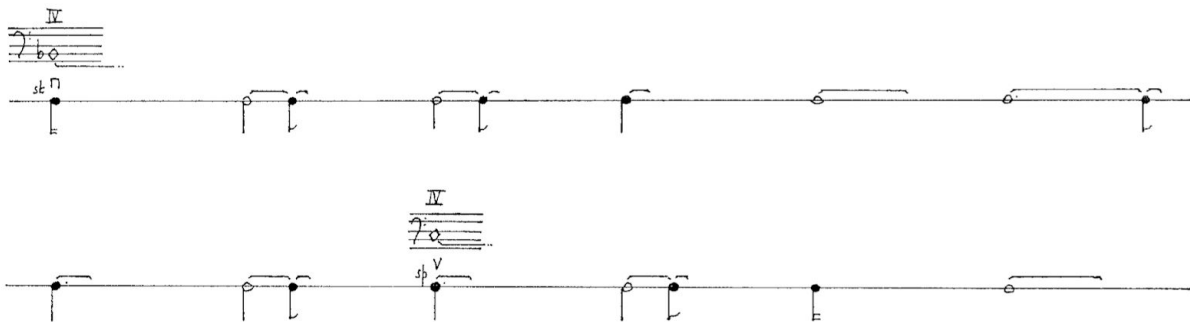


Figure 14: Opening material of *calme étendue* by Antoine Beuger

The duration between each bow change is not immediately apparent at first glance, especially when the performer is moving through the 17 pages at a continuous rate. This can make it difficult for the soloist to prepare a specific bow speed that will neatly fit each duration under one complete bowing. In theory, the performer could go through the score and make an indication for specifically how much time will occur between each bow change, but I believe this

would go against the spirit of the piece. Similar to *calme étendue (spinoza)*, the performer should resist creating an interpretation that helps tie each phrase together. Instead, this intended ambiguity has the result of creating an element of technical instability.

If the performer is intent on using a full bow for each section, the long phrases create situations where at the end of a phrase they must speed up or slow down a bow stroke to compensate for how much bow they used at the beginning. Throughout each individual section, the designated pitch will therefore have slightly different levels of clarity and degrees of bow noise attached to an attack point. This variation is intentional and the performer does not need to adjust the weight distribution to clean up the sound. Beuger creates another level of sonic variation by indicating the specific string a note will be played on and alternating between the bow location of *sul tasto* and *sul ponticello*.

The composer states that “because of the resulting slowness sometimes more, sometimes less of a ‘tone’ will be produced. Often only the friction of the bowing will be heard.” This results in a kind of listening that aligns with the compositional use of silence. The performer strives to produce the given pitch, but the listener (and performer) end up focusing on the unintended sounds emerging from the slow, quiet bow movements. These sounds include the noise of the bow hair, a squeak that emerges from a different harmonic partial and the subtle variation in volume levels that inevitably come from the bow moving at different speeds. This requires the performer to engage in a process where the end result is unknown. Similar to Houben’s analysis of Frey, “the notation and the sound reality cannot be reconciled easily.”¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Houben (2019). *Musical Practice as a Form of Life*. Transcript Verlag.

This technical approach is delightfully presented in a clear conceptual manner in Beuger's work *cadmiumgelb* (2000) for solo double bass¹²¹. The score contains the following information:

“painting that is almost possible, almost does not exist, that is not quite known, not quite seen”

(ad reinhardt)

hold: a natural harmonic

bow: almost standing still (a whole bow = 10 minutes)

after about two to four minutes: standing completely still

after about 6 minutes the piece ends

This kind of notational practice poses interesting challenges for the performer. In *calme étendue* (cello) the soloist is presented with physical actions that result in an indeterminate pitch. The double bass work however presents defined pitch material that results in indeterminate physical actions and noises. Even if the performer accepts that a high degree of noise will be produced, does a faithful interpretation of the score mean that the performer at least strives to create an audible pitch? I would argue this kind of performance rationale is limiting in the context of a Beuger composition.

A more fruitful question to ask is: how does the performer's perception of pitch change over the course of the work? For example, the first line in figure 13 indicates that the VII partial on the E string should be sustained under a single down bow for an extended duration. If the performer chooses to begin the piece at this moment, it is highly doubtful that a clear sense of a

¹²¹ Beuger *cadmiumgelb*. 2000. Edition Wandelweiser, 2000. Print.

D pitch will be recognized. However, if the performer ultimately circles back around to the beginning of the score after 4 to 6 hours of continuous playing, the musician's perception of quiet sonic material will inevitably be radically heightened. A line that at first was perceived as entirely bow hair scratches, is now a distinct D with a vivid timbral complexion. The performer does not change how they "perform" the work, but instead the manner in which they hear the performance will change over time.

Musical Practice in *calme étendue (double bass)*

Eva-Maria Houben states "to which practice does a composition open? Does this practice provide us with certain opportunities, occasions?"¹²² When compared to *the double bass* (Houben), *calme étendue (double bass)* presents a more exaggerated situation for the double bassist to contemplate an isolated musical activity. Instead of 27 individual events over the course of 90 minutes, this piece is restricted to a single action that is sustained for potentially 9 hours. The extreme conditions that the performer is placed in make it difficult to identify the type of musical practice that is taking place.

When a composition opens up a space that emphasizes the individual perspective of the performer, this also inevitably reframes the role of the audience, if one happens to be involved. Houben writes "Does it make a difference for the audience when the accent is so decidedly shifted to the performers? An audience can be present, but not be the addressee. Practice has no addressee, but participants. The perspective from the field of practice develops a completely different assessment of listeners, of audience."¹²³ *calme étendue* requires only a single

¹²² Houben (2019). *Musical Practice as a Form of Life*. Transcript Verlag.

¹²³ Ibid

participant, the solo double bassist. The lack of necessity for an audience creates a distinct performance space even when outside members are present.

The piece could technically be presented in the context of a concert performance, but if one commits to the full 9 hours, it is highly unlikely that the performer would be “addressing” anyone one individual for the entire duration. Beuger writes “In case of the very long durations, it is necessary to think of the whole context: people should feel free to leave the concert hall for a while, so there should be a nice, inviting place for them to stay, when they want to take a break, something to drink, to eat maybe.”¹²⁴ This creates a situation where the performer becomes the singular participant who experiences the composition in full. An audience member is therefore never an addressee, but a participant that is invited to witness an event. The complete performance encapsulates a private experience made by the soloist and the audience is privileged to view a snapshot of the “emptiness”, “silence” and “void” that results from Beuger’s understanding of the solo.

The *calme étendue* series opens up a space for a musician to participate in a musical practice that does not require an audience or other participants beside the individual performer. This private mode of interaction with a score can also be found in the works by the Hungarian born Austrian composer István Zelenka. His work “The trumpet shall sound!” - “Stillstück” (a silent piece) for a cellist, is a piece meant to be played by the performer without an audience. The composer instructs the performer to play ‘per se’ and suggests that the cellist perform the work “in an intimate/private room with a window or a door to the outside world” or “in an open public space/place in the city or in nature.”¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Beuger & Saunders (2020, March 09). Interview with Antoine Beuger from <http://www.james-saunders.com/interview-with-antoine-beuger/>

¹²⁵ Zelenka: “*the trumpet shall sound!*”, score, instructions.

The private mode of engagement in “Stillstück is not explicitly prescribed in *calme étendue* (double bass), but the performer may draw inspiration for how the score may be used. Beuger’s music relates with Zelenka in that the musical activity creates a transparent dialogue with the performance environment. The soloist may create a distinct musical space by engaging with the work in their home or personal surroundings. Interaction with the everyday world opens up new types of musical practice for the double bass player. Eva-Maria Houben’s analysis of Zelenka offers a vision for how this practice might be applied to *calme étendue*:

“The practice, the peaceful activity, becomes part of everyday life. Even in the quiet activity alone at home or anywhere in the world, the single performer is not alone; the practice embeds them in the world. You may feel and experience this participation through the practice that becomes part of the (everyday) life.”¹²⁶ An individual may find hope through participation in musical practice. Even though one is alone in the solo, they need not feel deserted. The privacy of *calme étendue* should not suggest an attitude of solipsism or reclusiveness. The act of music making is not a closed circle where one is limited to the mundane feedback of the individual mind. In sound we experience ephemerality that leads to silence. In silence we experience our own existence and how it is connected to the world. Hope comes from the fact that a musician may engage in this practice again and again, trusting that they will step into a new space each time. A musician’s interaction with the score opens them up to the world and previously unknown realities.

¹²⁶ Houben, E. (2019). *Musical Practice as a Form of Life*. Transcript Verlag.

Epilogue

Houben writes “Solo: I am alone as a performer. This is a challenge.”¹²⁷ The three solo double bass compositions discussed here highlight musical practices that an individual performer may engage in. Each work is an invitation for the musician to participate in unique performance and listening situations. In *the double bass* by Eva-Maria Houben, the musician reflects on the individual musical activities of the instrument and forms new relationships with these actions. In *accurate placement* by Jürg Frey, a performer experiences balancing on the threshold between fragility and precision. *calme étendue (double bass)* by Antoine Beuger creates an intimate and immersive environment where an individual learns new ways of listening over a long period of time.

This writing primarily occurred during the COVID-19 global pandemic that forced the majority of musical artists to cease live performances and in person collaborations. The private nature of this music allowed for specific modes of solo musical participation as I faced the limitations of quarantine. The phrase “listening to yourself” (Houben)¹²⁸ took on greater meaning in my daily interactions with the double bass. The definition of “practicing” and “performing” were continuously blurred as these unique scores helped me sustain creative joy in the solitude of my apartment. I am grateful to Eva-Maria Houben, Jürg Frey and Antoine Beuger for the musical practices that I have been opened up to.

¹²⁷ Ibid

¹²⁸ Houben, E. *listening to yourself* Edition Wandelweiser: 2019

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