

Still smouldering

a musical project related to loss and lament.

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But it's quite short, the time of the cherries,
When we go together and pick drop earrings while dreaming,
Love cherries with vermillion's robes
Falling under the leaves in drops of blood.
But it's quite short, the time of the cherries,
When we pick up coral earrings while dreaming.

“Le Temps des cerises”

My life will never be where you think you can find it too bad for me.

— *Laure*

All that is solid melts into air...

— *Karl Marx*

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Written/theoretical component

I. scc/eo *introduction and orientation-points for the project*

For my master project, I have explored relationships between music and death through the composition of two bodies of musical work, as well as through this written component. In particular, I have been investigating *forms* which tolerate death in itself instead of hiding it, marginalizing it, or exploiting it for a “greater good”. As a composer, I have been mostly interested in musical forms, but as my written component will show, I do not believe that any of these forms are exclusively musical. Rather, they are ways of organizing a relationships between sound and meaning, voice and language. The forms that I am investigating fall loosely under the two categories: allegory and lament. The music that I am submitting includes selections from the opera/oratorio that I am writing for the Norwegian National Opera (*Det ryker fortsatt*), as well as pieces that were written as part of an ongoing collaboration with the Dominican artist manuel arturo abreu (their name is intentionally not capitalized). The libretto for the opera was written by Finn Iunker, and that work is a collaboration with composer Bernhard Bornstein. I can say with honesty that I have been the “primary” composer for the large majority of this project, although we have worked hard to retain Bernhard’s voice throughout the opera¹. The collaboration with manuel arturo abreu includes a work for piano trio, a “theatrical work” for two performers and amplified objects, and a work for symphony orchestra. In this introduction, I will briefly describe the scope of the two “bodies” represented in my masters project before presenting the written, theoretical, component of this project and discussing the scope and aims of this component.

The written component will focus upon the work of philosophers Gershom Scholem and Walter Benjamin and their concepts of lament and allegory. It might be unusual for a composition masters student to use so much of their written component on philosophical texts, but, as I have said, I do not see my musical “forms” as exclusively musical, and nor do I see these textual forms as “textual” or even “linguistic” in essence. Rather, they express a fundamental musi-

¹ Throughout much of the work’s composition period, Bernhard was occupied with his education to become an air-traffic controller.

cality. As scholar Ilit Ferber says, the language of lament even reveals “the musical foundations of *every* linguistic utterance”.² After expounding upon both forms in a general sense, I will offer musical examples of these forms.

I hope that these discussions will inspire thought and questions about my music, but I do not want this to be mistaken for an analysis of my own work. These texts, ideas, and other sources of inspiration that I mention are not things that are directly adapted into or cited within my own work, and I would never expect the audience to have a pre-existing knowledge of Walter Benjamin, for example, or think that my work in any way is a commentary upon Walter Benjamin or Luigi Nono. Rather, I believe that the forms of lament and allegory are phenomena that exist across categories and can effect readers and listeners regardless of their critical awareness of the phenomena themselves.

It is worth noting that these two forms are not only informative to my work in a “philosophical sense”, but they also reveal traces of the “origins” of my compositional work. As I will note later, there are paths leading from Scholem and Benjamin to Luigi Nono to contemporary composers, which reveal something of the origin by which my work was conceived, but I do not wish to claim genealogies for my musical material. Musical material is just that — material — and as we will see throughout this paper, any talk of “bloodlines” would be ironical and contradictory.

² Ferber, Ilit. “Language Failing: The Reach of Lament”. Lecture at ICI Berlin. May 11, 2015.

This opera is the result of a commission from Den Norske Operaen that Bernhard Bornstein and I received in 2018. The commission was requested after the Director at the time, Annilese Miskimmon, and dramaturge Hedda Høgåsen-Hallesby saw a performance of our operetta, *Walter Benjamins død i Portbou*, which was written after a libretto by Finn Iunker, who agreed to write the libretto for this new opera as well. A commission of two composers is somewhat unusual, but Bernhard and I come at music from totally different angles, and our individual definitions of “composition” are miles apart from each-other. Our difference in viewpoints is not something that weakens the collaboration. I view composition as a semiotic and philosophical practice. It is a “relational” practice in that it (mostly) involves a playing with relations that listeners and performers have to meaning and non-meaning, as well as playing with their location inside of different times, including but not limited to historical time. Bernhard on the other hand does not feel the need to question his aesthetic situation or taste, and for him, composition is a craft which culminates in the creation of “good” melodies. I do not wish in any way to belittle Bernhard or his compositional practice. Bernhard is an extremely skilled craftsman and enjoys being this. For me, especially in our current historical situation, a composer’s responsibility is not to create “original material”, or to generate “novelty” in any way (this relates to Kurt Weill’s critique of ‘Verbrauchsmusik’, “music to be ‘used up’”, which I will later discuss at length). And so, I am not bothered about using someone else’s material in this case Bernhard’s to compose, and working with Bernhard doesn’t make me feel as if I am “compromising” my work, even if the end result is something very different than it would be if I was writing the melodic material myself. (I should note that I did write a lot of the melodic material myself, although I adapted it to fit with Bernhard’s material). Working with Bernhard’s material is in someways similar to how I am also working with diverse historical material, and recordings from the Norwegian Opera’s archives (to which I was given access for this project).

Originally, the premier for this work was supposed to be in March 2021 (150 years after the start of the Paris Commune), but the date for the premier was delayed for a number of reasons. The first reason was Finn Iunker’s dissatisfaction with his original libretto. In June 2019, just

before the beginning of this program, Finn delivered a draft of the libretto for the work. But at the end of the summer, and after we held a workshop with the material we had written during the first three months, Finn ultimately decided that the libretto needed to be rewritten instead of edited. We, and the Opera, agreed that this was OK, and Finn wrote a new libretto over the next months, which was delivered to us in January 2020.

In March 2021, we were contacted by the Opera and asked if we could be interested in setting the Opera up as a digital version. Given that the majority of the opera is performed by the choir, and there is no dramatic “plot” or literal scenes, we agreed that the opera could work well in digital form. This would also potentially shrink the involvement of a third-party director, depending on how the work is filmed or presented. However, this suggestion came as quite a surprise, since we believed we had been postponed to the 2022 season because of the corona virus. After a moment of consideration, we agreed. As well as specific movements, I am sending the complete vocal score with this document. The vocal score was edited specifically for the Norwegian Opera’s vocal ensemble, consisting of 10 members of their chorus. A brief note about the score: instead of meter changes in many of the movements, we were asked to change the notation and use more fermatas and ritardandos. The danger of this is that the music will be less exact, but this will be avoided by a close collaboration with the conductor, in this case Cesar Cañon, whereby the conductor knows the exact duration of each fermata and ritardando. We will record the opera in June 2021. We have already been fortunate enough to have three movements from the middle of the opera performed (digitally) at Brecht-Tage 2021 hosted by Literaturforum im Brecht-Haus, Berlin. These movements were performed by soloists from the Norwegian Opera. The video recording of the broadcast is submitted with this exam portfolio.

This subject of this work is the Paris Commune of 1871. To briefly summarize the events of the Commune for those unfamiliar: the Commune came about after an unpopular peace treaty ended the Franco-Prussian war. Paris was under siege by the Prussians from September 1870 to late January 1871, when the French Government at Versailles signed an extremely unfavorable treaty which ceded the industrial region Alsace-Lorraine, and which demanded that Paris pay large sums to the cities of Germany and dismantle its own defenses. When the French authorities expressed concern to the Germans that the treaty would anger

the working classes, the Prussian Chancellor Bismarck's response was "provoke an uprising, then, while you still have an army with which to suppress it".³ This is exactly what happened. The government provoked an uprising, and then the Germans assisted them with their massacre. As a result there was *never another serious revolution or serious challenge to power in the city of Paris*, which is astonishing, considering that there had been a major uprising about every 20 years since the French Revolution.⁴

The conflict started when the French (Versailles) authorities tried to disarm the civilian National Guard in Paris in March 1871. This resulted in a street brawl in which two officers of the Versailles army were killed. Because of this, or rather, using this as an excuse, the entire French Government fled the city, claiming that they feared for their lives, and leaving the civilian population to manage the city by themselves. The people of Paris did not plan this uprising and did not view themselves as breaking the law when they formed their own government. Because they believed their power to be legitimate, the Communards did not even requisition the money from the Banque de France, and legally *loaned* the money from the Banque, while this same bank funded the Versailles forces that came and slaughtered them. Nor did the civilian National Guard immediately march on Versailles⁵. Instead they administered Paris and formed a new idealistic society which lasted all of two months. This society included concerts open to all members of society modeled after the free concerts of 1793.⁶

The name "Commune de Paris" has radical connotations now, but the term had several meanings in its day, meaning among other things Paris Municipality, like Oslo Kommune. Seen as a signpost in Communist history, only about 20% of the Communards organizing body was communist, and this designation was in large part post-dated by Marx. Although there was cer-

³ Horne, Alistair. *The Fall of Paris: The Siege and the Commune 1870–71* (repr. Pan ed.). London: Macmillan, 2002. p.240.

⁴ I am open to the including of May 1968, but the workers declined to join the students in that uprising, and there is a real question to whether they could have really challenged the government.

⁵ They would unsuccessfully do this several weeks later after Versailles had regrouped and it was clear that there would be civil war.

⁶ Mordey, Delphine. "Moments musicaux- High Culture in the Paris Commune". in *Cambridge Opera Journal*; Cambridge Vol. 22, Iss. 1, (Mar 2010): p.3.

tainly an overall sympathy to socialism and self-representation of the working class, the Communards were a diverse bunch, ideologically and biographically.⁷

The Versailles government, headed by Adolf Thiers, sent their army to assault Paris and massacre the Communards. After putting up a gallant effort and resisting the assault for nearly two months, the people of Paris were defeated, and tens of thousands of people were executed. Indeed, Yale historian John Merriman cites that this is the first example that a government has organized the eradication of an entire populace based on identity (in this case, working class identity) – noting that it foreshadowed the horrors of 20th century purges and genocide⁸. Record keeping was very poor, and no one knows how many were executed. Thousands more were deported; 4500 alone to New Caledonia in the Pacific Ocean.⁹ Instead of focusing on the “action,” our libretto, constructed out of documents published by the Communards, focuses on their response to loss in the last days of the Commune.

The selection of this subject was based, among other things on its position in theater and opera history, and also specifically its position in Norwegian theater history. Finn Iunker was initially interested in this subject, because it is a point of relation between Nordahl Grieg and Bertolt Brecht. Brecht originally wanted to direct Grieg’s *Nederlaget*, but decided that the work was of poor quality, and decided to write a new work: *Die Tage der Commune* (1948-49). The “Brecht” connection (and one degree further, the Kurt Weill connection) to our work continues a thread that began in *Walter Benjamins død i Portbou*. Furthermore, I was interested in this subject because of its connection to the composer Luigi Nono. In 1975, Nono wrote the work *Al gran sole carico d’amore*, whose first half is based on the Paris Commune, with *Die Tage der Commune* as a principal source text.

⁷ For a detailed description of who the communards were, see: “Masters of their Own Lives” in Merriman, John. *Massacre: The Life and Death of the Paris Commune*. New York: Basic Books, 2014.

⁸ Merriman, John. “John Merriman: Paris Commune of 1871” Interview on *MacMillan Report*. April 23, 2014.

⁹ Bullard, Alice. *Exile to Paradise: Savagery and Civilization in Paris and the South Pacific 1790-1900*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000. p.93.

Originally, traces of *Die Tage* were visible in our libretto. However, the final draft, found in the “appendix” of this document ended up being quite different. This libretto, which became the work *Det Ryker fortsatt*, contains no characters. In fact, there is only one movement which centers around a single voice who expresses something from the point of view “I”. However, this libretto is similar to some of Brecht’s other works, notably those used in Kurt Weill’s *Das Berliner Requiem*. The new libretto focuses on “archetypes”, which are extremely Brechtian: instead of a specific soldier, we have “a soldier”, or instead of a specific woman we have “mothers”. A character who was in an earlier draft Louise Michel, is now simply a female soldier.

I am very pleased with this libretto. From the outset I have been concerned about the “cult of personalities” and melodramatic glorification of the communards. My anxieties have come from the Commune’s place in capital C “Communist” (read Soviet) history. Luigi Nono was also very preoccupied in responding to this “abuse” as he saw it, and I learned a lot from looking at his treatment of figures from history.

To briefly orient this train of thought with the theoretical investigations of the project, I can say that this work is a product of my investigations of how to represent the dead in art while avoiding the problematic act of commemoration. As manuel arturo abreu notes, commemoration incurs a debt to the dead¹⁰: one is capitalizing on the dead when commemorating, regardless of how respectful one tries to be. Use of the dead is extremely problematic. In “making sense” of their deaths and showing how their death contributed to a greater good, we are ignoring what death is in its self: loss. We commemorate lives – not death or dying. But the Communards themselves saw death, freedom, and singing as being closely related, and in the *Journal Officiel*, cited in the libretto, they compare their own violent deaths to birds flying away and a song leaving the lips of nameless masses.

In connection with my opera, or in lieu of an analysis thereof, the latter section of my written component will focus on *allegory* as a form that reflects death in itself instead of using it or concealing it for another purpose. I will begin my discussion of allegory by presenting Walter Benjamin’s use of the term, which is intentionally elusive and escapes definition. For Benjamin, allegory is a form or a process, and not a concept. Most people assume that allegory is

¹⁰ abreu, manuel arturo, *Incalculable Loss*, (Seattle: INCA press, 2018), 50.

when an artwork represents aspects of society at large. However, for Benjamin and his friend Bertolt Brecht, the *function* of allegory is in some ways the total opposite of this supposition. Allegory has nothing to do with “real life”, and instead of portraying reality, the language of allegory shatters its connections to reality, or reveals the falsehood of this portrayal — allegory draws attention to the abyss between the sign and any kind of signified in a perpetual receding and fragmenting motion. For Brecht, this process of distancing [*verfremdungseffekt*] between external reality and art was crucial to inducing the audience to thought. The audience has no illusions that what they are viewing is “real”, and this, for Brecht and those that followed him, was liberating.

The relationship between allegory and opera is of the utmost importance. The writer Walter Benjamin proposed allegory as the category that offered an alternative to tragedy. Walter Benjamin’s *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* is essentially a critique of Richard Wagner’s music and its interpretation in Nietzsche’s *Die Geburt der Tragödie*. Wagner wished to use the force of death in tragedy as a foundational power, which can be used to establish the Nation through mass co-identification and anamnesis (the feeling that a presented story comes from one’s own memory). As I will discuss in the second chapter, my compositional work is informed by Benjamin’s critique of Wagner, the works of Brecht/Weill, and Luigi Nono’s relationship to both Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht.

IB. crp/oo

the collaboration with manuel arturo abreu

I became familiar with the work of manuel arturo abreu (mani) in 2015 after they published their first collection of writing, *List of Consonants*. mani and I went to the same university and were friends, but their emergence as an artist and writer happened after we were finished at school, and we met again during their book tour. The work *List of Consonants* is a collection of writings, mostly poems, dealing with the suicide of their friend from childhood. When I began to formulate this project in the fall of 2019 and searched for a countersubject to the Paris Commune, I thought of this book. The subject matter, as well as the forms through which this material was handled, seemed to match well with the ideas I was working through. I had begun to investigate artistic forms which could offer alternatives to “the commemorative”, the form through which Western art usually deals with death and the dead. As I mentioned earlier, the norm for Western art is an assertion of life over death, be it through honoring the past or sacrificed lives of “important” people (i.e. through monuments, memorial concerts, or tributes), or through asserting eternal life and absolute meaning after death (for example through requiem).

In my research on alternatives to commemoration, I stumbled upon the early work of German Jewish philosopher and historian Gershom Scholem, particularly his work on the *language of lament*. Putting it very crudely, lament expresses the *border* between meaning and non-meaning, (I should note that these are not Scholem’s exact terms). The paradox here is the paradox of death within life – how can we signify something which is the absence of existence? How can we refer to or attribute meaning to something that doesn’t exist? Scholem brings up the language of lament in the context of the biblical book of Lamentations. The book of Lamentations is written mainly in alphabetical acrostics. An acrostic is a poem where by the first letters of each line combine to spell something, or form a pattern. I will discuss these acrostics at length later, but I will briefly say now that this hyper-formalization without purpose – that traces the border between total significance and the failure of meaning or understanding reminded me again of mani’s lists from *List of Consonants*.

I took contact with manuel very early in the process and asked if I could use some of these texts for musical pieces which would explore lament, and saying yes, they also sent me two more texts which have since become central to both my artistic work and my theoretical research. Discussions of these works and our ideas regarding them have become the basis for a rich and fruitful collaboration between the two of us, and just before the pandemic struck, I was even able to visit mani in Portland, Oregon. The two works sent to me were the collection of poems *Obsequies*, whose texts inspired my orchestral work *3 (n)Obsequies*, and the theoretical work *Incalculable Loss* which focuses, among other things, on Western language's inability to express meaning without implying an incalculable loss — Western language functions by reducing our experience into something “communicable”, and thereby loses an incalculable amount of experience in this process.

manuel is trained as a linguist, and is therefore constantly searching for languages or linguistic modes that can escape this reductive, sacrificial, mode that has become the norm in Western communication. From Aristotle to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (and even after), Western semiotics and linguistics has described language as a “representing” an external world, and thus “reducing”, or distilling, our experience of it through communication. abreu sees this mode of language as one where our experience is sacrificed to meaning. The “language of lament” could be one such language that escapes this sacrificial tendency. manuel's ancestors were slaves and indigenous, and for them, this research into how language is viewed and used as a reductive and sacrificial tool is intrinsically connected to colonialism. The lives and experiences of the indigenous peoples and slaves were the incalculable loss in the reductive process of making Western history. And so for them, the question of lamenting in a way that does not reduce or redact reality, is an important part of honoring their ancestors: lament does not sacrifice the (non)reality of death for the “good” of the living.

mani and I, while able to maintain a good intellectual exchange, were frustrated in our plans for a physical artistic collaboration. It was planned that they would visit over the summer and in January of 2021. This wasn't possible. We would have liked to collaborate on a series of theatrical music works. For example, I had the idea of composing a series of works where resonating bodies were filled with different materials, thus changing their resonance — a guitar could be filled with sand as they played laying on their back, or a violin could be filled with water.

The ritualistic movements involved in filling vessels with sand would need to be carried out by another performer or pair of performers.

Instead, our collaboration took a different form, which was markedly less theatrical. The pieces I wrote ended up being directed towards more normal concert presentation. While mani inspired the pieces, they were not directly involved in the compositional process. This is not to say, however, that the artistic quality was compromised, or that the works moved farther from the topic of the project, even if the connection may not be as explicit.

There is still one piece which doesn't use traditional instruments or notation, *Short and Long Piece*. This piece is still fairly traditional in that the two performers on the stage are sitting and making sound, but the visual element of that piece is very important. It is also worth noting that this piece does not use traditional musical notation, and was written in such a way that it could be performed by non-musicians. The documentation provided is a recording of me performing this piece at the Ultima festival 2020, with dancer Maja Wilhite-Hannisdal. This piece explores resonance and its absence and came out of our inquiry into vowels and consonants. At the end of this piece, a text emerges from the sounds. This text is mani's "A HEAD THAT IS ENTIRELY A BODY".

The other two pieces are more traditional in their instrumentation, as I took advantage of the opportunities afforded by the Norwegian Academy in order to have them performed. The orchestra piece was workshopped twice and performed as a run-through by Trondheim Symphony Orchestra. We were pleased to have this opportunity in light of the Covid situation, and I was very happy with the results. The piano trio was recorded in a workshop with Cikada Trio. Unfortunately, due to Covid-19, we were not able to have a concert. The recording gives the listener a general idea of the piece, but I should stress that the time we had was extremely limited. I look forward to having the piece premiered when there is a return to "normal" concert settings. These pieces both use text written by mani, although in the case of the orchestra piece, this text is heavily redacted. The text in the orchestra piece, used in the second movement, is from a poem in list form called "MY FRIEND'S FUNERAL", from *List of Consonants*. For the piano trio, I set "Prayers" from *Obsequies*, as well as "WHAT COMES AFTER HOPE" and "HOW TO START BELIEVING" from *List of Consonants*. Text and speech are extremely important in these two works, and both works explore how the border between sound and

meaning can be both traced and threatened. Both pieces can be seen as containing elements of what might be called “anti-narrative”. A ritualistic nature is still alive in these works, and all of the texts can be seen as prayers. Prayer is central to the ideas both Gershom Scholem and Abreu. The texts used in these pieces are included in the preface to their respective scores (with the exception of *Short and Long Piece*, where it is in the score).

As is the case in the with allegory, what may appear at first to be a discussion of literary or linguistic phenomena in the written component is in fact just as much a discussion of a musical phenomenon. We have already established the central role opera plays in Benjamin’s *Trauerspiel*, but music is also central to Scholem’s essay on the Book of Lamentations, “On Lament and Lamentation”. The original German title is already explicitly musical, as lamentation is translated from “*Klagelied*”, revealing the musical and performative orientation of the essay.

IC. snthr/ooee

introducing this written component, and its scope.

Music is at the heart of both allegory and lament as conceived by Benjamin and Scholem, but by introducing my work in light of these thinkers and concepts, I would like to demonstrate how I approach music in terms of linguistic, textual, and philosophical problems and questions. These may not always find literal embodiment in “composition techniques”, and indeed, it is possible that lament and allegory *evade literal implementation altogether*.

This written/theoretical component of the masters project is not just background or analysis of the concepts at work in the compositions. This component will reveal connections between these concepts and present a constellation of figures, both musical and literary, which are alive in my work. As I have mentioned in the introduction thus far, I will introduce the opera and the collaboration with abreu in terms of two central “formal” concepts: allegory and lament. I will present these two central concepts in terms of the texts “Über Klage und Klagelied” by Scholem, and *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* by Benjamin. These texts are closely related, and “Über Klage und Klagelied”, written a few years prior to *Ursprung*, was incredibly influential on Benjamin. Scholem’s text, furthermore, can be seen as a reply, or development upon the ideas introduced in Benjamin’s “Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen”.¹¹ I will not spend time here discussing which threads come from which thinker, but I do think that it is important to mention this here to mark some origins of my line of thought. This line is important for my orientation within the history of opera, and connects it to my work with lament. Scholem’s and Benjamin’s thought were directly influential upon the composer Luigi Nono, and Benjamin was an interlocutor with both Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, who created several seminal operas and vocal works together. My music responds to many elements of both Weill’s and Nono’s work, and generally the two composers have generally been influential in shaping what has become contemporary opera.

The next sections begin with presentations of the formal concepts of lament and allegory and then orientate these concepts in terms of music, indicating how music might work in these

¹¹ Schwebel, Paula. “The Tradition in Ruins”. In *Lament in Jewish Thought*, ed. Paula Schwebel and Ilit Ferber. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014.

forms and offering examples of musical works which I believe characterize lament and allegory. In the upcoming section section, on lament, I will examine lament as it is realized in two works by Henry Purcell. In the subsequent section, on allegory, I will discuss the work of Luigi Nono and Kurt Weill. Throughout these sections, I will touch on other genres that deal with death but that handle it in what I believe to be an intolerant or ironical way; namely Wagnerian opera, requiem, and commemorative works. Throughout the theoretical section I will reference my own work, and will explicitly discuss some of the formal and philosophical concepts that come up in my work such as *prayer*, *lists*, and *allegorical treatment of characters*, but I will refrain from using explicit musical examples from my own work when discussing these concepts, and I will also refrain from explicitly analyzing my work. I believe it is important that these ideas are read alongside my work, and hopefully this work and my compositions reflect and illuminate each-other. However, it is important that my music is not read as an explicit implementation of the ideas in this text, especially since this text focuses upon ideas that oppose the reductive nature of Western language and linguistics.

Following the advice of Eivind Buene, I organized this theoretical work in two alternative forms. Firstly, I am providing the document in essay form to facilitate a straight forward reading. However, the purpose of this work is not to claim one opinion or another about allegory and lament, and those two categories are by no means exclusive of one another. You could say that this essay, and my master project in general, is not “linear”. Rather, the purpose of this text is to present the aforementioned ideas in such away that allows them to illuminate each-other, as well as my work and the musical examples I have discussed. And so, I have also organized the work as a “constellation” on Research Forum. This constellation allows the reader to compare my writing to the cited musical examples and also my own music, and this allows them to make new connections between the different ideas and between the different musical materials. The idea of the “constellation” is also specifically related to the work of Walter Benjamin to be discussed in section IIB of this essay. The sections in the constellation are still labelled alphabetically to guide readers unfamiliar with the project and the ideas cited.

II. scc/oo
Allegory and Lament

IIA. ooue/ntg *Lament*

“The meticulous reporting of dates and facts masks the continuous motion (arduous signification, which we often refuse for ourselves) of our past. To forget everything of one’s history: such grace is denied us, for we have not learned a thing.

*The incense of the earth is in the earth.
The rut of humus of rock the false summer
in their labor have gathered
roots, your haloes*

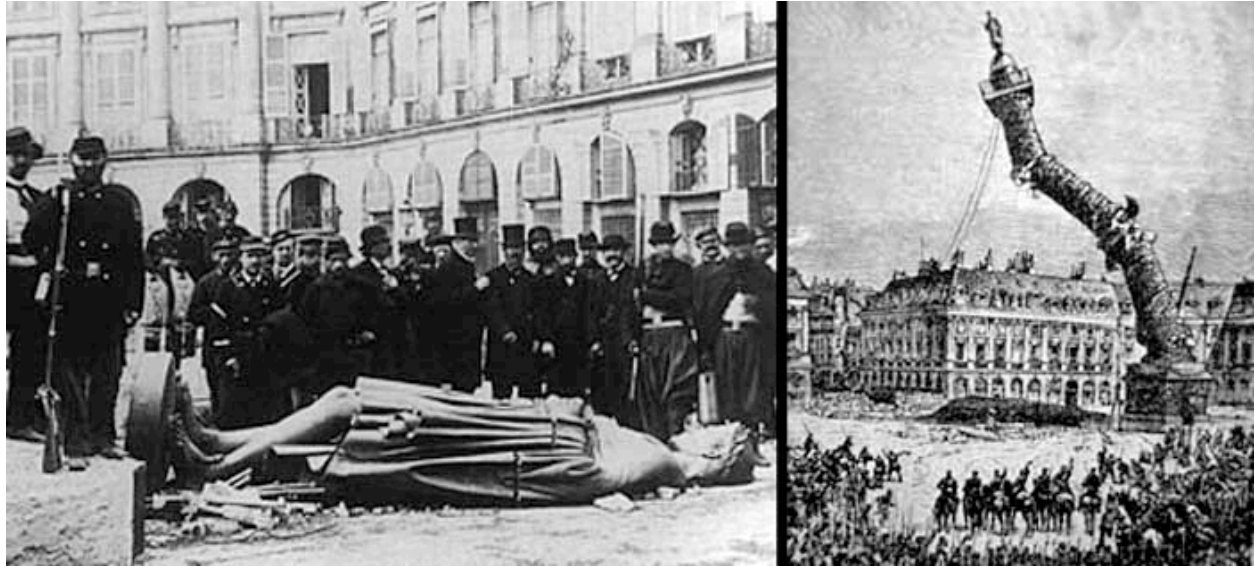
we have left our heroes”

—Éduoard Glissant, Poetic Intention p.173

Death is very impersonal. Some years ago, I lost a family member. At the same time, I had cut my hand and could not play music. The coincidence of these events was catastrophic, and as a direct result, I learned something of the importance of lamentation, and how fundamental music is for this. But, I don’t believe that is why I wish to write this work. I have always been fascinated with death and horrified by it. And I do not I wish to “cash-in” on personal losses I have suffered, and I don’t think it would be appropriate to make something very personal about death. Death is very impersonal.

Origins

My search for these forms began with my research on the Paris Commune. How to write an opera about the Paris Commune? This was an especially challenging topic, as the Commune has been dominated by capital “C” Communist mythology. This is something that the Communards themselves would have been disgusted with! The Communards were notorious for



destroying and defacing monuments and commemorative markers in Paris. The most famous of these iconoclasms was the tearing down of the Vendome Column (upon the orders of Gustave Courbet). Most people assume this is because of *who or what* the monuments commemorated, but this is not really the case.

What is lesser known is what Courbet wanted to put in place of the Vendome Column. The Communards wanted to construct what he called a “Monument of the Accursed”¹², a kind of negative monument, that I see now as a kind of presaging of Brecht¹³. Rather than constructing a monument as a commemoration of those who had sacrificed themselves for a greater good, or to those who had achieved a god-like eternity through their actions (like Napoleon), Courbet wanted a monument to the scum of history, the enemies of the future, to serve as a

¹² Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p.790.

¹³ for those unfamiliar with Brecht’s devices, I will discuss them at length in the the *Allegory* chapter.

reminder that one must always be vigilant. This would also not be a dominating column, but rather, a text in the middle of the square. It would be something that inspires though, like the bronze *Stolpersteinen* that lead us to think of the holocaust when we stumble over them *interrupting* our unconscious daily routines, in a way that could be seen as Brechtian.

But this frustration with the commemorative and monumental made me think about the nature of commemoration and memorialization more broadly and try to understand what was so problematic about it. Concisely expressed, one of the major paradoxes of Western “death-art” since the classical era is its assertion of meaning over death. The requiem sees man’s finitude and death as an occasion to assert God’s eternity and ultimate meaning. The requiem mass may begin with a request for eternal rest [*Requiem aeternam dona eis*], but the majority of the text, from the Sequence to the Communion, begs God to *save people from death*. The Requiem celebrates triumph over death, the triumph of light, or *clarity*, over or darkness, or *obscurity*. This is quite a contrast to Baroque funeral music, whose texts often focus on mortality and human finitude. The commemorative also asserts the “meaningfulness” of one’s memories and the importance of one’s relationship to the deceased, and the memorial uses death to transfigure the deceased into a symbol which exists across time.

All of these actions either ignore or actively fight against the notion that death is ultimately *loss* and that the dead are absent from our world. If we’re thinking about it in a materialist sense, death is not “absence within life”, but rather, the dead are absent *from* life. Representing the non-existent is a limit-function for the traditional linguistic frameworks of western thought, which has viewed words as a signifiers for objects which exist in the world, even if abstractly. To summarize the basic paradigm of language up to that point in history, Ludwig Wittgenstein famously opens his *Philosophical Investigations* with Augustine’s theory of language:

“These words, it seems to me, give us a particular picture of the essence of human language. It is this: the words in language name objects – sentences are combinations of such names. In this picture of language we find the roots of the following idea: Every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated

with the word. It is the object for which the word stands. Augustine does not mention any difference between kinds of words...”¹⁴

This idea, that language represents objects in the world, and that language offers us a picture of these objects, or a picture of the world in general, was dominant in linguistics through Wittgenstein’s “Tractatus¹⁵” and even, in a sense, through structuralism, and it is still the underlying assumption of an uncritical western view of language. These systems of language cannot tolerate death, the existence of something that doesn’t exist in this world – the dead should reveal the limit of these systems. Moreover, as manuel abreu suggested to me these forms of language are not just innocent bystanders unable to deal with death, they are killers themselves. If language becomes a “representational system”, then it becomes a kind of sacrificial action which reduces lived experience to the communicable, leaving what manuel calls an “incalculable loss”. For abreu, this linguistic sacrifice and loss is closely linked to the West’s sacrifice and subsequent hiding away of incalculable numbers of black lives and experiences.

Attempts at commemoration compound the problems that already exist in representational language. As manuel arturo abreu says about their *LIST OF CONSONANTS*: “the commemorative... is seen as the payment of respects but in fact incurs more debt to the dead, debt which is ultimately unpayable”¹⁶. When one uses the dead to make meaning in the world of the living, this incurs an unpayable debt. Since one cannot repay someone who no longer exists, the debt will remain outstanding forever. In honoring someone as a martyr or sacrifice, for example, we try to reveal meaning in their death, but this martyr is now owed an unrepayable debt. Even mere tributes represent a claiming of the dead as one’s own. The fact that someone knew Lee Konitz, or Pierre Boulez, for example, is through a dedication, transformed into the author’s cultural capital at the expense of the dead. An expense which, again, cannot be repaid.

¹⁴ Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte. ed. Hacker and Schulte. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. §1-3.

¹⁵ *Philosophical Investigations* is Wittgenstein’s repudiation of his *Tractatus* and all of the linguistic thought before it. I should add that there are many alternative theories of linguistics, and I recognize that my invocation of Augustine and Saussure is a totally inadequate representation of what I call “traditional linguistics,” but the restrictions of this paper do not allow a more in depth analysis.

¹⁶ abreu, manuel arturo, *Incalculable Loss*, (Seattle: INCA press, 2018), 50.

abreu draws attention to the fact that exploitation and colonialism don't end when one dies. In addition to problematizing commemoration, abreu highlights other Western religious/colonialist practices that claim black "lives" even after they are dead.¹⁷

And so my attempt to find forms which could tolerate the dead and deal with death in a non-exploitative way, both in general and in relation to the Paris Commune, became an attempt to solve a linguistic problem, or rather, it became a search for alternative languages and alternative linguistic paradigms. Over the past two years I have researched, among others, the work of Jacques Derrida, Gayatri Spivak, Roman Jacobsen, and the late work of Ludwig Wittgenstein. But it was an essay by Gershom Scholem called "On Lament and Lamentation," ["Über Klage und Klagelied"] that really set me on my course.

¹⁷ For example, Mormons literally *convert* the dead, which is why they have the world's largest genealogical database.

The Language of Lament

Scholem's "On Lament and Lamentation" was written as a compliment to his translation of the biblical Book of Lamentations. Scholem's essay, while referencing the Israelites lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem and using the Book as a springboard for formal and linguistic theorizing, discusses lament and the language of prayer more generally.

How can a language handle death, or loss in a way that is not ironic or paradoxical, as the signification of absence would be? By failing. For Scholem, the language of lament is a language defined by its *failure* to express, and not by any positive signification of this failure. It is a language that can never be a vessel for communication, and which instead inflicts upon itself the very loss and destruction of which it cannot speak:

"Thus mourning partakes in language, but only in the most tragic way, since in its course toward language mourning is directed against itself – and against language. What appears here [in lament] is the truest anarchy, which emerges most clearly in the impression made by lament, in the utter inability of other things to answer lament in their language. There is no answer to lament, which is to say, there is only one: falling mute (*das Verstummen*)."¹⁸

Unlike other forms of language which use signifiers to address an external reality, convey a content, or to reveal hidden potentialities of meaning, the language of lament can never address anything outside of itself. According to Scholem, Lament does not elicit a response, provoke thoughts, or evoke images.¹⁹ External signifiers or any language outside of the Lamentation are "utterly unable to answer" its anarchy. This kind of total internality means that the *what* that is mourned cannot be anything external to the lament itself. True lament is a mourn-

¹⁸ Scholem, Gershom. "On Lament and Lamentation." *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 21, trans. Lina Barouch and Paula Schwebel. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014. p.9.

¹⁹ This idea may seem counter-intuitive at first, but think of the very simple example of someone mourning a loss. They may wail: "Why? Why?", and this wail, though "semiotic" in its point of departure, expects no answer. "Why" has become more of a cry than a "semiotic" statement, and here lament is a gestural process which turns language into a sound. Following Scholem, in its truest sense, Lament is not any kind of *outward* show, or a demonstration for others, but is rather this very process of the breakdown of language and the giving up hope that its expression will lead to anything. If one is truly lamenting, one wails for the sake of wailing, and not to be heard or to make a point.

ing of its own language. But this is by no means to say that the language of lament is powerless. Lament appears on the other hand to have immense, chaotic power.

“This language [of lament] reveals nothing, because the being that reveals itself in it has no content (and for that reason one can also say that it reveals everything) and conceals (*verschweigt*) nothing, because its entire existence is based on a revolution of silence. It is not symbolic, but only points toward the symbol; it is not concrete, but annihilates the object.”²⁰

The language of lament cannot escape its own border to address anything external, but this doesn't mean that it is powerless: the language of lament has a destructive power over anything it is oriented towards, and all symbols and desires for representation are smashed by this language. It is a language with an impossible system, which contains the trace of *all* objects on the precondition that they are always destroyed as soon as they are sensed or hinted at. For it is not external objects or signs that are destroyed in this process, but language itself, again and again.

“Language in the state of lament destroys itself, and the language of lament is itself, for that very reason, the language of destruction (*Vernichtung*). Everything is at its mercy. It repeatedly attempts to become symbol, but this must always fail, because it is border.”²¹

According to Scholem, lament is always on the *border* between silence and revelation, or in other words between the (silent) symbol and the expression of that symbol. The language of man usually involves a movement from one to the other, either the outward “expression” or revelation of a symbol, or the capturing of that revelation within the silent symbolic. Not so with lament: the language that *is* the border. As soon as it begins to move from the border (which it must, because this border takes up no space and lament is a constant unavoidable departure), lament destroys itself and all hope of revelation or content. Lament is an ultimate state of instability. Scholem continues:

²⁰ Scholem, p.6

²¹ Ibid., p.7

“And therefore lament can usurp any language: it is always the, not empty, but extinct expression, in which its death wish and its inability to die are joined together. The expression of innermost expressionlessness... This language is infinite, but it has the infinity of destruction, which is, as it were, the ultimate potency of the extinct.”²²

To recap, Scholem writes that this language is at once mute but at the same time roars with the fires of destruction. He writes that its movement of pure expressionlessness is a gesture complete unto itself: this marks both a total failure of language to express, and a moment of complete expression. These statements would be totally paradoxical if we were talking about the normal languages of man, which either reveal the content of a symbol, or capture those revelations in new symbols. However, what is crucial is the understanding that lament is a language on the *border* between revelation and the symbolic, and that this border is impossibly thin, which means that lament is always slipping back and forth from one to the other, constantly destroying itself. This creates a kind of repetition, but it is a repetition without memory. Lament can never build upon itself. Indeed, each gesture of lament is truly alone, as if it were totally outside of time. As we can already sense, form and time function in completely unique ways in lament – these are the sorts of things we will look at shortly through musical examples. Lament is at once both cyclical and non-constitutive. It is both overwhelmingly repetitive and on the other hand hopelessly fragmented and alone in each utterance.

This gesture’s collapse is in many ways “tragic”, and indeed Scholem recognizes that the language of lament is closely linked to the tragic. However, the differences in these languages is defined by their failures. Tragic failure is constitutive. Tragic failure leads to the birth of a new era, a new mythology. Scholem is very careful with his language, insisting that lament is never *reborn* after its collapses. Instead of “birth” [*geburt*], Scholem, and Benjamin after him, use the term “origin” [*ursprung*] to describe the continual reappearance of lament. This is crucial, because *ursprung* does not mark any kind of beginning.²³ Rather, it seems that each instance of

²² Scholem pp.9-10

²³ For an in depth analysis of the term *Ursprung* in how it is used by Scholem and Benjamin, see Paula Schwebel’s “The Tradition in Ruins: Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem on Language and Lament”, and Ilit Ferber’s “‘Incline thine ear unto me, and hear my speech’: Scholem, Benjamin, and Cohen on Lament”, in *Lament in Jewish Thought* (De Gruyter 2014).

lament is totally unconnected by time, as if there was an undefined, or contentless amount of time between each instance. Instead of marking a new beginning, each lamentation is an action that leaves no mark of its failure upon the future at all. This can have immense musical implications.

Scholem does not directly critique the tragic in the way that Benjamin later does in *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, but along with the crucial difference between birth and origin, we can detect a hint of another important concept in the divide between tragedy and lament:

“Lamentation is, in its deepest sense, mythical. In it, myth itself seeks exit to a world to which there is no access, in which one can and cannot be, but into which, since eternity, no one can reach from another world. In lamentation, mythical enchantment (with which it was perhaps originally enmeshed) is shattered by the unheard-of linguistic phenomenon of the border.”²⁴

As I have mentioned earlier, tragedy and lament are very closely linked, but here we see the nuanced differences. Whereas lamentation is mythical in the sense of being totally inaccessible to those outside of it, any element of “enchantment” that derives from this, or any kind of power that the mythical could exert upon the outside, is gone. Scholem continues, “the order of lament itself destroys the possibility of exploiting magic as enchantment”. Here we have the germ of what will become an important political aspect to Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, and later to anti-Wagnerian operatists such as Luigi Nono. Fascist art – in contrast to lament (and other forms like *Trauerspiel* and allegory, which we will discuss soon) – exploits magic as enchantment, and uses mythology to achieve something external. In Tragedy, the meaning of events is bestowed after the fact. In Tragedy, something is retrospectively born with the hero’s death. Benjamin writes that “tragic death marks a moment of fulfillment,” which means that “all the events of a life gather significance from the anticipation of this moment”, whereas death in *Trauerspiel*, “does not fulfill a life,” but is “one a series of insignificant moments” in a game where “each moment is... a repetition of a repetition”.²⁵ While lamentation

²⁴ Scholem p.11

²⁵ Benjamin, Walter “*Trauerspiel* and Tragedy”, cited by Kiarina Kordela in *Sparks Will Fly* (SUNY press, 2015), p. 104.

and trauerspiel are not the same thing, it is clear that the two have a lot in common in terms of their relation to time and opposition to tragedy.

Prayer and Form

Ilit Ferber states that in Lament, we experience *mere voice*, or *language as such*, to use the Benjaminian terminology, and in this, we experience language musically. Ferber summarizes Walter Benjamin's concept of language as such, saying, "the purity of language lies in its unfastening from forms of proposition or intention".²⁶ If we follow this line and view the language of lament as something without external referents or intentions, it becomes an acoustic phenomenon. While I would argue that there are many types of music, I would say that the language of lament is certainly an *aesthetic* language, and as such, it is musical in essence. By this I mean that formal elements *internal* to the language come to dominate its character.

Scholem calls our attention to the *form* of the biblical *Book of Lamentation*, saying that "the alphabetical acrostic has a symbolic meaning that is at least connected with the fact that lament encompasses all language and destroys all language". An alphabetical acrostic is a poem where every line begins with the next letter of the alphabet. And so, with this formal gesture Lamentation takes all language, from the first letter to the last, and empties and destroys its meaning. But what is left? A pure form on one side, emptied and in a state of ruins, and pure sound on the other. Instead of connecting it to the entire world, from A to Z, lamentation traces the border between this world, in its entirety, and its semiotic representation, creating an abyss between them.

But let us also do a deeper analysis of the "musical form" of the book of lamentations, which was also a favorite for musical settings across the centuries. Form here is working in a way which is in great opposition to how form works in modern music (from Bach onward). Norwegian composer Asbjørn Schaathun likes to characterize form as a delaying of the end. Good form for Schaathun is a kind of Odyssean cleverness that allows a composer to put off the inevitable. This is an interesting analysis that, whether it is true or not, gives broader insight into how Western classical music and its progeny view form to be *an organization of time*. Theodor

²⁶ Ferber, Ilit "'Incline thine ear unto me, and hear my speech': Scholem, Benjamin, and Cohen on Lament", in *Lament in Jewish Thought*. ed. Paula Schwebel and Ilit Ferber. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014, p.113.

Adorno even traces this desire to organize time back to the origins of notated music in itself.²⁷ Lamentation as a musical act in many of its “folk” forms is highly improvisatory and often impossible to notate, comprised wails and impossible inflection. But even Lamentation in its *written form* can also be viewed as a sabotage of this organization of time.

Let us take a closer look at how form is working in the *Book of Lamentations*. We have a list of questions addressed to God, which nearly all begin with *how? How? How?* What does repetition mean here? Repetition is a common musical element, but the continual repetition of one element – an element which usually solicits a response – unhinges it from its structural functions as it becomes completely rhetorical, “*unfastening from forms of proposition or intention*”.²⁸ This kind of monotonous repetition signals not only the unending nature of lament, but more importantly the absence of all hope of a response. When the Lamentation leaves silence after these questions, it is not so it can be answered by an external voice, but rather, it leaves space as an expression of its own expressionlessness and an abyss which contains *no time*, so that the lamenting can continue in a way which is totally out of joint with its last iteration.

Lamentations are a kind of prayer. Jacques Derrida writes that prayer is a language without hope. The absence of the addressee is not just an important element of prayer, but it is also an a defining characteristic. One cannot know if the prayer will ever be heard. The possibility of eternal absence of the addressee is the *condition* of the prayer. Derrida says, “if I were sure, there would be no prayer”²⁹. The possibility that a prayer could fail is not only inherent, but constitutive. And as such, the caesura between man and God, between speaker and world, is a limit experience in the absence of time. Derrida says that all prayer should contain “a moment of atheism” – the a *negative* moment – where time would stop for lack. If one would like to truly pray, then one must accept that one could be praying for no one. Never hope for anything, not even the future. This moment, or caesura, relates to what Derrida calls “*epoché*”,

²⁷ Adorno, Theodor Wiesengrund (1995), “On Some Relationships between Music and Painting”, trans. Susan Gillespie from text originally published in 1963. *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 79 no.1 (Spring 1995), p.70

²⁸ Ferber, “Incline thine ear”, p.113.

²⁹ Derrida, Jacques, “Other Testaments: An Interview with Jacques Derrida ‘On Religion’”, hosted by *The Society of Biblical Literature* and the *American Academy of Religion*. Toronto November 23-26, 2002.

which is both a suspension of certainty, and a state of deferral. Deferral for Derrida is the elimination of meaning, but more importantly, *epoché* is a suspension *on the border*:

The form of the prayer is very closely linked to the form of the list. A list is always at the border because its content can not formally imply an ending. In the form of a list, there is always room for continuation, but one is also always potentially finished. When listing, one is always *on the border*; The word list comes from the Proto-Germanic “liston”, meaning border; and *liste* means border in old french, old english, and old Italian. When listing, one’s relationship to time changes. Like with prayer, one is deprived of temporal syntax. This is why prayers come often in list form.

In manuel arturo abreu’s *LIST OF CONSONANTS* (2015), who’s texts were used for movements two and three of the piano trio “Prayers and Lists”, the second movement of “(n)Obsequies”, and the last movement of “Short and Long”, abreu uses lists to lament the death of their friend Michael Raven, who committed suicide. The list form was used to destroy any sense of narration, or personal ownership of memories over the dead. The list form enabled abreu to break out of any kind of temporal syntax which would otherwise orient specific moments towards a “greater meaning” of the life, which would make it sacrificial. And in doing so, each line becomes absolutely isolated, shattering all hope of connection with external life.

Ludwig Wittgenstein also sought to escape from the reductive explanation of language as representative of reality. And it was precisely through the form of a list that he engineered his escape. His famous Philosophical Investigations is written in the form of a gigantic list- an unending list of possible uses of language. Wittgenstein says that there is no one law of language, but rather, that language defines its own rules on an instance by instance basis according to each unique situation or iteration. Wittgenstein uses the paradigm of the game to articulate these borderless rules of language. Wittgenstein writes:

“... this diversity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and...The word “language-game” is used here to emphasize the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity; or of a form of life. Consider the variety of language-games in the following examples, and in others:

*Giving orders, and acting on them —
Describing an object by its appearance, or by its measurements —
Constructing an object from a description (a drawing) —
Reporting an event —
Speculating about the event —
Forming and testing a hypothesis —
Presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams —
Making up a story; and reading one —
Acting in a play —
Singing rounds —
Guessing riddles —
Cracking a joke; telling one —
Solving a problem in applied arithmetic —
Translating from one language into another —
Requesting, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying. — ”*

— Wittgenstein. PI. §23.

What is interesting here is how Wittgenstein’s writing formally emphasizes the point that he is

making. Wittgenstein writes in list form, rattling off example after example in a way that seems like he could go on forever. Indeed, even within the points there are several types of examples, making it seem like each individual point on the list could turn into a much longer list: “cracking a joke; telling one —”. Wittgenstein here reminds one that a joke is not just one type of language game. Jokes arise in a practically infinite number of situations, and in the future, there will be new situations where one will joke in yet another unexpected way. It’s almost as if Wittgenstein is implying that each “iteration” of joking could be a new game. At the end of his list Wittgenstein speeds up: “Requesting, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying. —” As if to emphasize that his ending is not really an ending at all, but merely an ellipsis indicating that he could go on forever but hasn’t the time at this particular moment. But when one thinks about this, one realizes that the entire book is a kind of list. Wittgenstein’s seemingly endless numbered paragraphs show that there is no limit to the number of forms of language. Indeed, even if one had managed to count them, “new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence”. Wittgenstein “ends” his text, just like the list above. With “just-another-point-on-the-list” — Wittgenstein offers no summary of his arguments, and no conclusion. For these would reduce his thoughts to an idea and destroy the infinite nature of his games which sprawl across his book and even further — into our lives and futures.

The list is everywhere in my master work, both in the collaboration with manuel abreu, and in the opera. Lists, in fact, while intimately connected to prayer, also are formally connected to the games and play, and with them, humor. In fact, in opera history (and also in other genres) the list is often employed in comic situations. The most famous list in opera is perhaps Leporello’s aria “Il catalogo è questo,” but a more modern example from György Ligeti’s *Le Grand Macabre* also comes to mind: “Arse-licker, arse-kisser”. In this duet, two characters insult each other in alphabetical order, comically skipping over “I” and “J” when they cannot think of insults beginning with those letters. This example, as well as emphasizing the comic place of the list within opera, also brings us back to the alphabetical list as a stand in for an infinite list comprising the entirety of language from start to finish. Within Ligeti’s opera, this is just one of many eerily hyper-formal gestures, always bordering on extra-musical, or rather the “extra-human”. The opera is famous for its two preludes: one played by car-horns, and the other by door-bells — ringing at the border between life and death, between music and noise, between meaning and absurdity.

Iterations of Lament

While my music clearly contains lists, prayers, and death, and contains elements of some of the specific formal characteristics that I have described above, I am hesitant to analyse specific passages of my music in *terms* of Scholem or Derrida because, even though their terms resist direct representative meaning, this kind of “functional” analysis and attribution would set a kind of representative meaning onto my music. A claim that the music correlates to an external formal idea would fasten it to “forms of proposition or intention” rejected by Benjamin and Scholem, thus weakening any kind of lamentational force or character, and reverting back to the reductive-sacrificial tendencies of modern western language. While writing about music, or even just *writing* music without proposition or intention may well be impossible (there is a reason that lament was traditionally a non-notated genre), writing which *unfastens* from these forms, questions them, problematizes them, or destroys them, could be possible.³⁰

There are so many kinds of musical lamentation from so many eras and cultures that it would be impossible to give any kind of overview or “structural analysis” of any kind of aggregate nor would this be of interest given the character of lament. Some of the most striking examples of lament include Irish *Keening*, and Karelian *Kuolinitku*, both of which find themselves on the border between wailing and singing – always disintegrating from one into the other³¹. But both of these traditional laments are not *written*, which complicates their relationship with my work. And so, in light of the aforementioned *unfastening* through writing, let us give a couple brief and wonderfully archetypal example of lament in order to examine one way in which lament *could* take form, or unfasten from it.

For this purpose I have chosen to analyse two arias of Henry Purcell. Firstly I am attracted to Purcell because of his quintessential position as the composer of “Laments” in Baroque music – for good reasons as we will see. Secondly his work will connect us to our second chapter, which will focus on Allegory and will begin with Walter Benjamin’s writings on Baroque

³⁰ And it is here we get begin to glimpse the distancing and fragmenting allegorical movement of language (and music) that we will examine closely in the next section.

³¹ Wonderful examples of Karelian lamentation are presented by the Dutch artist Matilde ter Heijne. <https://vimeo.com/81900908>

Trauerspiel. Thirdly, these works are in a totally different style from any of the works I am presenting, and so, my formal analysis will illuminate thoughts on Lament in a general sense, rather than tempting the reader to see them as an analysis of my own work in disguise. It is better we remain “allegorical” in our glance—viewing the particular always through the lens of the general, and always permitting distance to come between our gaze and the receding object of our study.

Dido's Lament

This lament is complicated for a number of reasons, and its paradoxical characteristics and shortcomings are telling for Western art music's treatment of lament in general. The most famous lines of this aria could be the last ones: “Remember me, but forget my fate”. Following the idea that Lament destroys representative language or thought and thus destroys memory, one would think this to be problematic from the start. Combined with the idea that Dido is asking those who listen to her to remember her life but forget her death and abandonment, it seems that this music could be of the very “commemorative” genre that we are trying to escape. But these lines attack themselves within their context: “Remember me, but forget my fate” in the form of an aria embodying lament is the ultimate irony, because the music is immortalizing the moment of dying, and not the rest of Dido's life. What we “remember”, or ex-

The musical score for "Dido's Lament" (mm. 9-19) is presented in a multi-staff format. The top staff is a lute part marked "Tasto solo". Below it is the vocal line for Dido, with lyrics: "When I am laid, am laid in earth, may my wrongs create No". The instrumental parts include Violins I & II, Violas, and Basso continuo. The Basso continuo line includes figured bass notation: 6/5, 6/4, 7, 6, 6/2#, 7#, 6, 6/5, 4, #.

Figure 1: “Dido's Lament” mm. 9-19

perience again and again is the moment of Dido's dying, and not who she is. This irony works against the "idolizing" function of the aria and cements Dido's fate as *the one who is always dying*. But in a deeper sense, we *do* remember her, but forget her fate. The content of her life including Aeneas' betrayal is forgotten in this sound and all we know is the *voice, or physical character* of Dido, which repeats over and over in our minds unending. This never ending (but always dying) feeling is created by a number of musical factors, first of all, the melody *begins* when the ground bass *ends*, prompting a feeling of forced continuation, since the beginning of the ground is thus also a beginning of the next phrase. The ground bass consists of a 5 measure pattern, and this irregular number adds an intense sense of unresolvable restlessness to this aria (see *figure 1*).

This feeling is then intensified in the next section when Dido's melody takes form in even *more* unstable and irregular phrases, as she sings the famous "Remember me". This section begins here, at measure 34, with a 7 bar phrase shown in *figure 2*:

The musical score for measures 32-43 of "Dido's Lament" is presented in two systems. The key signature is G minor (three flats) and the time signature is 3/4. The piano accompaniment features a repeating ground bass pattern in the left hand, consisting of five measures. The vocal line includes the following lyrics: "breast. Re-mem-ber me! Re-mem-ber me! But ah! for-get my fate; Re-mem-ber me! But ah! for-get my—". The score is written for voice and piano.

Figure 2: "Dido's Lament" mm. 32-43

This melody meanders on the border between life and death, never finding proper resolution until Purcell resolves the melody with a slight-of-the-hand combination of 6 and 4 measure phrases. What is important here is not the fact that the melody does resolve, since that is a neutral, neigh-unavoidable trait of baroque arias. What is remarkable – and what one notices when listening – are these irregular phrases which, combined with dissonances such as minor ninths and appoggiaturas, create the sense that Dido is never dead, but always in the moment of dying. In a striking allegorical gesture of irony, the irregular and always changing phrase lengths also sabotage our ability to remember exactly what Dido sings when asking us to “Remember”. This is a music at the border, which is a place without horizon, or perhaps with an infinite horizon.

What might weaken this aria is its position within the greater narrative of the opera *Dido and Aeneas*. Here, as in so many other examples in Opera history, the position of the dying is occupied by a woman, who is sacrificed by a male hero for the betterment of Western history. This lament, which may in itself resist “forms of proposition or intention,” is incorporated into a larger form of proposition or intention. However, in Purcell’s handling of this opera, Dido’s lament may just be stronger than the Roman, Western, narrative. Indeed, Aeneas’s departure occurs at the very beginning of the final act, and the opera ends directly after Dido’s death. There is just one number after Dido’s death, a chorus ending with the words “Never, never, never,” – and between each “never” stands a caesura, an epoché, as the cupids with their drooping wings swirl forever around the door between life and death. The focus of the opera is set firmly upon Dido’s dying and not Aeneas’ living on.

It is also of significance that *Dido and Aeneas* was originally written for performance at an all girls school and not for performance at a royal court. The work was only performed twice in its entirety before 1895- both times at an all girls school³². This female place of the opera’s origin could strengthen a reading of this work as coming from a place of lamentation and eternal imbalance, injustice, and dying. As we will see later in our examination of the Brecht-Weill, lament and allegory are certainly compatible with social criticism. Irish *keening* has long been

³² White, Bryan, 'Letter from Aleppo: dating the Chelsea School performance of *Dido and Aeneas*', in *Early Music* Vol. 37, No. 3 (Aug., 2009). Oxford: Oxford University Press. p 420.

used as a protest against colonization, typically against English colonization³³, but more recently, in 1984, women gathered to *keen* in Parliament square to protest a visit of Ronald Reagan³⁴. Although these women were not professional keeners, and indeed the form has been lost so we do not know what it really sounded like, the gesture of lament as protest and resistance still stands.

The Cold Genius

Another character of Purcell's who pleads for death in a perhaps even more emphatic style is the "Cold Genius" in *King Arthur*. The "Genius" is *interrupted while dying*, and one gains the feeling that, if the aria weren't interrupted, the process of dying would continue forever. In fact, the character represents the spirit of winter, which makes sense in this context as a process of eternal dying which continues until it is interrupted by spring. Winter's spirit doesn't "become warmer", rather, spring comes and interrupts it. This infinite dying is in this case, expressed through a chromatically rising line continuing across phrases as if never



Figure 3, "The Cold Genius" mm. 53-56.

ending or beginning, and it yet is *always interrupted at each syllable* by its own extreme staccato and trembling character (*figure 3*). This melody is a perfect example of something which can always be ended at each moment, only to continue on and on forever. The text is also set in such a way that the words seem reluctant to continue. The meaning of the words is completely secondary to the physical character of the language. The words are grotesquely prolonged on unnatural syllables. For example, Purcell writes "power____" instead of "po____wer". The effect

³³ Brophy, Christina Sinclair. "Keening Community", Boston College, 2010.

³⁴ Footage of this event was recorded and published by The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/yourgreenham/video/page/0,,2075892,00.html>

is an even more truncated experience of the already broken language. Moreover, because it is this last syllable that is extended, no one knows when the word will end — it is as if it is continuing forever but simultaneously always ending. This frigid, brittle quality of language and music certainly contains elements of Lament, but perhaps this brokenness-as-movement fits more the character of Allegory, which we will discuss in the next section.

Lament is of critical importance to us today: Lament shows us limits. Human limits were forgotten by modern man, who thought himself “universal”. Through the 20th century with our expansion into space, “man’s” view was a view from the universe, and it was assumed that humanity’s growth— and the growth of capital— were without limits. Now we are witnessing a struggle: a struggle between those who feel the physical limits of our world and those who do not. Those who feel and reflect on our confined existence on this Earth, and those who continue to ignore the world and try to insist that they exist in a kind of “no-place”. To use the term of Bruno Latour, the latter move “off-shore”³⁵. They move their money to “off-shore” accounts, and want to drill for oil “off shore” in places where we would never see it. Now we must fight for the recognition of our physical, mortal, limits against foolish and violent notions of universality and claims of existence of “no-place”.

³⁵ See: Latour, Bruno. *Down to Earth*. trans. Catherine Porter. Cambridge: Polity, 2018.

IIB. lgsnhd/eoea *Allegory*

*My swirling wants. Your frozen lips.
The grammar turned and attacked me.
Themes, written under duress.
Emptiness of the nations.
They gave me a drug that slowed the healing of wounds.*

*I want you to see this before I leave:
the experience of repetition as death
the failure of criticism to locate the pain
the poster in the bus that said:
my bleeding is under control.*

A red plant in a cemetery of plastic wreaths.

A last attempt: the language is a dialect called metaphor.

—Adrienne Rich, “A Valediction Forbidding Mourning.”

Like death, style is very impersonal, and that is no coincidence. Style has no author, and when divorced from its endemic social framework, as it almost always is in post-industrial society, style becomes something “other”. This is neither good nor bad, but rather something we must be conscious of when working with style. Style may have always been impersonal and tinged with an inhuman, deathly element. This may be what makes it so sexy. Allegory and style are not synonymous, but they are closely linked. We will soon, in our inquiry about allegory, see that allegory occurs when the whole represents the parts, in total opposition to the Brahmsian or Schoenbergian “grundgestalt”, where the fabric of the piece is identifiable in the tiniest of motivic materials. Style is similar to allegory in this way. Allegorical music may be viewed as “stylized,” and is best performed in this manner. When a music is “stylized,” the whole becomes

dominant, and individual aspects become expressions of that whole. Because of this, these individual aspects are also emptied. Like death, style is very impersonal.

Allegory and frozen play

Walter Benjamin's concept of allegory, while central to discussions of Benjamin's work, is famously difficult to grasp. Bainard Cowan writes in 1981, 41 years after Benjamin's death, "almost every study of Benjamin's thought mentions allegory... however, the [theory] in its entirety, as elusive and unconventional by scholarly standards as it is, has gone virtually without a thorough explication".³⁶ However, what is remarkable is not that this "concept" went so long without a comprehensive study — what *is* remarkable is that in his thousands of pages of writing and through all of his discussions of allegory, Benjamin *never* defines the term "allegory", and never explains it as a concept.

This is because allegory is *not* a concept (*Begriff*), and is rather something that resists being possessed or grasped (*ergriffen*). In its essence, allegory is something which *eludes* representational meaning. Like lament, it interested me precisely because of its non-representative, or even anti-representative relation to meaning. Benjamin is only able to reveal allegory to us by "performing" allegory in his texts through allegorical gestures. These gestures and specific examples of allegory provided by Benjamin facilitate an experience of allegory as such. Allegory is thus more of a method or practice than it is a concept or theory, but for the sake of clarity I will attempt to work towards a rough definition of allegory, even if it is paradoxical to do so. But more importantly, I will present allegory as a method for working with meaning (both linguistically and musically). In order to do this, I will analyse how it is employed by not only Walter Benjamin, but also by Brecht and Weill, Luigi Nono, and several composers and artists working today.

As I wrote in the introduction, most people assume that allegory is when art represents society at large (or aspects of society at large). Today, allegory is most often interchangeable with metaphor, and its wholistic social implications are even viewed as secondary in its definition. However, for Benjamin and his friend Bertolt Brecht, the *function* of allegory is in some ways the total opposite of this supposition. Allegory is not figurative. Instead of "portraying" reality in metaphors, the language of allegory breaks its connections to reality by revealing its "portrayal" to be fraudulent. Allegory draws attention to the abyss between the sign and any kind

³⁶ Cowan, Bainard. "Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory." *New German Critique*, no. 22 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1981), 109-22. doi:10.2307/487866.

of signified. For Benjamin and Brecht, this process of distancing [*Verfremdungseffekt*] between art and reality was crucial to inducing the audience to critical thinking. As a result of *Verfremdung*, audience lost the illusion that what they are viewing was “real”. This non-representational character; this disjuncture from “the real” is the reason that Benjamin cannot *define* allegory: it would then cease to be allegorical. Benjamin can thus only demonstrate its non-representational, or anti-representational function.

The closest that Benjamin comes to defining allegory in his habilitation is a short section in the second chapter of the work, “Allegory and Trauerspiel”. Benjamin begins by explaining a few enlightenment authors’ ideas about allegory as a jumping off point. The author that he does not dismiss entirely is Goethe, who writes:

“There is a great difference between a poet’s seeking the particular from the general, and his seeking the general from the particular. The former gives rise to allegory, where the particular serves only as an *instance* or the example of the general; the latter, however, is the true nature of poetry: the expression of the particular without any thought of, or reference to, the general. Whoever grasps the particular in all its vitality also grasps the general”.³⁷

This statement clearly shows allegory to be inferior to poetry. However, Benjamin finds an explosive power in this definition. Allegory *is* the expression of the generic, it is not a “convention of expression” but the “expression of convention”³⁸ itself. It does not express an integrated whole through details. This would bind the world together and show the world as a “vital” organism. Rather, when the general reveals itself in discrete objects — objects who do not need each other in their independent “instances” of the general — the world explodes into fragments, isolated from the living world. Benjamin continues:

“Any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else. With this possibility a destructive, but just verdict is passed on the profane world, it is a world in which the detail is of no importance. But... [in allegory] the things that are used to signify derive a power which makes them appear no

³⁷ Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne, (London: Verso, 1998), 160.

³⁸ Benjamin, 175.

longer commensurable with profane things, which raises them onto a higher plane, and which can, indeed, sanctify them. In allegorical terms, the profane world is both elevated and devalued.”³⁹

Instead of being a particle that contains a small amount of the whole – the particular that expresses in itself the *fabric* of the whole – an allegorical signifier is a “place holder” for the generic. This “place” is simply occupied by an allegorical “sign” which never refers to any specific thing, only *the general or generic*. And so, it could effectively express *anything*. What it means at a particular moment is arbitrary. Because everything stands for the whole, nothing can then be an integrated part of the whole, or a part of any system, even a semiotic one. It is “no longer commensurable” with these things. It is not a sign that refers, but rather something that re-replaces, or even re-moves. It is at once holy and damned, “elevated and devalued”: it is inherently empty and isolated, yet it indicates the *potentiality* of meaning. Its existence is the existence of absence in presence, the closest we come to the existence of death in life.

Walter Benjamin uses and demonstrates allegory in a number of ways and gives numerous examples of allegory. Example is a special form. It allows a reader to grasp a *specific* thing in order to get a sense of a whole *category* of things. But in becoming an example, this specific thing is separated from the rest of its category. All examples stand alone – with its *exempleness* comes the recognition of the example’s failure to carry the universal for which it attempts to “stand-in”.⁴⁰ The example is allegorical in itself. Examples are isolated – exiled –, and although tangible as objects, they reaffirm one’s distance from definitive truth. Benjamin gives us many examples of allegory in *The Arcades Project*. One entry reads: “On allegory: limp arms, like weapons dropped by one who flees”.⁴¹ Having set up this example by writing “On allegory” what comes after is expected to shed light upon allegory. The result is intentionally frustrating. Nothing is explained. The quote that stands in for a definition, flees from its role. Instead of

³⁹ Ibid., 175.

⁴⁰ Giorgio Agamben said, in a lecture at the European Graduate School in 2002, that an example, (Greek παράδειγμα [paradigm]) “is neither universal nor particular; neither general nor individual, it is a singularity which, showing itself as such, produces a new ontological context. This is the etymological meaning of the word *paradigme* in Greek, *paradigme* is literally ‘what shows itself beside.’ Something is shown beside, ‘para’”.

⁴¹ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 303.

even a metaphor for allegory (*“limp arms”*), we get a metaphor for a metaphor for allegory (*“like weapons”*). Any help we could have received has run away, and the tools or weapons which could have helped us are now powerless, isolated, fragmented. But on a closer look, these “arms” are not weapons, but the very body of allegory, marked by perpetual flight and fragmentation.

In addition to such examples, Benjamin offers obtuse demonstrations of allegory. These statements don’t really help us come closer to a *meaning* of allegory. These statements are instantiations of allegory in themselves, and their performance on the page is an enactment of the shattering and isolating process that is “allegory”. In another example, Benjamin writes:

... [T]he allegorist – for whom objects represent only keywords in a secret dictionary, which will make known their meanings to the initiated – precisely the allegorist can never have enough of things. With him, one thing is so little capable of taking the place of another that no possible reflection suffices to foresee what meaning his profundity might lay claim to for each one of them."⁴² [H4a,1]

This quote is of particular importance. Its seeming *direct* contradiction to the earlier statement about the universal replaceability of allegorical objects underlines the illogical modus of allegory and its resistance to meaning. Instead of looking for what the text *means*, we must look at what the text *does*. Unlike language, and unlike “symbols or signs”, meaning for the allegory is separated from itself. When reading this quote, meaning is thrice removed from the objects that could contain meaning. 1. Objects represent keywords. 2. Keywords refer one to a dictionary. 3. The dictionary is itself hidden or secret. One could look at this quote and say that allegory, even though it is “very far removed”, still refers one to a dictionary and demands hermeneutic analysis. This hermeneutical instinct, however, only keeps one from experiencing allegory as such. The modus of the allegory *is* to create distance, and herein lies its importance. Benjamin demonstrates this three times in listing one after the other the three steps of removal between allegorical object and meaning. Benjamin facilitates the experience of the allegory by evoking the *potentiality* of meaning, while moving us further and further away from this meaning. The feeling that there is some sort of meaning replaced by allegory is crucial for

⁴² Ibid, 211.

its existence as a phenomenon. Distance, removal, replacing, these are the keys for understanding the movement of allegory.

Continuing our analysis of the quotation, not only does Benjamin give an illustration of three layers of distance, but he goes to discuss the allegorist as a kind of collector who “can never have enough of things”, because “*one thing is so little capable of taking the place of another*”. Why does he use this wording? Why doesn’t he simply say that one object “cannot” take the symbolic place of another? In a way, by saying that objects are “so little capable” of taking each others places, Benjamin reveals that the desire of the objects is precisely to *take the place of other objects*. Because this is their desire, and because they are so weak in their ability to fulfill this desire, the allegorist must simply collect as many things as possible. Indeed, an allegorist expresses a kind of will to, not quite represent, but to replace the whole world with separate objects. In order to do this, the allegorist would need to collect every object in the world and turn those objects into individual allegorical objects – replacing the entire world with a fraudulent, fragmented alternative.

Benjamin continues, “...no possible reflection suffices to foresee what meaning his profundity might lay claim to each one of them” – it seems at first that at some point in time, the allegorist/collector could potentially glean meaning from the allegorical objects. But this motion is perhaps the most incomprehensible of all. Meaning is not found in the object itself. Meaning is not discovered to have been latent in the object. Nor is meaning even projected upon the object by the allegorist. Rather, it is “the *allegorist’s profundity*” that “*lays claim*” to meaning. This profundity is itself an external object – foreign to both the allegorist and the object. So we have a third term in profundity. Profundity doesn’t supply meaning in itself, but rather the profundity *lays claim* to meaning *for* each object. And so, *meaning* is a fourth term, external to 1. the allegorist/collector, 2. the object/thing, and 3. the profundity of the allegorist. This is truly a shattering action: not only are objects isolated from each other, but each joint in a potentially representative process has been broken down and left standing alone.

Benjamin says right out that allegory occupies the place of death within life.⁴³ Fragments and ruins — things that are simultaneously “shattered and preserved”⁴⁴, or if you will, preserved in their destroyedness. The entire world has been replaced by ruins and fragments. Their existence does not communicate their meaning. Rather, their existence seems to communicate the mark of their distance from the present day and the listener or viewer. But it seems that the more removed we are, the stronger the promise of a “lost meaning”. This meaning must be infinitely retreating in order us “to foresee what meaning [one’s] profundity might lay claim to for each one of them”.⁴⁵ With this distancing comes perspective and possibility.

⁴³ He states, “...the triumph of allegory-the life which signifies death.” Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*. p. 336.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 329.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 211.

Constellation and dialectics at a standstill

How does Benjamin “make use” of these ruins and fragments, how does he lead them to function allegorically?⁹ For Benjamin, the allegorical function rests in something called the dialectical image. The dialectical image contains both its fore-history and its after-history within itself, as opposed to past and future. Past and future are referential to the present, implying a kind of development from one into the other. The allegorical (dialectic image), on the other hand, is non-referential. Instead of images that refer to a past and a future, Benjamin presents an idea of the “dialectical image” or the “constellation”, which contain the tension of time in a single moment on the *border* between past and future. On this border, there is no chronology, or perspective. 100 years ago means the same as 5 years ago. There is only the “what-has-been” crashing against “the now”:

“It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what-has-been comes together in a flash with the now to form a *constellation*. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent.- Only dialectical images are genuine images (that is, not archaic) ; and the place where one encounters them is language.”.⁴⁶

When ideas function as an image, there is no movement between them, they are stuck, but there is a tension of meaning permanently between them: like a constellation in the sky. Benjamin consistently traces different dialectical images as constellations. This allows him to relate materials across history and set them in tension with one another. For example, in the Arcades Project, Benjamin identifies and delineates a number of constellations such as the “constellation of awakening”⁴⁷ or the “constellation of phantasmagorias”.⁴⁸ This is not simply an “organizing strategy”, it is a form of writing or art.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 462.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 458.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 25.

Numerous essays by Benjamin are composed by numbered fragments: “Moscow”, “One Way Street”, and what we know of *The Arcades Project*. I think that people’s lack of understanding of Benjamin’s work *in his own terms* has led to wide-spread misunderstanding. Perhaps Walter Benjamin’s writings have more in common with the collages of Max Ernst, the sound-objects of Pierre Schaeffer or the ready-mades of Méret Oppenheim than they do with the philosophers of the Frankfurt School with whom he is often associated.⁴⁹

Benjamin’s method of constellation often appears as simple juxtaposition. Whether they are two of his ideas, or ideas of other individuals, the positioning of ideas in constellation allows them to maintain their distinction and tensions while simultaneously giving them new meaning in light of each other. The constellation is a creative method which allows for seemingly infinite use of the same materials – placing them in new positions and thus illuminating new aspects of each idea.

The form of the constellation also problematizes the author function. Benjamin discusses constellations as something which already exist, implying that he is merely drawing attention to them and not actively “using” constellation as a method. *A form without author?* This certainly seems to be the case. If we view the Arcades Project as a finished work, even if it is debatable how finished sections of this are, attributing authorship to different passages is difficult. The work is an assemblage of fragments, quotations, and quotations of quotations. This form is particularly interesting for my project because its questioning of the author function changes works’ relationship to immortality and death. According to Michel Foucault, the “writing act” is a sacrificial act:

“Writing is now linked to sacrifice and to the sacrifice of life itself... Where a work had the duty of creating immortality, it now attains the right to kill, to become the murderer of its author. Flaubert, Proust, and Kafka are obvious examples of this reversal”.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Benjamin was a friend of Theodor Adorno until the two had a falling out over *music*. Adorno did not like the influence of Brecht and Weill on Benjamin’s work, and was hurt by Benjamin’s criticism of his own opera. (See Adorno’s Letter to Benjamin from London on March 18, 1936).

⁵⁰ Michel Foucault, “What is an Author”, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), p.102.

Following the general trends in Western language use discussed earlier, the author function sacrifices life to meaning which can exist over time. Benjamin's work and methods seems to an extent to elude this. Instead of giving up his own life to attain "authorship" of the text under his name, Benjamin allows the text to retain a certain independence through problematizing the author function:

"Cyrano de Bergerac become a pupil of the astronomer Arago" Journal des Goncourt, July 16, 1856. no. 3 "If Edgar Poe dethroned Walter Scott and Merimee, if realism and bohemianism triumphed all down the line, if certain poems about which I have nothing to say (for fairness bids me be silent) were taken seriously by ... honest and well-intentioned men, then this would no longer be decadence but an orgy." Pontmartin, *Le Spectateur*, September 19, 1857; cited in Leon Lemonnier, *Edgar Poe et la critique française de 1845 à 1875* (Paris, 1928), pp. 187, 214.⁵¹

One could look at this through the traditional lense of citation and attribution, but the citations are more often than not citations of citations, or even citations of citations of references, spinning into a labyrinth of referral. And what of Benjamin himself? It seems that his name, least of all, has a "grasp" over his work. Constellation brings the connotation of astrology, and with astrology *fate*. This becomes a key topic for Theodor Adorno, but Benjamin seems to avoid the term astrology in *Arcades* project. This is further indication that the constellation as a form already has its significance *in its image*, not in the interpretation of this image. The constellation functions allegorically, and not referentially or hermeneutically. Astronomers and hermeneuticians abuse these forms and do not allow the constellations to function as such.

⁵¹ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 303.

Writing in Chalk: Brecht and Weill

Can Benjamin's ideas be relevant in the process of making art? I hope so. As I have said, the forms that Benjamin is *demonstrating or performing* through his own writing are the same forms that he identifies in other works, including works of art. Through examples of allegory and constellation we can trace these forms. Even if it is difficult to work directly with these forms, due to their anti-representational nature as "anti-concepts", I have found working critically through examples of allegory and constellation to be helpful to my own work. While it is tempting to explore here the figure of Franz Kafka, whose use of *insignia* is very close to Benjamin's melancholy dialectical image (and close to my musical setting of "signatures" in "Number 8" of *Det Ryker fortsatt*), I think that it would be more effective for the purposes of this document if we went straight to musical/theatrical examples of allegory.

I would like to begin this more "practical" conclusion with the figures of Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, before looking at the work of Luigi Nono. Much research has been done upon the relationship between Brecht and Benjamin, but Walter Benjamin was also friends with the composer Kurt Weill and the two spent time together in both Germany in France.⁵² And so, even though other scholars have not examined their relationship thoroughly, I believe that it is very much worth investigating the music of Weill in terms of the ideas of Benjamin, especially the music from his collaborations with Bertolt Brecht.

Benjamin was initially attracted to Brecht and Weill because he saw many of his theoretical ideas embodied in their theater. Central to this was their rejection of Wagnerian tragedy. As Stanley Mitchell writes in *Understanding Brecht*, "Brecht's drama is a deliberate unseating of the supremacy of tragedy and tragic inevitability... Echoing his own 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', Benjamin comments: 'It can happen this way, but it can also happen quite a different way'"⁵³. Benjamin writes that Brechtian Epic Theater operates under the *refusal* of Aristotelian Catharsis. The audience should not believe in the character's fate, and should

⁵² Benjamin's friendship with Weill is noted in several biographical sources, and their conversations are mentioned in Benjamin's work on popular culture, such as the 1931 piece "Mickey Mouse".

⁵³ Mitchell, Stanley. "Introduction to *Understanding Brecht*". In *Understanding Brecht*, by Walter Benjamin. London: Verso, 1998. p. xii.

question if the story presented on the stage “must be that way”. This desire for an “active” audience is also a theme in Weill’s thoughts about music. Weill conceived two types of music: “*Verbrauchsmusik*,” or music to be used up” and “*Gebrauchsmusik*,” music that is useful. Weill wanted to write *Gebrauchsmusik*. Rather than overwhelming audiences with emotion and wanting them to identify with the emotion of the characters, Weill wanted his music to be considered critically, thus stressing simplicity, irony, and external references. Weill wanted his music to inspire thought and be useful to the listener beyond the moment in which it was heard.

Weill and Brecht’s work shouldn’t be viewed in terms of simple metaphor or symbol. Rather, Brecht-Weill’s theater is truly allegorical in a Benjaminian sense, meaning that the never ending referential gesture is always more important than the symbol or signified itself. The reference is a gesture, never a statement of judgement or truth. Stanley Mitchell describes Brechtian allegory as a process by which “...critical intelligence intervenes to comment upon the representation, in other words where the representation is never complete in itself, but is openly and continually compared with the life represented...”.⁵⁴

Instead of having characters with who are concrete personages, Brecht/Weill’s characters are *types*. If they have names, like Mackie Messer or Leokadja Begbick, they are merely placeholders, and the characters can switch roles or personalities. I can mention here that this was a topic of discussion in the creation of a second libretto for our opera about the Commune. In the old libretto, there were Brechtian types, and even characters used in Brecht’s *Die Tage*, but we eventually decided to go even further, as Brecht and Weill themselves do on a number of occasions and remove all character names. Those who appear on stage are truly “types” in the purest sense – the mother, the editor, the soldier.

While of Brecht’s and Weill’s works do not often focus on death, the form of allegory that they use is certainly “tolerant” of death. In fact, I would argue that Weill’s *Gebrauchsmusik*, or “music that can be useful”, is more likely to be tolerant of death as it is – perhaps surprisingly not written with objective or intent, unlike commemorative music. I must add, to avoid confusion, that Weill’s *Gebrauchsmusik*, and his ideas about the genre, were quite different from those of other composers, like Paul Hindemith. Weill defined *Gebrauchsmusik* as music that “*can* be useful”. This does not mean that it is “occasional”. Rather, it means that it is open and

⁵⁴ Ibid. xiii

does not force itself upon its subjects. Weill began with the question: “is what we do useful to the general public?”⁵⁵, asking about the potential usefulness of a work in a *general* sense, rather than a particular sense. Furthermore, Weill compares this music to *Verbrauchsmusik* music to be ‘used up—’ implying that music with a *particular* use is undesirable, and possibly even inherently capitalist. Instead of having a particular use or function, musicologist Stephen Hinton writes that Weill wanted to *provoke* with *Gebrauchsmusik*, trying to inspire general thought and action as opposed to *enticing* a certain response or emotion.⁵⁶

Weill’s *Das Berliner Requiem* with text by Brecht, focuses on death, but rather than merely being “occasional”, this music is also intensely political. Through this piece, Weill demonstrates clearly that these forms, *Gebrauchsmusik* and *allegory* are not merely compatible, but overlap greatly. *Das Berliner Requiem* is pompous in style, but in a seemingly ironical way. The orchestration, (2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 alto saxophones, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, timpani, percussion, organ (harmonium), guitar, banjo, and male vocalists) is reminiscent to the classical genre of requiem (with trombones and organ). However, the lack of strings and high voices makes it clear from the beginning that the work is unsentimental. In fact, the work is almost always devoid of sustained notes. The exception is the first half of the 5th movement: a recitative with church organ. This is the “exception which proves the rule”: the organ never ceases to play long sustained chords backing an exaggerated “Bachian” recitative. Indeed, the contrast that this movement provides serves to underline the barren nature of the rest of the piece, from which the organ is strangely absent. While Weill evokes Bach and Mozart, he simultaneously uses irony and exaggeration to distance us from them. Even the “barren” nature of the accompaniment can be viewed as a Brechtian/Benjaminian “*Verfremdungseffekt*”, or “distancing effect”, which separates symbols of their original semiotic content so that they can be heard or viewed objectively by the audience. A figure repeated in silence, though still emotional, becomes an object that the listener can contemplate. Instead of a magnificent organ which surrounds the listener with the glory of God in the face of death, Weill’s listener gains an ironical distance, whereby the organ may sound insufficient, cold, or even funny.

⁵⁵ Marx, Wolfgang. “Brecht and Weill’s ‘Berliner Requiem’ as a Necropolitical Statement”. *Who Telleth a Tale of Unspeaking Death?* Dublin Death Studies 2, ed. Wolfgang Marx, 2017.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

The use of instruments in a single movement is a theme in this piece. Weill only uses guitar in the second movement (“Ballade vom ertunkenen Mädchen”) and the banjo is featured in the third movement alone (“Marterl”). This gives a fragmented, disjointed feeling to the work, which is also repetitive both within individual movements, and across them, with the last movement repeating. This traumatic condition, characterized by a simultaneous fragmentation and repetition, is evocative of the Baroque lament that we discussed in the previous section. I would like to again highlight the barren nature of the accompaniment. Not only is acapella singing a norm, but the focal use of non-sustained string instruments like guitar and banjo cements the groundless feeling of the piece. Indeed, the second movement, about a nameless dead girl floating in the water, is truly groundless.

Lento

tutti p

Tenori Als sie er-trun-ken war und hin-un-ter -

Baritoni Als sie er-trun-ken war und hin-un-ter -

Bassi Als sie er-trun-ken war und hin-un-ter -

Chitarra *p*

Ten. schwamm von den Bä-chen in die grö-ße-ren Flüs-se,

Bar. schwamm von den Bä-chen in die grö-ße-ren Flüs-se,

Bassi schwamm von den Bä-chen in die grö-ße-ren Flüs-se,

Chit. *Am7 C7*

(aufrecht)

Figure 4: “Ballade vom ertunkenen Mädchen” mm. 1-6

31

Tenn. *erst ihr Ge-sicht, dann die Hän-de und zu - letzt erst ihr Haar. Dann ward sie Flas in- Flüs-sen mit*

Bar. *erst ihr Ge-sicht, dann die Hän-de und zu - letzt erst ihr Haar. Dann ward sie Flas in Flüs-sen mit*

Bassi *erst ihr Ge-sicht, dann die Hän-de und zu - letzt erst ihr Haar. Dann ward sie Flas in Flüs-sen mit*

Chit.

34

Tenn. *vie - - - - - lem Flas.*

Bar. *vie - - - - - lem Flas.*

Bassi *vie - - - - - lem Flas.*

Chit.

Handwritten annotations: *E7* (red), *G#m* (red), *G#m* (blue), *Dm* (blue)

Figure 5: “Ballade vom ertrunkenen Mädchen” mm. 31-37

This movement contains no root position chords (see *Figure 4*), until a seemingly random D minor chord at the end of an otherwise E minor tonality movement, which further emphasizes the “groundless” feeling through its arbitrariness (see *Figure 5*).

Barrenness, fragmentation, repetition and namelessness. We have seen these elements in our discussion of allegory and lament thus far, and indeed the “Ballade vom ertrunkenen Mädchen” is a lamentation in the purest sense. But this does not mean that this is not a political work. On a topical level, this movement deals with the death of communist leader Rosa Luxemburg, or to be more specific, the figure of the drowned girl stems from the memory of Rosa Luxemburg: Brecht’s poem “Vom ertrunkenen Mädchen”, originally written in 1920, was dedicated to Luxemburg, who was murdered by the paramilitary fascist Freikorps in 1919 and dumped in the Landwehr Canal to be found months later, her body grossly decomposed.

Unlike other glorifications which commemorate her memory, this artistic treatment focuses on *loss*. This movement is about the loss of human identity that occurs in death. And so while we can extrapolate beyond the work and the allegory to find a real “Rosa Luxemburg”, within this work, not only has she lost her name, but she has lost her face. Literally, in the text it has rotten off, and the body is no longer her:

Als ihr bleicher Leib im Wasser verfaulet war
Geschah es (sehr langsam), dass Gott sie allmählich vergass
Erst ihr Gesicht, dann die Hände und ganz zuletzt erst ihr Haar.
Dann ward sie Aas in Flüssen mit vielem Aas.

[As her pale body lay foul in the water
She was forgotten (very slowly) by God himself
First her face, then her hands and, last but not least, her hair.
She became rot in a river full of rot]⁵⁷

And so, while the figure of Rosa Luxemburg is present, *it is present as the figure of her loss*, the figure of her dissolution. Weill’s chord progressions demonstrates the allegorical process: ever repeating, breaking down, and cycling back upon itself, like a corpse in a flowing river, stuck in the weeds. When we find this body and pull it out of the water, it has transformed into the totally unfamiliar D minor.

⁵⁷ Brecht, Bertolt. In Kurt Weill’s *Das Berliner Requiem*. ed. David Drew. Vienna: Universal Edition, 1987.

Luigi Nono: Out-Brehting Brecht.

Luigi Nono saw himself as a successor to Bertolt Brecht and saw his music as the subsequent step in revolutionary theater. Texts by Brecht, and also Walter Benjamin, are found throughout Nono's librettos and theoretical writings. Nono also acknowledges Weill's important position in "liberating music-theater" from traditional opera⁵⁸. Nono believed that his theater stood, like Brecht's and Weill's, in opposition to the mythological theater of Wagner. His ideas are clearly inspired by Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, as well as the similar device of *ostranenie* [making strange], which comes from the Russian formalist avant-garde, but with some clear differences. Like Brecht, Nono wanted his audiences to be critical. Nono writes that the audience should "faced with clear choices... impelled to become aware of and also actively put into effect its own choices, not channeling them into aesthetic categories, posed and resolved abstractly... but deciding those choices in connection with life"⁵⁹. We see here that Nono also wants to go further than Weill's *Gebrauchsmusik*. Nono doesn't mean to only provoke thought or be of "general" use, but wants to inspire direct decisions and actions. We will come back to this key difference very soon, but it is still clear that Nono uses allegory in order to challenge the audience and inspire thought.

There are multiple examples of "allegorical" techniques in Nono's theater. Even the way that Nono scores vocally is overtly allegorical. Let's look at his treatment of the legendary anarchist Louise Michel in *Al gran sole carico d'amore*, whose first section is based on Brecht's *Die Tage der Kommune*. Multiple soprano's sing the role here, and not just in monophony or homophony. Rather, the character "Louise Michel" is represented through a kind of hocket (see *figure 6*). In the libretto, Louise Michel is a single character and not some kind of chorus, but Nono's text-setting attacks the idea that Louise Michel is a single individual, and raises the idea that she could, for example, exist in the spirit of the people. No individual sings an entire word, but instead, they depend on each other to make meaning. Any direct significance of the polyphonic treatment of Louise Michel is never explicitly stated by Nono, and what is more

⁵⁸ Nono, Luigi. "Possibility and Necessity of a New Music Theater". *Nostalgia for the Future*. ed. Ida De Benedicuts and Veniero Rizzardi. Oakland: University of California Press, 2018. p. 217.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.213.

Handwritten musical score for Luciano Berio's *Al gran sole carico d'amore*, measures 554-557. The score includes staves for Flute (FL), Clarinet (CLARINET), Bassoon (S. BASSON), and Soprano (SOPRANO). The tempo is marked *Allegro* and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are in French: "RTIENS TOUT E NTIÈRE SO CIA LE À LA RÉ-VO-LU-TION".

Figure 6: Al gran sole carico d'amore mm. 554-557

important is that this gesture *eschews a literal reading* of the music as portraying a historical narrative. This helps the music resist the “cult of personalities” that plagued many leftist depictions of the Commune, or other historical events.

There is another side to Nono’s use of allegory, one that relates more directly to Benjamin than Brecht. In allegory there is a void that opens up between sound of language and the image of text. In his analysis of Baroque theory of language, Walter Benjamin writes,

“Script is not transfigured into sound; on the contrary, the world of this writing remains intent on unfolding, altogether self-sufficiently, its own proper import. Script and sound stand opposed to each other in high-tension polarity... The gulf between signifying image writing and intoxicating speech sound, as it tears open the solid massif of word-meaning, necessarily draws the gaze into the depths of language... ‘Word-Baroque’[sound] and ‘image-Baroque’[text] — as Cysarz only recently designated these forms of expression — are grounded in each other as poles. The tension between word and script is im-

measurable in the Baroque. The word[-sound], one may say, is the ecstasy of the creature, is exposing, daring, impotence before God, script[-image] is the collectedness of the creature, is dignity, superiority, omnipotence over the things of the world".⁶⁰

21

S. 2

Ms.

S. 1

$\text{♩} = 45 \text{ } ^*)$

mp *ppp* *mp* *mf* *pp* *mf*

IL SOLE CHIAMERÀ

⁶⁰ Benjamin, Walter. *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, tr. Eiland. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019. pp. 217-218.

However, at the same time, the *text*, or *text-image* stands under the vocal lines in the score (see *Figure 7*). Why is this? Precisely to highlight the separation between voice and language. How the articulation of words through song destroys language in an allegorical disaster. The larger structure of the piece also highlights the “abyss” between text and language. The piece is symmetrical, with the outer, longer sections being sparsely accompanied and marked by the slow and fragmented vocal polyphony described above. The middle section, however, is characterized by noisy chaotic electronic accompaniment and *spoken* text. Here again we have a contrast between *text*[-image], this time represented by audible speech, and *noise*[-sound], which has now become something inhuman, as if to link the *sound* of our voices heard in the outer sections with *all sounds*. This middle section, by far the most active and tumultuous, is simultaneously a figure of the abyss around, and over which, language stands, impotent. Is this a negation of the dialectic mentioned earlier by Benjamin, where the sound of the voice is impotent and mortal while text is silent and omnipotent? Whatever it is, the two poles are clearly at odds with each other and sparks are flying. But this reading of *Quando stanno morendo* as a “negation” of the text-sound dialectic could be a key to its political aspect: as in the earlier example of keening, it seems that the *sound of the voice*, the *noise of the voice*, has gained power over the text.

These Benjaminian and Brechtian perspectives on allegory are by no means incompatible. Rather, it is worth highlighting that the two Nono examples that I chose highlights the exact same vocal technique, and both pieces are explicitly political. While *Al gran sole* is political in content and archetypes, *Quando stanno morendo* is more similar to the political use of laments like keening, mentioned earlier. *Quando stanno morendo* was written when Nono’s friends in Poland were arrested by Jaruzelski. The work is dedicated “the Polish friends and comrades who resist in exile, in hiding, in jail, at work — who continue to hope amidst hopelessness, who continue to hope despite their disbelief”. We have established that the text has been set in an allegorical way, but this work is a great example of the coincidence and overlap of lament and allegory. The texts are indeed perfect examples of lamentation in themselves. Velimir Khlebnikov’s “Moskva, ty kto?” [Moscow, who are you], with its irresolvable conundrums and lists of rhetorical questions, perfectly characterizes the Old Testament lamentational forms described earlier, and contain an ambiguous “hopelessness” (or “disbelief” to use Nono’s own term) that corresponds to the Derridian concept of prayer. Nono’s *Quando stanno morendo* is lamentation

as protest, but it is also lamentation as dynamite whose sound blasts to pieces the Eastern-Bloc's totalitarian domination of meaning.

As we mentioned earlier, Nono wanted to go farther than Brecht and Weill. Instead of merely showing them an allegorical picture of society and leaving the representation open-ended, such that audience could then contrast what they had seen to the real world, Nono wanted his theater to *change* the world directly. Following the example of the early Soviet theater director Vsevolod Meyerhold, Nono writes that theater should not only portray real-life, but directly engage real life, meaning that it must “directly involve with political disputes”.⁶¹ For Meyerhold, and Nono, this “direct engagement” was not just symbolic, but physical and *technical*. Technology for Nono is inherently political, and his chief criticism of Stockhausen is that Stockhausen's non-political engagement with technology made him complicit with technocratic Capitalism.⁶² This was all part of Nono's quest to “liberate” theater from Wagnerian mythology. Indeed, Wagner's use of industrial instruments in the closed acoustic space of Bayreuth could be seen as the first example of unconscious technological domination of art.

For Nono, in order to change the world, we need to intervene and change technology. Thus, theater needed to be aware of all technological and indeed all technical/formal elements of which the world was made up, and then manipulate all of them simultaneously. All aspects would be integrated into theater – time, space, light, and sound.

The purpose of this was to overcome the gap between art and reality, and between art and truth. According to Nono, this was what had kept art from generating real revolutionary change before. Art had always reflected some kind of mythological falsehood instead of being unified with real-life in such a way that enabled intervention. Instead of being “dominated by technology”, Nono wished to use these technologies to destroy mythology and liberate humanity. It was no longer enough to supply “revolutionary mythology”: “It is not a matter of opposing an emphasis on content to various manifestations of formalism, but of affirming the objec-

⁶¹ Nono, Luigi. “Possibility and Necessity of a New Music Theater”. *Nostalgia for the Future*. ed. Ida De Benedicuts and Veniero Rizzardi. trans. John O'Donnell. Oakland: University of California Press, 2018. p. 218.

⁶² Nono, Luigi. “Music and Power”. *Nostalgia for the Future*. ed. Ida De Benedicuts and Veniero Rizzardi. trans. John O'Donnell. Oakland: University of California Press, 2018. p. 293.

tive inseparability of form and idea in overcoming any abstract opposition between art and truth".⁶³

But here Nono gets into trouble with the thinkers to which he saw himself successor. In order for Benjaminian or Brechtian theater to function, there must be distance between the empty signifiers on the stage and "the real world". No "real" world is posited at all through allegory, and allegory in itself is diametrically opposed to any notion of "real-life" (or any life) or "truth".

"Allegory, as the sign that is pointedly set off against its meaning, has its place in art as the antithesis to the beautiful appearance in which signifier and signified flow into each other. Dissolve this brittleness of allegory, and it forfeits all authority... Introduc[e] "life" into allegories, [and they] in turn suddenly wither like flowers".⁶⁴

Allegory doesn't have anything to do with life, and remains broken off from reality,⁶⁵ and instead of the present, allegory operates in dialectical now-time which is poised on an impossibly thin border between the past and the present; between death and becoming. For Benjamin, inauthenticity is not a problem for revolutionary art, but a precondition. There is no "original", for the past is constantly recurring and interrupting the now. Benjamin writes that life is "a series of insignificant moments" in a game where "each moment is fraud, a repetition of a repetition".⁶⁶ Nono does not view allegory in this way and, thus, misreads Benjamin's "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility", believing Benjamin's work to be critical of inauthenticity, or at least choosing to read it in a different light. Nono writes that "a tape recording, radio broadcast, or CDs are all *falsifications*: space disappears completely in all of

⁶³ Ibid., p. 213

⁶⁴ Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. p.374.

⁶⁵ Rather than in "life", for Benjamin, the site of the struggle is the *image sphere*, a strange realm where the inanimate is poised to become agentive at any moment. See: Benjamin, Walter. "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia." In *Illuminations*. trans. Edmund Jephcott. ed. Peter Demetz. New York: HBJ. 1978. pp. 177-192.

⁶⁶ Benjamin, Walter "Trauerspiel and Tragedy", cited by Kiarina Kordela in *Sparks Will Fly* (SUNY press, 2015), p. 104.

them.”⁶⁷ Because CD’s separate music from their original location, they fail to capture the *truth* of the musical experience – something which, for Nono, is of critical importance.

While Nono successfully avoids the “Tragic” tendency to give one moment in time (death) a centralized and culminant significance, Nono’s reading stands as an – unfortunately common – misreading of Benjamin’s text. Benjamin, while expressing nostalgia for the lost power of art in its original context, was excited by the revolutionary power of this mass decontextualization that occurred with technological reproduction. It was precisely this allegorical distance between the art object and “life” that, for Benjamin, reveal revolutionary potential, whereas for Nono, technology should be used to impact “every aspect of reality”. Nono, while claiming to work against Wagnerian mythologization, may indeed have created a more extreme form of *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

Benjamin writes that mediums whose production is itself a kind labor within the inauthentic, where the question of an “original” recording is totally beside the point, are the mediums which offer us hope in the modern world. Benjamin says of film, “The representation of human beings by means of an apparatus has made possible a highly productive use of the human being’s self-alienation”⁶⁸. Rather than being dismayed by the self-alienation and inauthenticity brought about by technology, one must make use of it. Otherwise, the “revolutionary opportunities implied by this... [will be] used for counter-revolutionary purposes”.⁶⁹

I should stress that Nono’s reading of Benjamin is often on point, and he gains from it a healthy criticality towards “technology for technology’s sake”, recognizing that the aestheticization of technology “in itself” is never be politically neutral. The key for Benjamin was embracing the inauthenticity within recording technologies and using it to subvert capitalism and release new potentialities for mankind, whereas Nono viewed that inauthenticity to be an element of capitalism itself. And so, 30 years after Nono, these are elements that still need to be

⁶⁷ Nono, Luigi. “Other Possibilities of Listening”. *Nostalgia for the Future*. p. 379.

⁶⁸ Benjamin, Walter. “Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility (second version)” paragraph XII. In *‘The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility’ and Other Writings on Media*. trans. Edmund Jephcott and Harry Zohn. ed. Michael Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Levin. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. p. 32

⁶⁹ Ibid. p.33

restored to opera and music theater at large, and there are many composers today doing this work.

A Case for Disingenuity

Restoring the “inauthentic” to music-theater, weakening the need for novelty, and problematizing the author function are certainly trends within the more experimental areas of contemporary music theater today. The purpose of this essay is not to give a survey of the contemporary opera and music theater scenes, but I do want to briefly name some tendencies that I see as positive, as well as composers who I view as personifying these trends.

Firstly worth mentioning is the breakdown between definitions of curator and composer. This is a trend that is occurring both in Norway and abroad. Norwegian composers such as Eivind Buene and Henrik Helstenius are “composing” concert settings in “pieces” such as Buene’s “Schubert Lounge”. In “Schubert Lounge,” the musical material played is not original. And so the barrier between composer, curator, and arranger are all blurred, which undermines the perceived value of *original* material. Abroad we must mention Heiner Goebbels, whose work was long questioned the boundaries between direction, curation, and composition. Olga Neuwirth is also working to question these lines. Her piece “Homage a Klaus Nomi” is not only an arrangement of other people’s material, but they are *arrangements of arrangements*, since Klaus Nomi didn’t write original material, but rather stylized them.

This rejection of originality has its roots in earlier artists (from Benjamin’s time) such as Marcel Duchamp, and later John Cage. Continuing and extending John Cage’s tradition, artists like choreographer Jonathan Burrows and composer Matteo Fargion in their piece “Cheap Lecture”, named after John Cage’s “Cheap Imitation,” use unoriginality as a kind of raw material, or base. Burrows and Fargion draw attention to the externality of form, and its inhumanity. The result is at once playful and profound.

I also believe that composer Trond Reinholdtsen’s series \emptyset can be viewed as a kind of Brechtian take on the Wagnerian “Gesamtkunstwerk”. Reinholdtsen embraces Wagner’s totalizing form and mythology, but he does so in a way which parodizes its own totality. \emptyset portrays character who represent all aspects of society. But this unifying society-gestalt-formation function is sabotaged. This Wagnerian social function rests on the audience being able to identify with the characters — forming a community around this mass co-identification. But Reinholdtsen’s

characters are unrelatable. Their faces are grotesque. One face appears to be an anus. This creates a Brechtian distance between the audience and the would-be-social-totality, opening up an allegorical chasm.

In other theater forms there are similar movements, from which composers could gain a lot. Maximalist Ann Liv Young's work take myths such as Elektra, or Sleeping Beauty, and sabotage them with interruptions and other devices which make it impossible for the audience to relate to the story. At the end of the performance Ann Liv Young fields questions — any kind of question —, and sells her props. This process demystifies and profanates the piece and also breaks down the “sacred” distance between performer and audience, and leads one to think about the capitalism or other economic structures that lie behind the “illusion” of so much art today.

The problematization of social representation in art, as well as the problematization of the author function in both historical and contemporary work, and the problematization of any identity function in language is crucial in art today. More and more, self-identification through digital representations, and fidelity to these digital representations, become the norm. But it is precisely the near infinite pluralities of representation today that can expose contradiction and falsehood. It is in these moments of exposure — these moments of loss of identity — that we glimpse possibility and the future.

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- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte. 4th edition, eds. P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte. Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

List of reference recordings (Kildehenvisning)

Henry Purcell

Dido and Aeneas

Performed by musicAeterna, New Siberian Singers, Vyacheslav Podyelsky, and Simone Kermes. Conducted by Teodor Currentzis.⁷⁰

Alpha Classics 2017.

Available at: <https://open.spotify.com/album/2mWdxcYBMPZ59oC4gc4qX9?si=DvzPc-cDcR2SvGfdRPtvmLg>

&

King Arthur

Performed by The English Baroque Soloists and the Monteverdi Choir. Conducted by John Elliott Gardiner.

Erato 1985.

Anneli Asplund (Traditional Karolian):

“Kuolinitku Äidille/Dirge To The Mother” and “Kuolinitku Sodassa Kaatuneelle pojalle/Dirge For A Son Who Has Fallen In Battle.”

Available at: <https://vimeo.com/81900908>

Kurt Weil

Das Berliner Requiem

Performed by Alexandre Laiter, Peter Kooy, La Chapelle Royale, and Ensemble Musique Oblique conducted by Philippe Herreweghe.

Harmoni Mundi 2007.

Available at: <https://open.spotify.com/album/5fHtAxGgyBDtiT5nJtAmia?si=CdgUH-ωr9RDGe6gqgjbOiUw>

⁷⁰ The recording of the entire opera is idiocyncratic to say the least, but the musicality of the lament its near silent and repetitive insistence made me choose it as my reference recording. Simone Kermes' performance, and the closing chorus after it, are absolutely breathtaking.

Klaus Nomi

The Cold Song

Live recording originally broadcast on German television in 1981.

I was not able to find more information about this broadcast.

Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7ZAXtUfDm4>

Burrows and Fargion

Cheap Lecture

Performed at Frankfurt LAB, 2012.

Available at: <https://vimeo.com/68313484>

Eivind Buene & Peter Tinning Transatlantic Trio

Schubert Lounge

Live recording from Granhøj Dans as part of Sporfestival 2015

Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O8xr4bflh74>

Luigi Nono

Al gran sole carico d'amore

Performed by Staatsorchester Stuttgart. Conducted by Lothar Zagrosek.
Warner 2001.

Available at: https://open.spotify.com/album/4gZCnzmsl9B14QkUspE6KW?si=lsvem_LWQEIJAQwbrCEA

&

Quando stanno morendo

Performed by Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart. Conducted by Manfred Schreier.
Collegno 2002.

Available at: <https://open.spotify.com/album/4UjF9DfuHmHoDflFSp2gC6?si=i9Yr-5jST1SvvweYd-wv7g>

Libretto to *Det ryker fortsatt*, (the libretto is separately entitled *I dag er vi mange som synger om frihet*)

I dag er vi mange som synger om frihet

Libretto

Nr. 1

Vi synger det siste vi skrev i

Journal officiel, 25. mai 1871.

Vi er vår tid,
og vår tid er her i Paris.

Nr. 2

Sentralkomiteen forkynner i dag
til alle soldater i hæren:

Dere skal en dag bli fedre.

Hvis fedrene skyter mot folket i dag, vil sønnene skyte mot folket i morgen og sønnene deres mot folket bestandig.

Sentralkomiteen vil stille et spørsmål
til alle soldater i hæren:

Har dere glemt 1830, kampen og volden i 1848, skammen i 1851, Sedan og 4. september, beleiringen, sulten og 18. mars?

Alle soldater i hæren vet svaret:

Dere vil ikke klare å skyte en bror.

Dere vil ikke klare å skyte en søster og se henne dø. Dere har ikke hjerter av jern.

Dere har ikke hoder av sprit eller lunger av kalk.

Franskmenn kan avsette konger og legge bastiller øde, men ikke på én dag miste sin arv fra 18. mars.

Ikke forlat arbeidernes sak! Kom heller til oss! Hjemme hos oss er dørene åpne for brødre. Dere kan spise og sove hos oss.

Vi skriver historie i dag.

Nr. 3

Komiteen for velferd har ordet.

Porte de Saint-Cloud er beleiret på fire
sider med brann på Mont-Valérien,
Butte de Mortemart, des Moulineaux og Fort d'Issy.

Den ansvarlige leder på hver barrikade
må selv rekvirere nødvendige ting fra sitt *quartier*.

Versailles har tatt Porte de Saint-Cloud og spredt seg over Paris.

Til våre brødre i frimurerlosjen:

Våre bannere rives i stykker av kuler fra Thiers. Regjeringen sender granater fra Thiers.

Nå kaller Kommunen på oss.

I våre verksteder ligger
klare beskjeder om hva vi skal gjøre.

Grav brostein opp fra gatene!

Bær dem opp trappene, ut på balkongen! Kast dem som våpen mot fienden! Prosjektilene deres vil
lande i sanden der det engang lå brostein.

Nr. 4

Redaktøren og hele hans stab i *Paris libre* har tatt bladet fra munnen: Versailles må forstå at Paris er like sterk i dag som i går til tross for granater som treffer Porte Saint-Denis og en harmløs befolkning. Granatene sprer ikke frykt. Granatene viser pariserne veien til sinne og mot. Når granatene treffer, blir mennene løftet og kvinnene løftet. Parisere husker Sedan og beleiringen. 18. mars var en gave til Frankrike. Men nå ser vi ville forbrytelser ingen vil glemme. Vi ser skamløse krigere adlyde ordrer fra Thiers blindt.

Nr. 5

Militære rapporter fra ettermiddagen, 22. mai, like før klokken seks. Intens beskytning øverst i rue d'Amsterdam. Rue de Rome og Place Moncey er tapt til Thiers. Sammenstøt ved Batignolles. Harde kamper i rue du Helder. Ved Champs-Élysées kjemper vi bra. Sentrum er barrikadert, veier blokkert, trafikk er forbudt. Les Halles

er et hav og av våpen, Place du Château d'Eau like så. Barrikadene bygger vi, bygger i rue Béranger. Vi bygger i Porte Saint-Martin, Porte Saint-Denis. Place de la Bourse brenner. En granat har falt på Hôtel des Postes. Raoul Rigault er ikke død. En av granatene landet på hörnet av rue du Croissant. En annen granat traff en gassbrenner. Den eksploderte og skadet gutten hos vinhandleren. Thiers tok seg inn i Paris

i en båt. Trocadéro er tapt til Thiers, likeså rue Feydau og rue Vivianne. Delescluze har gitt ordre, men ingen vet hvilke.

Nr. 6

Ved rådhuset ser jeg Vermorel og Lefrançais. La Cecilia møter jeg, deretter Cluseret.
Jeg kan ikke beskrive hver barrikade,
men den på Place Blanche blir forsvart

av mer enn hundre kvinner.

Mot meg kommer ei ung jente. Jakobinerlue, rifle i hånda.

«Stopp, citoyen!»

Jeg stanser og viser passerseddelen. Hun slipper meg igjennom.

Hele natten var det kamper på høydene.

Nr. 7

Gare Montparnasse står i brann. Versailles skal ha tatt seg opp til Montmartre, rue Maubeuge, Place Saint-Georges. Fra vinduene i rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs kaster vi plater av marmor.

Det ryker fortsatt fra departementet, finansdepartemenet.

Nr. 8

Den internasjonale arbeiderforeningen
vedtok den 20. mai en erklæring med følgende innhold: Vi støtter arbeidernes krav og Kommunen!
Gobelins, Récollets,
Vaugirard, Château-Rouge, Batignolles, Popincourt, Vertbois, Hôpital Louis, Couronnes, Ternes,
Montrouge, Marmite, Gare de Bercy, kjeramikere, La Villette, Richard-Lenoir, fiskehandlere,
Acasias, Duvalle,
hele XIII. arrondissement, Relieurs,
optikere og Faubourg du temple
deltok på møtet. Ikke til stede: Malon og Varlin.

Nr. 9

Forskjellige saker.

Korrespondenten fra britiske *Times* rapporter

torsdag 18. mai: Ansvar for krigen ligger hos Thiers. De tror de kan styrte Kommunen, men vil ikke lykkes.

Forskjellige saker.

Innlegg i *Le Prolétaire*. Jeg ser unge mennesker reke omkring. Motivene avhenger av hvor de bor. Jeg bor i ellefte.

- Jeg kunne godt ha vært med i den bataljonen, men det blir for mye.
- Sjefen i det kompaniet er ikke seriøs.
- Jeg kjempet mot prøysserne, men franskmann mot franskmann? A-aldri!

E. Parthenay, ellefte arrondissement Forskjellige saker.

Versailles kontrollerer aviser som kommer med løgner. «Kommunen i oppløsning», står det i flere aviser. Det er løgn! «Protot arrestert da han flyktet.» Løgn!

«Raoul Rigault, prokurist i Kommunen, drept ved Porte de la Muette.» Løgn!

«Tre gisler skutt på Mazas, sammen med erkebiskopen!» Ha! Hans høyhet

er sunnheten selv. «En biskop i lenker ble myrdet av mobben.» Løgn!

Nr. 10

Vi synger det siste som nådde oss gjennom *Journal officiel* 25. mai, en onsdag i 1871, midt i den blodige uken.

Våre lesere vet at vi lider og sørger for dem som ble drept. Han som ble skutt

i rue Notre-Dame-de-Lorette,
gråter vi over, og flere som ham.

Han som ble fraktet til vår ambulanse, rett ved Pigalle,
gråter vi over, og flere som ham.

Han som ble skutt av sin bror bak gardiner i tredje etasje,
mødre og fedre som ser sine barn bli til intet når kulene treffer i hode og lunger. Men våre ideer er
lette som fugler som flyr når granatene treffer.

Like navnløse er vi som fugler. Vi er vår tid. Gå inn i din.

Nr. 11

Det siste vi så, var en kule som traff kommandanten fra Brussel. Kommandanten ble fraktet til Hôtel de Ville.

Ingen fikk vimpelen løs fra hans hender.

Leppene snurpet seg på kommandanten. Det siste vi hørte, var kampropet: «Leve Kommunen!»

Så fikk vi vimpelen løs fra hans hender og fortsatte kampen for frihet.

Nr. 12

Den blodige uken er nesten blitt søndag. Rundt tjue barn
som har reist barrikaden i tverrgaten nedenfor Faubourg du Temple,
den eldste knapt fjorten, har slåss mot regjering, mot Thiers, mot Versailles. Regjeringen, Thiers og
Versailles har besluttet at
alle som kjemper for frihet er fiender av staten. Også en gutt som har sett
at hans far fikk en kule i pannen og mor en i hånden.
Bataljonen av kvinner fra hele Montmartre har stilt seg
på hjørner, bak sandsekker. Vi er det siste vi synger. Vår tid er her.
Soldatene stormer opp trapper og finner seg plasser bak pene gardiner og skodder. Historien har
mange kapitler igjen, men vi er gått tomme for blekk.
Jeg pleide å elske Paris når det nærmet seg juni.
For en kontrast mellom barna og kvinnene nede på gaten,
og de som bak skodder og pene gardiner med ordre fra Thiers og Versailles har lagt an. Nå skal de
meie oss ned. Vi er lette som fugler når fuglene drar,
vi er lette som toner og ord, for i dag er vi mange som synger om frihet.

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