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NONSENSE

"Nonsense", what's that all about? Jumping into the middle: It is supposed to be a philosophy of music that has no other goal than to show that a philosophy of music is impossible. Because such a philosophy would only be possible if it left precisely this, i.e. philosophy itself, behind. In other words, a hopelessly breakneck endeavor that sets out to show philosophy what it CANNOT do, in order to simultaneously empower music to continue exactly where philosophy has to stop and turn back - the endeavor to say in words what can never be said in words.[1]

ADORNO LAMENTS on the loss of meaning in post-war music (in "The Ageing of New Music"). And by meaning he means the "musical-linguistic means" of: motifs, themes, transitions and reprises, i.e. the means that Schönberg - contrary to the inner logic of his own 12-tone technique - still wanted to hold on to at all costs. Neither Schönberg nor Adorno believed that the 12-tone technique itself could be sufficiently coherent. For Adorno, therefore, only the "musical-linguistic" means create "the musical context", "without which there can be no talk of music" (similarly in "The Ageing of New Music"). Adorno's criticism clearly shows what separates the older new music of Schönberg's time from the newer new music, i.e. what the listener Adorno is expected to listen to from 1950 onwards and what the thinker Adorno is no longer able to think. In his rejection of a music that is in the process of questioning previously central instances such as expression and semantics, the philosopher shows himself to be philosophically at a height (depth) from which he can only identify the "absurd" in it. For him, jeopardizing meaning and expression is the decline of the Occident. There can be "no more talk of music" in such an undertaking.

UNDERSTANDING COMES AFTERWARDS. I confess that I didn't understand a lot of the texts I wrote at the time I wrote them down. Perhaps there was a brief flash of understanding at the moment of writing - or shortly before - but by the next day at the latest, I no longer understood anything and wondered about my own formulations. Often, however, not even this 'flash' can serve as a guarantee; often I have only written what SOUNDS right, I have only trusted a formulation because of the way it sounded. In the early 80s, there was the new wave band "Ideal" with Annette Humpe as lead singer ("Deine blauen Augen machen

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[1] This text can be seen as a direct continuation of my article "Musik ist nicht wahr - oder: Warum es keine Philosophie der Musik geben kann", MusikTexte, 2017, issue 155, and consists of notebook entries from the end of 2016 to the beginning of 2017.

mich so sentimental"); when asked in an interview how she came up with her lyrics, she replied something similar: she doesn't follow the meaning, she just listens to the sound of the words. And after about 35 years of writing by listening, I would like to state that the method has proven to be consistent and, looking back, even makes sense from the point of view of meaning. And doesn't every musician know down to the tips of their hair that what sounds good is also right? And she knows this in a much more absolute sense than a philosopher could ever know anything: For what one philosopher recognizes as 'correct', the second may view from a different angle and already consider it to be a little less correct. On the other hand, there are no different views on the question of what a pure (beating-free) fifth is. It is not a question of opinion. It is "absolute" in the relative sense that sensory perceptibility and scientific measurability, beatinglessness and numerical proportion are largely congruent here. It could therefore be that if I trust the sound when writing texts, I am closer to such congruencies than if I only follow my (currently accessible) understanding of meaning. But trusting the sound also can be called being blind to the meaning in certain respects. It can be called writing without understanding. In fact, I only now understand some of the things I wrote in the early 90s. In the past, when I was asked about a published text and asked what I meant by that passage, my head would turn red: I couldn't explain it. The same applies to music: much of what I have composed only gradually becomes clear to me in its potential to make experience and perception transparent. Be it music or text: I didn't write what I understood, I wrote what I wanted to understand (and I hope that this is still the case, but I won't be able to judge that until later).

THE MODE OF PRESENCE. There is an irreconcilable discrepancy between our 'natural' (philosophers say "naive") claim to reality, that what we see before us is actually before us, and, on the other hand, the way this question is treated in Western philosophy. Philosophers largely agree that what the natural claim demands is a phantom, and instead offer a complex system of reference - e.g. the transcendental - to connect us to the thing in front of us. So there is this mode in which philosophy deals with the question of reality or real presence. But is this the only mode available to us? We can speak of 'one' mode despite all the differences between the various schools of philosophy: it is ONE mode in different variants. - The very fact of such unity should make us skeptical. There MUST be other modes! There ARE others!

TILT IMAGES. For Agamben, tilting images are "those geometric figures that, if they are looked at long enough, take on a different shape, from which no path, apart from the possibility of closing one's eyes, leads back to the first

shape"[2] - Here we have the schema again, the mode of the philosophers: "no path that leads back", not even in the tilting image. This is the mode of transcendentalism, the mode of dialectics and that of the linguists or the constitution of meaning. And my task is to show that I can very well tilt back. And what's the point of closing your eyes for a moment? A blink is enough. Whether the tilted image is a Necker cube or a 3D image or stereogram: Just a blink can throw us out of the targeted figure /3-D image and catapult us back to the "innocent" start. The need to blink is what distinguishes us from the gods, is the admission of our mortality. And art is perhaps the discipline that has cultivated jumping back from meaning, bouncing off it, swinging to and from, tilting, to the greatest extent.

SHE LOVES ME / SHE DOESN'T LOVE ME - and I'm obviously back in the 'philosophy is right / is NOT right' pendulum mode.

THE MAN WITHOUT CONTENT. That is Agamben's honorary title for the artist. In the book of the same name, many stimulating and readable motifs are brought together, but I still cannot agree with the conclusion. I consider what Agamben defines as the scope of the "aesthetic" to be a misdiagnosis. The changes brought about by "aesthetic" perception since the late 18th century are said to be responsible for the split between the artist and his audience, between creative subjectivity on the one hand and aesthetic judgment on the other.[3] However, the division described can already be found in the artist himself. In order to achieve recognition, he has no choice but to strive for the "Museum Theatrum" himself, to wear his skin to the market, to transfer his subjectivity into an object, so that the only way out for him is to run away from himself, to flee from his own objectification. The case is quite different for the viewer: Agamben shows how much even the aesthete is denied the opportunity to remain 'in the aesthetic', how much he has to fall prey to the 'bad' arts, the 'bad' taste. But in the description of the "split", he simply drops this point. Agamben explicitly speaks only of the viewer and visual arts, but extends his conclusion to art in general. To gauge the extent to which the audience can NOT be reduced to aesthetic perception, we need only think of the theater or opera of the late 19th century, of the Wagnerian ecstasies, which are impossible to grasp with the "aesthetic" judgment, or even the Kantian "disinterested pleasure", but rather miss the point entirely.

TRUE PROOF. "It is only in science that art can truly prove itself" (Hegel).[4] I am tempted to say that it is only in the

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[2] Georgio Agamben, Der Mensch ohne Inhalt, Edition Suhrkamp, 2012, p.20
[3] ibid. S.50
[4] quoted from Agamben, ibid. 55

failure of science (in the attempt to grasp art) that art receives its true proof.

THE MOUNTAIN - OR: WHAT DIFFERENTIATES THE SIMPLY-ONLY-THERE BEING OF A MOUNTAIN FROM THE NEVER-SIMPLY-ONLY-THERE BEING OF A PIECE OF MUSIC. The mountain was not simply there as long as it was made by God. Only since the divine will disappeared behind the mountain has this just-being-there emerged. Simply-just-being-there is therefore something that has come about historically. In order for a piece of music to simply be there, its composer (its 'creator') would have to disappear behind it. But how would that work? The composer can perhaps step back a little, but never disappear completely, no matter how much he would like to do so. And as long as a piece is 'made by someone', it is endowed with an intention, it tells us something that its author did not want to say - could not even have wanted to say - and that is the same as NOT simply being there, is an expression of the necessary split.

TO PHILOSOPHIZE IS TO LOSE BEING HERE. There are moments when I hate myself while "philosophizing" for how much I lose a here and now in the process, exactly what I am constantly and relentlessly trying to gain in art.

THE ART AS A MOUNTAIN is therefore not yet finished, not completely pushed aside. The matter of art's 'never-just-being-there' is linked to the perspective of the viewer, who only encounters art as something finished and completed, as something made. For the artist, however, art is the 'making', i.e. the unfinished. And in this view, the subsequent/final negations do not yet exist (nor does the "nihilism" that Agamben sees as the ground of art[5]).

THE DOING AND THE CALF. They are thus opposed to each other: The doing of the artist and the gaze of the viewer, which is always the gaze on the finished thing, is "calf", which he may only adore or curse.

KEEP IT GOING. I therefore do not want to follow Agamben's endeavor to make poiēsis the original mode of art, and thus equally the "space of truth"[6]. Poiēsis is the production of something, the transition from nothing to something - quite clearly: this is the structure of becoming truth, but not the structure of art. Production is only constituted by what is produced, and this misses the core of art. This core is rather to be grasped in "doing". However, this doing must be defined differently from Agamben. It must be detached from the 'opus' of the 'operare'. The purpose of doing is not to produce (something) but to keep it going. It is committed to a much

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[5] cf. the chapter "A self-destructive nothingness", ibid. 70ff.
[6] ibid. 91ff.

more original mode than that of the Greek ideal of art, and that is the mode of the ritual, the sacred action that produces nothing more than the presence itself. And this mode is also that of the abolition of the difference between the interior and exterior view of art, between artist and viewer. And also the abolition of the difference between 'winning' and 'losing' (the here and now).[7]

ART IS. Agamben sees art as the highest task of man, but by also falling back on ritual - albeit only fleetingly - he avoids addressing the incompatibility with his own conception.[8] As if that were not enough, artist and viewer are ultimately even reconciled and the initial division bridged, which sounds nice, but is only achieved by aligning art with the truth, making it the basis of the latter.

PREVENT STUPIDITY. The most fundamental task of philosophy would be to prevent stupidity.[9] Should philosophy ever succeed in preventing stupidity, in abolishing stupidity, it would have abolished itself at the same time. And not because the 'good' needs an 'evil' reason before which it can appear as 'good', not because it needs 'dung' for 'roses' to bloom, but because 'stupidity', the misunderstanding, the non-understanding, the difference to an 'understood' understanding is the prerequisite of philosophizing itself.

INTELLIGIBILITY HAS AN ONTOLOGICAL CHARACTER. This is Agamben's thesis[10], shortened by me to a formula, which is not actually about intelligibility as such, but about a very specific one. Nevertheless, at this moment I am only interested in the general case. In other words, the question of whether thinking itself, or man's ability to think, can be so easily ontologized. For then there would be no ontological difference between thinking (or hearing) and the things thought (or heard)...[11] It seems to me that there are immediate

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[7] Around 1980, I invented the figure of the 'vestal' as a profession for the hermaphrodite who appears in the title of my "Opus 1": *Der neuvermählte Hermaphrodit - zufällig und mit sich selber*. The hermaphrodite functions here as a figure of identification for the artist-subject who recognizes himself as divided, who sees his most noble task not in the production of something, but in not letting the fire go out.

[8] Agamben 135f

[9] Ray Brassier: "I agree with Deleuze's remark that ultimately the most basic task of philosophy is to impede stupidity".
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speculative_realism (quoted from: James Whitehead, "Bad Music", JLIAT, 2016)

[10] Georgio Agamben, Signum rerum, Edition Suhrkamp, 2009, p.38

[11] But Agamben also seems to have the abbreviated, general question in mind when he immediately quotes the poem "Description without place" by Wallace Stevens:
It is possible that to seem - it is to be,
As the sun is something seeming and it is.
The sun is an example. What it seems
It is and in such seeming all things are.

advantages in thinking of thinking as a thing, as something that exists independently and alongside other things. Then we are no longer tempted to confuse them with each other, or to take the thinking of a thing for the thing itself (the hearing of a sound for the sound).[12]

LANGUAGE AND WORLD / LANGUAGE AND MUSIC. There is a connection between the separation into language and world on the one hand and the detachment of music from language, a detachment that is already documented in antiquity in the separation of 'melos' and 'logos'.[13] In the distinction between music and language, music takes the place of the world to a certain extent, it becomes that of which - from the moment of separation - it is no longer certain whether it can still be (fully) reached by language. But what does the juxtaposition of world and music then mean?[14] In this constellation, music in turn represents the function of 'language', which is interesting precisely in so far as this 'representation' is concerned. Music takes the place of language without being able to fill this place completely. The music plays the game of 'language'. Like an actor, it takes on a role and mimes the operations of referring to something, of designating and creating meaning.

PURE HEARING. If there is such a thing (something similar) at all (hence a hearing that escapes semantics), then the "pure" in it is certainly not something more primal. On the contrary, it is something that has to be wrested from the meaning and thus comes 'after' it: a state of suspension that leaves the meaning for a moment in the indefinite, a pirouette or paradoxical loop that presupposes the meaning in order to escape it for a fleeting non-time.

TIME. "The actual dynamic mode of development of music, the idea of which was crystallized by Viennese classicism, that period in which being itself was made into a process and at the same time its result..." Here Adorno[15] gives us the opportunity to grasp what is excluded or contrasted with this

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[12] Wittgenstein seemed to have had something similar in mind when he wrote: "It is often clarifying to think of the imagining of colors, shapes, sounds, etc., etc., which plays a role in the use of language, as being replaced by the seeing of real color patterns, the hearing of real sounds, etc..., for example, recalling a memory image of a color by looking at a real color pattern that we carry with us; many of the processes in the use of language lose the appearance of the intangible, the occult, when one thinks of the possibility of this substitution." (Ludwig Wittgenstein, Eine philosophische Betrachtung; in: Schriften 5, 2nd ed., Frankfurt/M. 1982, p.130)

[13] see Georgio Agamben, Profanierungen, Edition Suhrkamp, 2015, p.32

[14] A difference that is characteristic of many of my works and that emerges when, for example, classical instruments and recordings of environmental sounds are placed in relation to one another.

[15] Theodor W. Adorno, Über das gegenwärtige Verhältnis von Philosophie und Musik, pdf.

formulation, namely the temporality of the preceding Baroque period. Furthermore, our complementary view allows us to point to the historicity of the (not only musical) concept of time. We thus recognize how closely the link between time and process is tied to the verbalization of music. Only in language can time become a process. In pre-linguistic music, however, time has nothing to do with process.

SWIFTS. Neither semantically nor semiotically can I explain why I find such endless pleasure in following the flight and cries of the swifts in the sky and along the facades of houses. The search for meaning soon comes to an end. But why - if everything is labeled and explained - why do I still have to keep watching?

WHY REDUNDANCIES. And why do we prefer to see the unchanging blue sea rather than our everyday environments, which are as changeable as they are diverse. Why do we pay an expensive summer vacation for such a blue "nothing"? And what can the semiotic model do about it? I would say it is destroyed by our inexhaustible desire for redundancy.

NO. When music mimics language, it can be so dazzling and successful that someone like Adorno can no longer imagine any other kind of music. Whereas it quickly becomes apparent how differently music is structured, namely by its inability to say 'no'. Only through the detour of a rhetorical convention (agreement) could such a 'no' be smuggled into the music.[16] In language, on the other hand, people have internalized the 'no' so much that they have forgotten that the 'no' does not exist outside of language. Everything that is not language - the mountain, the swifts, the blue sea - knows no 'no'. But man derives all his metaphysics from the 'no', the juxtaposition of himself and nature, the belief that he has something that nature does not have, from which he derives his superiority over nature. The 'no' is the construct with which man orders his world. Language, law, property, morality. And at the same time it is the chimera with which he misses the world. - This is where the philosopher would intervene at the very latest and accuse me of coining a dogmatic, pre-modern concept of the world. But I am an artist. And for me, there IS a world outside of language: before it and after it and on this side of the 'no'. Music knows the 'no' just as little as matter does. So if the philosopher cannot think this outside: art CAN. To understand the 'no' means both: to understand how language creates something that opposes us to the extra-linguistic, and how it simultaneously makes us incapable of achieving the extra-linguistic within it. Again, the philosopher would object that it is language itself that

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[16] In Beckett's "Words and Music" there is such a - not too successful smuggling - when the "words" shout loudly "No!" and the "music" tries to keep up by playing a "long A" according to the stage directions.

creates something like the extra-linguistic in the first place - but in our context this is just another expression for the inability to think music without reference to language. The extra-linguistic aspect of music is that which cannot have valid words, but nevertheless has availability, experienceability.

THE SPIRITLESS. For Hegel, "the immediate spirit" or "sensual consciousness" is "the spiritless".[17] Herbert Schnädelbach suggests translating 'spirit' with 'culture'.[18] If the spiritless thus mutated into the cultureless, what would music/art be then? Art precedes culture (in a non-historical sense). The cultureless could be its place.

SILENCE AND SILENCE. How different a word like 'silence' - or the less "folded" concept of 'stillness' - is for a philosopher or a musician. For the philosopher, the 'silence' that ends speech is already the end of everything: the end of language is the end of philosophy is the end of ontology - of being - is the end of the world. The exact opposite is true for the musician: when the silence starts, the music can begin. Silence is a beginning, it is the prerequisite for everything that is important to the musician. And he is not even a quirky, autistic loner. An entire cultural industry and cultural policy builds its most elaborate and expensive palaces just to guarantee precisely this silence: as a philharmonic or opera house.

MEANING. From the balcony, I can hear film music from a television set a little further away on the other side of the street: a broadly bowed violin tutti slowly moves a semitone, then a major third down, that's all. A single note, not sustained too briefly, would have done the trick: it indicates 'meaning'. It could belong to a crime drama where something 'meaningful' is to be indicated. Is that the paradigm of music, to create empty meaning? Something like an empty speech bubble in a comic strip, or at best a speech bubble filled with nothing but an exclamation mark... Music as that which opens up a horizon of meaning without filling it.

SYMBOL SYSTEM MUSIC. Music[19] is also a system of expression and symbols. "All music is also a character structure". Music, however, is additionally distinguished by the fact that it seeks to grasp those moments "in which a sense that takes possession of itself"[20] discovers that what is discovered is

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[17] Hegel, Preface, Phänomenologie, Nicol-Verlag, Hamburg, 2016
[18] Herbert Schnädelbach, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Junius, Hamburg, 2013, p.68
[19] I am paraphrasing here in part: Christian Bermes, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Junius, Hamburg 1998, p. 133. The paraphrase consists essentially in the fact that I have replaced the word 'philosophy' with 'music'.
[20] End of the paraphrase.

simultaneously full and empty; full of perspectives of symbolization, and empty of concrete meaning[21]; an experience that is capable of taking self-grasping AS emptiness positively and registering it as a gain. Of course, music is not 'true', but it is 'certain' (like the pure fifth): Grasping oneself in music is not a becoming of truth but of certainty. This is where language and music diverge. Merleau-Ponty's "body", on the other hand, as that which precedes the "perception of truth", is very much related to "music" as the "operation that turns signs into signs in the first place".[22] Nevertheless, one difference remains: for Merleau-Ponty, the essential category for the 'body' is always that which creates sense. The 'body' ends with sense.[23] Music goes one step further and ends with the affirmation of 'nonsense' - nonsense understood as the insight into the operation of sign-making without simultaneously crashing into the concrete wall of meaning, without having to end there, but rather moving beyond it and opening up to the certainty and relevance of nonsense. Nonsense IS the overcoming of the binary code of true and false, and it IS at the same time integration and incorporation of the overcome code in and as existence - or, somewhat less philosophically, in and as practice.

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[21] Today I would write: "...empty of concrete meaning". Soon after this "nonsense text", I made the acquaintance of Julia Kristeva's book, Die Revolution der poetischen Sprache, Frankfurt/Main, Suhrkamp, 1978, and learned from it to distinguish between sense and meaning, a distinction that has been very useful to me ever since, and is reflected in my article: "Das Ungesagte. On psychoanalysis and number symbolism", Positionen, 2018, issue 115

[22] Christian Bermes, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, p.134

[23] Cf. ibid. 88