

MUSICAL COMPOSITIONS AND FRACTURES. LEAVING TRACES IN MATERIAL, TECHNIQUE, AND THOUGHT.

Rebecka Sofia Ahvenniemi

ABSTRACT

“Each and every important work of art leaves traces behind in its material and technique,” Theodor W. Adorno postulates in *Aesthetic Theory*, as he describes the way a composition is both a result of its own time and reacts critically to the time it belongs to. This quote demonstrates a reversal: rather than merely an expression or an outcome of an artist’s idea, art itself is regarded as a source for change. The work may come to affect its own tools and materials and the social space around it. The primary question of this article is: what is it in musical composition that leaves the traces? This article attempts to move the focus away from discussion of finished works, and instead, depict how composition as a discipline engages in dialogue with its handcraft, historicity, and surrounding social world. I call this aspect of composition that possesses critical potential a *lingering reflection*. Slow and heteronomous in its nature, it presents a counterpoint to ideas that seem solid, are easily accessible and unquestioned.

KEY WORDS

Musical composition, Theodor W. Adorno, Sofia Gubaidulina, Critical theory, Linging reflection

“Each and every important work of art leaves traces behind in its material and technique,”¹ Theodor W. Adorno postulates in *Aesthetic Theory*, as he describes the way a composition is both a result of its own time and critically reacts to the time it belongs to. Simultaneously, this quote demonstrates an interesting reversal: rather than merely an expression or an outcome of an artist’s idea, art itself is regarded as a source for change; the composition comes to affect its own tools and materials and the social space around it. This article discusses epistemological questions of philosophy of music, or more specifically, of composition of music, the primary question being: what is it in composition that leaves the traces?

The opinion that art can rise above established truths and reach higher levels of meaning has a romantic ring to it and refers to a discourse that dominated in the nineteenth century. This discourse came to exist alongside other changes in society; the modern world, which came to promote rationality as a supreme value, put art in the position of needing to redefine its role. To establish an essential position for itself, not merely as “decoration” on top of the existing world, art needed to claim its autonomy.² Consequently, certain ineffability was often ascribed to art music. However, while the discourse of the Romantic era was commonly motivated by the attempt to lend art a non-reductive character, in Adorno’s thinking it became anchored in social criticism and pessimism regarding the possibility of the human being in the modern world experiencing anything “true” at all.

The specific approach of this article is to challenge the focus on finished works in the discussion of the philosophy of music and to argue that the consideration of the process of making a composition is also philosophically significant. This is done by moving the focus in the direction of composition of music: composition as an activity and an institution behind a work. Within this activity one engages in dialogue with the tools, musical materials, and the historicity of the discipline. These aspects are often overlooked; theories that discuss musical meaning tend to assume that the work is, in one way or another, merely the expression of a composer. It is viewed as an externalised expression of one’s inner thoughts.³

The discussion of this article is realised within the frameworks of Western art music. Philosopher Lydia Goehr points out that the tendency of ascribing music an ineffable status is related to discussing musical works as single objects rather than examining the many mechanisms and processes around music as an activity.

This will be discussed in the first chapter, “In the Backstage Area.” The second chapter, “The Dangers and Possibilities of Standardisation,” continues to discuss some of the myths that lie behind the understanding of a finished work, when viewed as “pitch put together in a system.” The aim is to throw light on the complexity of process that goes unacknowledged.

When “leaving traces” is discussed in a contemporary context, the question does not only concern musical composition, but it also touches on the overall issues of the situation of contemporary music as a genre. It concerns the ideals put forward by early modernists such as Schoenberg, who promoted the idea that a work should negate the preceding works and the aesthetics. These ideals are still present as norms, or at least as a horizon, of contemporary music. The relationship between a musical work and society was established in a new way. This is discussed in the chapter “A Negative Activity in a Positive Sense?” in light of the social criticism of musicologist Rose R. Subotnik. According to Subotnik, the norms of contemporary music have isolated the field. This is a central argument, as it raises the question of whether it is possible for music in the contemporary world to leave traces at all. In the chapter that follows, “Flowers Appear Along the Way: Lingered Reflection,” I will describe the musical thinking of composer Sofia Gubaidulina as an example of a compositional approach that turns away from the merely structural features of a work and includes social aspects in a lingering process of compositional reflection.

Adorno’s thinking, which offers a framework for this article, is mainly applied in light of its contribution to the epistemological questions of art’s role, and possibilities, in the modern world. As someone who has deeply engaged in the discussion of composition within the frameworks of philosophy, he claimed that “finished works” hide their own process in order to privilege their completeness. From the perspective of a finished work, the musical materials and rules appear as set in a way that creates an illusion of the work having emerged simply as an idea of a composer. Adorno’s thinking is relevant to further perspectives on the subject, including aspects that concern the genesis of a work, such as cultivation of cultural codes, education, and experimentation within a practice. In the end, I will present a new concept, *lingering reflection*, to envisage an activity that could gradually challenge paradigms over time. The purpose of this concept is to highlight the complex dynamics of a musical work in the making.

THE BACKSTAGE AREA

An act of historically tracing the concept of a musical work helps us understand it as interwoven with certain conventions and values. Philosopher Lydia Goehr puts forward the idea that the concept of a musical work, in the way we know it today, came to exist as late as 1800, in line with the development of numerous other concepts. These concepts relate to the practice of score music, the role of a composer, and “the rise of the ideals of accurate notation and perfect compliance.”⁴ One of the relevant features of the modern concept of a musical work is its “self-containedness.” While the historical background of the concept of a musical work is complex and manifold, reflecting the fact that there *is* a historical development behind it also enables reflections on how the role of the composer came to exist, and what kind of myths lie behind it. Alongside this rise of the modern concept of a musical work developed the role of the composer as a specific type of creator.

Philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff suggests that neglecting the social conventions that lie behind the musical work might be deliberate and that, in this neglect, “we are touching on some of the deep features of our modern way of looking at the arts.”⁵ Wolterstorff asks: “Could it be that we have wanted to see art as separate from society so that we could see it as *above* society?”⁶ What appears to accompany the idea of a self-contained musical work is assigning it a certain mysticism. When we ascribe certain values to music, of it reflecting a higher culture and timelessness, we immediately place it outside the social world.

Goehr suggests that music has become interesting for philosophy exactly because it is taken to be something unexplainable. For a less mystifying approach to music, Goehr suggests that we need to focus on what we are *doing* when we engage in music: “It’s like going to the back of a stage and seeing all the mechanics of how some things are put together.”⁷ Goehr also claims that the philosophy of music has been cancelling out its performative aspect, or to quote her directly, it has been “shutting up the musician.”⁸ According to Goehr, focussing on the performance instead of the perception of existing musical works could contribute to a change of perspective.⁹ Could the interest philosophy has shown in discussing musical works relate to its tendency to discuss singled-out objects that are more fitting for an analytical discourse?

I follow Goehr’s suggestion that moving the focus to the “backstage area” rather than merely discussing the perception of finished works reveals something philosophically significant.

However, any discussion of a performance or a musician could refer to a person performing already composed music. A composition itself could, again, appear categorically as a finished material, without further discussion, simply delivered to the musician. This approach appears in Christopher Small's concept of "musicking," a concept developed to challenge universalising attitudes within Western traditions of classical music: "[C]omposing, practicing and rehearsing, performing, and listening are not separate processes but are all aspects of the one great human activity that is called musicking."¹⁰ Small suggests that the meaning of a work is part of the meaning of the event, and thus, one is not able to make such a clear distinction between "work" and "event," as for example Carl Dahlhaus does in *The Idea of Absolute Music* (1989, [1978]).¹¹ While Small's contribution is useful as a counterreaction to the hegemony of Western art music, he appears to reduce compositional activity to merely providing a score or other material for performance: "*To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing* [original use of cursive]."¹² This may, in the end, turn a composition into a "thing delivered to the musician," keeping it outside of the activity of musicking. While Small aims to break down the rigidness of historical categories of work, performer, event, and composition, and show how they all are interwoven in the event of musicking, his writing carries the seed to supporting universalising ideas. Describing composition as "providing material for performance" refers to a mindset where a composition itself is a material, or a "pitch material put in a system." This view doesn't recognize how social aspects are already interwoven in the activity of, for example, writing a musical score alone behind the desk. Small's view tends towards an understanding that the music is first simply composed, and then placed in a social context of performance, where musicking actually finds place.

My suggestion is that having a more nuanced understanding of composition as an activity that absorbs social context and takes actively into account its own historicity, including when writing a score, is what brings us closer to understanding the epistemological possibilities of music.

THE DANGERS AND POSSIBILITIES OF STANDARDISATION

The aim of this chapter is to suggest that focussing on the standardised components of a musical work, such as tones, harmonies

or gestures, as a given point of departure, prevents us from seeing what potentials music may carry. Musical notation represents these components, consolidates them, and makes them appear as universal, rather than something in continuous change, intertwined with an historical and cultural development.

The difficulty of seeing how these elements interact becomes clear in the many false notions that circulate in popular ways of speaking about music. To name an example, the television series *Black Mirror* presents the episode “Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too,”¹³ where a famous song writer and pop star named Ashley, who is unable to—or perhaps does not want to—compose anymore, is doped and put into a coma. A brain scanning device transcribes the creative activity from the area of her brain where new songs are born. On the computer screen one can observe transcriptions of brain activity into pitches and chords, which are further polished into finished songs. Here, it is both assumed that music is created primarily in the *head* of the composer, and that pitches and chords are the “musical particles” from which the music is built.

The above example is a result of standardisation of a view, whereby specific components start to appear as paradigmatic, to the extent that they are taken as a given within public discourse. The musical work seems to have been composed out of components, or “musical atoms,” that are put together and organised in time. In this scenario the material, the parameters of which have already been defined, is taken as a point of departure without engaging with the question of what this material is.

Another consequence of this approach, atomistic in its nature, is the use of standardised pitch material for creating MIDI sound files and of instrumental sounds in computer programmes as compositional tools. The playback sound of notated elements could, with today’s technology, sound nuanced and precise, and can accurately follow diminuendos and other detailed marks of expression. Nonetheless, these are projections of existing musical idioms. The question is not merely empirical; no matter how nuanced and precise the pre-programmed sounds are, they are still realisations of ways of thinking that are already part of a standardised cultural norm, and in the end, a projection of pre-existing human ideas. In this scenario, generating sounds in a programme does not necessarily enable fundamentally new thinking and development.

The vulnerable position of compositional possibilities that are as yet unarticulated (as in the mutual development of composition and its materials) is interesting to observe. As Jeppesen notes in his description of the dangerous status of “written rules” in a compositional context:

A rule, once it is formulated on paper, can exert an influence out of all proportion to the importance previously attributed to it can, indeed, exercise an almost magic power. It becomes dangerous. Out of respect for what is written down, composers strive, perhaps half consciously, to bring their practice into the nearest possible accord with the inscribed rules. And thus the influence of theory reacts upon practice.¹⁴

According to Jeppesen, the written word puts forward something that appears as a universal norm, even though, initially, theory was deduced from practice. If a writer were not careful, not only does an unreflective approach to written rules narrow down the thinking of possibilities, but it also creates authoritative frameworks around these rules.

If written rules can send this type of signals, forwarding certain standards as norms, then the musical notation can easily send similar signals regarding the standards of music. The development of notation is intimately related to the Western music tradition; however, I suggest that it does not only function as a way of expressing musical phenomena, but as something that further affects the thinking of music. F. E. Sparshott and Lydia Goehr provide a historical perspective: “[t]he drive towards polyphony and polyrhythm was one of the factors that led to the development of a graphic, mensural notation, without which such complex music could scarcely be learnt.”¹⁵ As a consequence of the systematisation of notation—with key advancements in the thirteenth century—the music, too, gradually changed. Musical structures themselves gained more focus.

To understand the dynamics between notation and musical thinking, their interwoven development, one could compare notation with written language. The phenomenological thinker Don Ihde makes this comparison and claims that written language flattens out some dramaturgical aspects of the voice by standardising it, but also provides it with new possibilities: “Notation does for music what writing does for language. For example, it allows repetition.”¹⁶ Notation allows one to organise the material, to rotate, permutate, and vary. The traditions of notation partly

determine the material a composer works with. Ihde notes further that “different embodiments entail different selectivities.”¹⁷ Musical notation could be said to communicate, or consolidate, a selection of parameters, for example pitch and duration. Standardised notation develops opportunities, but simultaneously excludes others, yet unknown possibilities. While notational practice preserves some of the idiomatic understanding of musical components, it simultaneously creates resistance: elements that are not idiomatic to common notation, such as timbral elements or musical gestures, end up looking complex in the score, even if they are not complex in their sound structure. In a compositional process one continuously and consciously engages in a dialogue with notation and its historicity.

My aim is to argue that by looking at the making of a musical work as participation in a culture of notation, through active choice, one also participates in challenging idiomatic elements and developing musical possibilities—and ultimately, in musical thinking. New notational practice is in continuous development in relation to a shared historical understanding. However, while the above examples still mostly concern internal structures of a composition, the following chapters will look at this issue from a wider perspective of the social context of a musical work.

A further observation from this chapter is that a certain tendency towards normativity begins to stand out. Challenging musical frameworks emerges as a value, an ideal, something one “ought to do.” The message could also be stated as: one needs to be careful not to lean blindly on a standardised understanding of music as simply components being put together in a system. The ideal seems to be that a musical work of our time, in one way or another, ought to be reflective of its own musical process and historical situation.

A NEGATIVE ACTIVITY IN A POSITIVE SENSE?

The subject of this article, leaving traces, not only relates to what a successful work does, but seems to function as a norm or an ideal—an expectation—of how contemporary music, understood as art music in the Western culture, should operate. Arnold Schoenberg, who has had a considerable influence on the values of contemporary music, states: “There is no great work of art which does not convey a new message to humanity; there is no great artist who fails in this respect.”¹⁸ The ideal of progression and of challenging existing musical systems is present in Schoenberg’s writing as it is in his musical approach, that uses the twelve-tone

technique to move away from tonal centres. For Schoenberg: “*Art means New Art* [original use of cursive].”¹⁹

To get a better understanding of the ideals of contemporary music, we may follow the point made by musicologist Rose R. Subotnik, that contemporary music is to be understood primarily as a normative concept, not a descriptive one: “[C]ontemporary music cannot be considered a chronologically descriptive term, encompassing all newly created twentieth century art music. It is a historically normative term, with aesthetic, intellectual and even moral implications.”²⁰ While Subotnik wrote these thoughts in 1987, many of the ideals she describes—as they draw historical lines of the development of specific values—can still be regarded as present within today’s understanding of contemporary music, including its position in the society.

In addition to the ideal of presenting something new, the work of music becomes a structure *in itself* and exists only for its own sake. Subotnik writes: “To be fully contemporary, a composition must be able to count for its own integrity as a structure *sui generis*; it must discourage efforts to understand it as an example, no matter how excellent, of a preexisting kind.”²¹ A work of contemporary music should not be understood as an example of something else, like a style, for example. Schoenberg himself, who Subotnik also references, states: “One thinks only for the sake of one’s idea. And thus art can only be created for its own sake. [...] [T]here is only ‘l’art pour l’art’, art for the sake of art alone.”²²

Another feature of contemporary music concerns its necessitating a specific type of structural listening. Subotnik presents this as follows:

To defend its own autonomy, contemporary music, unlike earlier new music, requires a particular mode of listening that reinforces its isolation from society. This mode, as set forth by Schoenberg and Adorno, among others, can be called “structural listening,” a process that amounts to following and comprehending the unfolding realization, with all of its inner relationships, of a musical conception.²³

One could add to this that contemporary music doesn’t attempt to be music for the masses but demands that the listener has an educated ear. Schoenberg himself, too, uses such concepts in his discourse, as excellence and advancedness, regardless of what the masses are drawn to: “[N]o artist, no poet, no philosopher and no musician whose thinking occurs in the highest sphere would

degenerate into vulgarity in order to comply with a slogan such as ‘Art for All’. Because if it is art, it is not for all, and if it is for all, it is not art.”²⁴

The norms mentioned above—newness, art for art’s sake, and what could be called uncompromised intellectuality—are, to some extent, the defining terms that describe the norms of contemporary music today. However, the terms have their specific and historical origins.²⁵ Adorno’s thinking sets a context around this issue: while the philosopher echoes the romantic attempt of ascribing art a space beyond rationality, he simultaneously views art as a thoroughly social institution. According to Adorno, art is a reflection of the society it belongs to. In the modern era it has become a reflection of the dominant rationality taking over and suppressing nature, or the concrete reality. The epistemological frameworks for this are outlined in Theodor W. Adorno’s and Max Horkheimer’s work *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), where they argue that, while the Enlightenment claimed dominance over nature, it simultaneously reduced nature to what is identical with ideas of the human mind. What is considered real from the perspective of modern rationality is pre-defined. Thus, modern rationality becomes a circular activity, projecting its own reasoning upon the world.²⁶ This thinking sets context for plenty further Adorno’s writings that circle around art and art’s position in the modern times. To comprehend the view of art forced into autonomy, it is vital to understand how Adorno and Horkheimer depict the development and the consequences of the Enlightenment and modern rationalism.

According to Adorno, the only way for art to survive in the modern world is to simultaneously identify with this world and reveal its contradictions through its form. This is not achieved by creating counter-claims—as these would only strengthen a previously existing discourse—but through identification with the darkness of the world. Adorno describes art in modern times as a “rationality that criticizes rationality without withdrawing from it.”²⁷ Artworks are, in the end, enigmas: they are able to show how instrumental rationality functions, and, at the same time, cannot be reduced to such instrumentality. In a way their “uselessness” itself functions as social criticism. For Adorno, the situation facing the contemporary composer is one where he is both “burdened with a task that, previously, the intersubjective language of music largely took on itself” and in need of becoming “aware of the traits of the external and the mechanical in his self-made language [...]”²⁸ Modern artworks need to become

individuals; they need to legitimate themselves out of their own rationalist premises, defined by the works themselves.²⁹ This situation, where music, too, becomes a system that dominates over nature, reflects “a longing present since the beginning of the bourgeois era: to ‘grasp’ and to place all sounds into an order, and to reduce the magic essence of music to human logic.”³⁰ The negative activity of modern music is positive in a sense that, if there is hope, art carries this hope.

Adorno writes respectfully about Schoenberg’s musical inventions: “The question which twelve-tone music ask of the composer is not how musical meaning is to be organized, but rather, how organization is to become meaningful. What Schoenberg has produced during the last twenty-five years are progressive attempts to answer this question.”³¹ Two things are to be noted about this quote. First, the subject of the sentence is not the composer, but the system: the twelve-tone music asks a question of the composer. In this way, the society, the situation, or the musical system require a solution from the composer, and this reveals the existence of a certain necessity from within the music. Second, this state of affairs places the composer in an awkward situation, one that inescapably combines freedom with a lack of freedom. Composition in the modern age might well appear as having arisen from the free choice of an individual, but at the same time the price of this freedom is high.³²

Subotnik claims that the ideals of contemporary music lead it towards isolation and unrealistic self-definition. Even when composers bring in material from a common social sphere, they tend to make the composition concern completely its internal structure, protecting it against “even the simple social activity of comprehension.”³³ Subotnik writes further:

The failure of contemporary music to establish close ties with society is symptomatic of underlying contradictions in a cultural value system which has propelled it towards a self-definition on untenable terms, and indeed encouraged it in the illusion that total self-definition is possible in society at all.³⁴

The total self-definition claimed by contemporary music is, according to Subotnik, a project which is doomed to fail, and one that exhibits some of the symptoms of the modern world. This might be because if art is to have any value as current social criticism—or as negative activity—it should continuously and

critically reflect upon its society. According to Subotnik “[t]his cannot be done by continuing to ask how an individual can create a complete musical universe and protect it against the depredations of an incomparably stronger society [...]”³⁵

However, with Subotnik’s writing it is not always clear whether she refers to the norms of contemporary music as a social practice, or to the individual choices made by composers. This is relevant, as the latter leads to false conclusions. For an individual composer today, it could take a long time to understand one’s position as a part of a larger socio-historical context. As Wolterstorff, too, points out about compositional practice, a learner always joins a community of other practitioners. A practice involves standards of excellence, which a student has to both learn how to model, and to accept the authority of. Wolterstorff writes: “The ‘why’ of the works is in good measure to be found in the artist’s wanting them to fit into those practices.”³⁶

Looking at the situation of contemporary music, the critique of Subotnik appears to have validity precisely because the isolation is not necessarily the individual choice of a composer. Contemporary music has turned into a practice of social isolation, and to some extent it appears to have forgotten its original purpose. From this perspective, contemporary music has become a musical genre; the sounds of extended techniques on a violin, the squeaks, or the buzzing sounds of a tremolo don’t necessarily carry any higher degree of reflective power than other musical expression, yet the social space coded in these sounds signifies a music that is serious or challenging.

If contemporary composition has lost both its relationship to social context and some of its reflective value, then, this situation does not exist merely because individual composers create individual music, but for the opposite reason: the original reasons have been forgotten and the practice is practiced for the sake of it. This situation—where a tool becomes the goal in itself—reflects modern rationality in the way Adorno presented it.³⁷ While Schoenberg was, according to Adorno, well aware of the difference between a technique and a compositional activity (and he did not approve of calling twelve-tone music an “atonal style”), Adorno suggests that the generations that followed Schoenberg were no longer aware of this difference: the medium had turned into a goal in itself.³⁸ According to Adorno, modern music sacrifices itself by taking upon itself the darkness of the world, and in becoming something no one wants to become involved with: “It dies away unheard, without an echo. Around music as it is

heard, time springs together in a radiant crystal, while unheard it tumbles perniciously through empty time.”³⁹

From the viewpoint of Subotnik and the critique presented by Adorno some decades earlier, the possibility of music leaving traces behind in the modern world appears bleak. In the picture of musical works becoming individuals, alienated from society, and forwarding isolation as a value, both the question of what it is that leaves the traces, and where the traces are left, appear to disappear into emptiness like a blank shot. Is there any way for contemporary music in today’s world to leave traces?

FLOWERS APPEAR ALONG THE WAY: LINGERING REFLECTION

The difficulty to locate the origin of a composition—whether it is in the first or the fifteenth draft, or simply in impressions or ideas that emerged while sitting at a concert—is relevant to the overall question of what it is that leaves the traces. The next step will be to study whether fractures on the surface of the ideas in societal norms could be caused by music, even when one or more of the three norms, described in the above chapter, are sacrificed.

One could say that the finished works “hide” their own process in order to privilege their completeness. Adorno writes: “[A] work that in its own terms, in its own texture and complexion, is only possible as emergent and developing, cannot without lying at the same time lay claim to being complete and ‘finished.’”⁴⁰ For Adorno, finished works *lie*. Here, Adorno acts as a spokesman for the vulnerable complexity that lies behind what might, in the end, crystallise as a finished work.⁴¹ The elements of a composition emerge in such codependency that one can’t pick them apart and deduce a “primary cause” from the process.

This process could be compared to a lingering, growing plant, which has its roots mostly in the ground, under the earth. Over time, a sprout, a weed, or a flower appears above the ground, visible or audible to an onlooker or listener.⁴² This comparison carries some features of laboratory experimentation. Even after a work is performed as finished, the often countless revisions from one performance to another exhibit the complexity and the fragmentary nature of the compositional process.⁴³

How does this process stand in relation to the ideals of “newness”, “art for art’s sake”, and “uncompromised intellectuality”? Composer Sofia Gubaidulina offers a refreshing example—through her musical attitude, including both her compositions and thoughts about music—of how music may be able to negate the social world without claiming newness as a

normative value, and without pushing music towards radically limited audiences. Gubaidulina claims that “composers make efforts in a certain direction [...] because music itself demands it, and our efforts naturally start to turn in this direction.”⁴⁴ However, change emerging from objective necessity could be slow, and go unnoticed. According to Gubaidulina, these changes are not necessarily perceived as innovations.⁴⁵ She describes her own compositional process as: “...an experiment, my personal experiment. It is my risk. Sometimes I succeed in it, sometimes not. Sometimes I am happy if I find a successful solution for at least one episode.”⁴⁶

Gubaidulina discusses her piano concerto *Introitus* (1978) as follows:

One could say it is not a concerto at all. The piano part is [...] completely deprived of virtuosity. Everything is meant to sound *pianissimo*; the pianist listens to an extremely long major tenth, trying to enter into the depth of it. I do not want either virtuosic or assertive passages; I do not want loud chords. My soloist penetrates into the depth of the sound; he/she listens and invites all the others to listen, too.⁴⁷

Gubaidulina’s reflections around her choices show historical engagement and a will to develop musical elements from inside of the field, with an awareness of social roles. She makes the point that the concept of the concerto changed drastically since the nineteenth century. In particular, she writes, the concept of a hero—the role traditionally given to a soloist—is different today: “The soloist is no longer a hero in the same sense as in the classical and romantic concertos. At that time, the hero was victorious: an outstanding individual, a winner in an unequal competition. The main presumption was that the hero knows the absolute truth, knows where to lead the crowd.”⁴⁸ In this constellation there was an opposition of the soloist and the orchestra, which, according to Gubaidulina represented “dramatic oppositions as a hero and a crowd, a hero and an army, an orator and an audience.”⁴⁹ Gubaidulina reflects further that these concepts have become irrelevant in the twentieth century: “[T]he hero is disappointed in everything, nobody knows what the truth is. And contemporary composers need to search for new concepts, for new interpretations of soloist-orchestra relations. I too am searching.”⁵⁰ Through her musical choice, Gubaidulina responds to the history of social roles and ideals, not only to the inner musical relationships of her composition.

Relevant to the subject of the previous chapter, Gubaidulina, too, appears to value the critical voice, or “negative activity,” of new music. She mentions that her desire is to rebel and swim against the stream. For Gubaidulina this means “...to introduce seriousness in art.”⁵¹ Her approach to newness has a different shade than Schoenberg’s, even though Schoenberg, too, presents the idea of change emerging from inner necessity.⁵² For Schoenberg, the newness is still emphasised as a value, as seen in the previously mentioned quote: “*Art means New Art.*”⁵³ Gubaidulina, on her part, states: “[I]t absolutely does not matter whether it looks new or old. News is good for newspapers, for journals. But art strives for depth, not for the news!”⁵⁴ The strive for newness and innovation is, according to Gubaidulina, harmful, in that it leads the artist to lose concentration and focus instead on the external effect.⁵⁵

Even though this remark does not necessarily contradict Schoenberg—depending on what one means with the term *newness*—Gubaidulina’s approach appears to open up specific aspects that usually go unmentioned, and are never emphasised, by those who describe the norms of contemporary music: Gubaidulina combines a deep historical awareness with reflecting social attitudes and roles that are already embedded in music. Her way of reflecting exceeds mere internal musical processes or the common tendency of locating musical value in internal musical structure. Importantly, the social aspect does not become anything additional to the music. On the contrary, it involves studying how historical attitudes are already embedded in music, and then including these in the reflective process of composition. While such contextual—even political—understanding is an important aspect in the work of many contemporary composers, the question is rather where the emphasis lies, and what kind of concepts the musical discourse circles around. Could the “Gubaidulinas” of this world be key to rescue the field of composition from its state of isolation?

A final aspect of Gubaidulina’s approach to be mentioned, before taking account of the central question, is her faith in the audience rather than the music critic. According to Gubaidulina, the audience “applauds composers and performers for presenting something that allows people to experience a state of concentration, to bring themselves into a state of wholeness, to cure themselves from the state of dispersal and disconnection that they suffer in everyday life.”⁵⁶ This seems to stand in contrast to some of the approaches in contemporary music. According to

Alex Ross, it was partly due to the external world not acknowledging modern music at all, that composers stopped caring for the attention from the mass audiences, and continued doing their own thing regardless. Ross writes:

Schoenberg's reasoning was this: if the bourgeois audience was losing interest in new music, and if the emerging mass audience had no appetite for classical music new or old, the serious artist should stop flailing his arms in a bid for attention and instead withdraw into a principled solitude.⁵⁷

In this picture the contemporary composer appears as a figure of solitude, a victim of the world's misunderstanding. Later, this image appears to have become both romanticised and normalised. In other words, it has become a form of institutionalised opposition. The refusal to consider the external world appears to have become a highly valued attitude among contemporary composers, even to the extent of taking pride in it.

Of the three norms (newness, art for art's sake, and uncompromised intellectuality), it appears that only the second norm remains uncompromised in Gubaidulina's work. While the aim of this article is not to solve the situation of contemporary music, this approach appears to allow for a scenario where it is indeed possible for the music to speak to society without being confined to isolation. Whatever the elements that are absorbed into compositional work, they will eventually make a comment onto their context. The exclusion of social awareness isolates the work from its presence as a social object.

The slow, deliberate, and complex engagement with tradition, which allows all the elements mentioned above to be absorbed into the compositional process, is what I define as *lingering reflection*. Even though it might not be possible to find a definition for this phenomenon once and for all, we are still left with descriptions, such as slow, focussed, and socially aware. The concept is meant to embrace the many aspects of composition and how they converge over time. It demonstrates that the artistic results do not emerge linearly as ideas that suddenly appear in the composer's head. In the end, it may not be the result of a composer's innovation at all, or perhaps not newness per se that has the potential of leaving traces. As an approach to composition, lingering reflection is likely to present a counterpoint to the world that has become absorbed with the superficial, with the easily accessible and transparent.

LEAVING TRACES

Adorno's dictum, that "Each and every important work of art leaves traces behind in its material and technique,"⁵⁸ addresses the inner structures of the work. By using Gubaidulina's work and practice as an example in the chapter above, I explored the possibility of social aspects being embedded into the compositional process. In this scenario the work speaks back to the world in a wider sense, not merely through its inner structures.

Adorno's contribution to this issue appears to be the epistemological reversal: while art emerges from the social mechanisms, it is precisely by identifying with the world, and by revealing the irrationality of the rationality itself, that art is able to perform a critique of this world.⁵⁹ However, the limitation of Adorno's social criticism is that it tends to circle around the internal structures of musical works to a greater degree than the social world wherein the music is wrapped. Markus Mantere mentions that Adorno mostly ignores other elements, such as social hierarchy, nationality, sexual identity, and how music is commercially mediated to institutions.⁶⁰ These are not external aspects that come to affect the way music is communicated, but they can be considered elements that are already present in, and form the frameworks for, the process of composition. Mantere notes that "Adorno withdraws from the social network of music and returns to his leaning chair to read the score."⁶¹ Even though Adorno's writing itself may not be incorrect on this matter, Mantere's critique of Adorno appears as in its place when it comes to where Adorno's emphasis lies, and that the applicability of his thinking could be limited in reference to, for example, questions of social identity within music.

According to Wolterstorff, "[i]f freedom and universality are principally what one looks for in art, then the embodiment in art of social reality will never catch one's eye."⁶² I propose that it is the act of lingering reflection—which is itself slow and heteronomous in its nature, and that absorbs and lingers around many aspects of the world—that is responsible for leaving traces in the materials and in the surrounding social space. In the best-case scenario, and perhaps the only scenario for contemporary music if it is likely to survive, the traces are left in ways that include the social conditions embedded in musical codes. The musical work is a social object, and to be reflective, it ought to reflect on its social situation as part of its constitution. This type of thinking questions its own methods and causes its paradigms to change over time.

The different degrees of complexity in the musical composition can be called degrees of denseness of lingering reflection. Often great amount of time is invested in compositions that are dense with lingering reflection. However, it doesn't necessarily refer directly to, for example, the complexity of musical notation. Primarily, it refers to the complexity that results from the inclusion of multiple aspects in the compositional thinking. Lingering reflection allows these aspects to converge in such ways that it is impossible to deduce one aspect from another and identify what it was that came first.

To conclude, I suggest that this type of thinking is not exclusive to artistic composition, but can also be present in other areas of the society. Philosophy, too, could operate with different densities of lingering reflection. It is hardly the case that philosophical thinking ought to begin from a "first reason" in a Cartesian sense, any more than artistic composition. By absorbing the spheres of the world and treating critically its own methods and vocabularies, the reflective activity could cause fractures to the polished surface of modern idealism. However, lingering reflection can easily remain without a clear voice, as it represents the opposite of what is immediately given in language (or music), that which can be judged quickly and superficially. The existing conceptions that appear as stable and universal are exactly those that are fractured through compositional process.

- 1 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minnesota: Regents of University of Minnesota, 1997, [1970]), 44.
- 2 The debate in the Romantic era was based on several types of attempts to “protect” the autonomy of music. One example is the work *On the Musically Beautiful* (1854) by Eduard Hanslick (1825-1904), where he opposes the common attempt of connecting music with the aesthetics of feelings and reception, as these are dependent on cultural convention.
- 3 Among many others, philosopher R. G. Collingwood makes the claim that “[t]he actual making of the tune is something that goes on in [the composer’s] head, and nowhere else.” (R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), 134.) This view is not discussed further in this article.
- 4 Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), 103.
- 5 Nicholas Wolterstorff, “The Work of Making a Work of Music,” in Philip Alperson, ed., *What Is Music? An Introduction to the Philosophy of Music* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press 1987), 108.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 127.
- 7 Kellen Quinn, “Music is marvellous, but not mysterious: an interview with Lydia Goehr” (Aeon; published online Dec 2015), accessed 25 April, 2021. <https://aeon.co/videos/music-is-marvellous-but-not-mysterious-an-interview-with-lydia-goehr>.
- 8 Rebecka Ahvenniemi, “Lydia Goehr in Bergen: Philosophy Meets Music,” in *Blog* (Bergen, Norway; published online 22 Jan 2019), accessed 25 April, 2021. <http://rebeckaahvenniemi.com/blog-5/>. Content confirmed by Lydia Goehr.
- 9 Ahvenniemi, “Lydia Goehr in Bergen: Philosophy Meets Music.”
- 10 Christopher Small, *Musicking, The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 11.
- 11 *Ibid.*; Small refers to the work of Carl Dahlhaus: *Die Idee der absoluten Musik* (Kassel: Bärenreiter-Verlag, 1978). A version with an English translation and introduction by Roger Lustig: *The Idea of Absolute Music* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989).
- 12 Small, *Musicking*, 9.
- 13 Charlie Brooker, “Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too,” in *Black Mirror* (Netflix, 2019).
- 14 Jeppesen, *Counterpoint. The Polyphonic Vocal Style of the Sixteenth Century*, x.
- 15 F.E. Sparshott and Lydia Goehr, “II. Historical survey antiquity - 1750,” in *Philosophy of Music*, ed. Lydia Goehr, F.E. Sparshott, Andrew Bowie, and Stephen Davies (Grove Music Online, 2001), accessed 25 April, 2021. <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000052965>.
- 16 Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice. The Phenomenologies of Sound* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 199.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 200.
- 18 Arnold Schoenberg, “New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea,” in *Style and Idea. Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1975 [1946]), 113-124, at 114.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 115.
- 20 Rose Rosengard Subotnik, “The Challenge of Contemporary Music,” in *What Is Music? An Introduction to the Philosophy of Music*, ed. Philip Alperson (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press 1987), 359-396, at 371.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 372.
- 22 Schoenberg, “New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea,” 124.
- 23 Subotnik, “The Challenge of Contemporary Music,” 375.
- 24 Schoenberg, “New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea,” 124.
- 25 This way of formalising “three norms of contemporary music” is my choice, made specifically for the purpose of this article. It takes its inspiration from the text “The Challenge of Contemporary Music” by Subotnik, but doesn’t occur in this way in her text.
- 26 Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002, [1947]).
- 27 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 71.
- 28 Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis, London: University of Minneapolis Press, 2006, [1949]), 81.
- 29 This impossible situation of needing to create the rules for each work individually, Adorno compares with “a writer who is called upon to create a unique vocabulary and syntax for every sentence he writes.” (*Ibid.*, 104).
- 30 *Ibid.*, 64-65.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 67.
- 32 Adorno calls the didactic justice of twelve-tone technique “[a] terrible discipline as an instrument of freedom.” (*Ibid.*, 116).
- 33 Subotnik, “The Challenge of Contemporary Music,” 366.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 390.
- 35 *Ibid.*; To conclude her critique later in the same text, she writes: “[O]f contemporary music it seems fair to view that music as an experiment that failed [...]” (*Ibid.*, 389).
- 36 Wolterstorff, “The Work of Making a Work of Music,” 115.
- 37 Adorno writes: “No less, however, does art rebel against precisely this form of rationality, which, in the relation of means and ends, forgets the ends and fetishizes the means as an end in itself.” (Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 54).
- 38 Adorno writes: “Schoenberg himself distinguished almost mechanically between the preparation of twelve-tone material and composition, and on account of this distinction he had reason to regret his ingenious technique. The heightened logical consistency of the following generation, however, which obliterated the distinction between the preparation of the material and actual composition, not only exchanged integration for music’s self-alienation but incurred the loss of articulation, without which form is almost inconceivable.” (*Ibid.*, 188).

-
- 39 Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 102.
- 40 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 34.
- 41 Schoenberg, too, takes account of this question by writing that everything in a composition “gives the impression of having come first.” Schoenberg doesn’t only refer to the choice of musical elements and their intertwinement with form. He compares the simultaneousness of the occurrence of elements to “idea” and “word” in written text. One can’t separate them, or deduce one from the other. (Arnold Schoenberg, “Problems in Teaching Art,” in *Style and Idea. Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1975), 365-369, at 369).
- 42 This comparison was made orally by composer Trond Lossius at a seminar in Bergen, fall 2015. (Rebecka Ahvenniemi, “Bergenskolen. Den stille og drøftende musikken,” in *Ballade*, published online 22 April 2016), accessed 25 April, 2021. <http://www.ballade.no/sak/bergenskolen-den-stille-og-droftende-musikken/>.
- 43 In this description the modern conception of a composer is taken as the point of departure. The picture would become even more complex in an historical perspective. While the composing activity throughout the Western history is often viewed in light of concepts of the composer as a creator and the work as an individual master work, deriving from the nineteenth-century aesthetic understanding, other social roles and values were attached to this activity before. J.S. Bach (1685-1750), for example, composed by – and learned continuously – by copying scores of other composers. Joseph Haydn (1732-1809), in his turn, composed more than a hundred symphonies, developing and standardising the craft further on each occasion. Today professional composers are rarely blinded by ideas such as “pure originality.” One could work by deconstructing works of others, or quoting from existing works, working partly conceptually, an example of which is Luciano Berio’s *Sinfonia* (1968-69).
- 44 Vera Lukomsky and Sofia Gubaidulina, “My Desire Is Always to Rebel, to Swim against the Stream!” in *Perspectives of New Music* 36/1 (Winter 1998), 5-41, at 12. <https://doi.org/10.2307/833574>
- 45 *Ibid.*, 12.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 10.
- 47 Vera Lukomsky and Sofia Gubaidulina, “‘The Eucharist in My Fantasy’: Interview with Sofia Gubaidulina,” in *Tempo, New Series, No206, Power, Politics, Religion... and Music* 206 (Sept. 1998), 29-35, at 30. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0040298200006707>
- 48 *Ibid.*, 29.
- 49 *Ibid.*
- 50 *Ibid.*
- 51 Lukomsky and Gubaidulina, “My Desire Is Always to Rebel, to Swim against the Stream!,” 9.
- 52 Alex Ross, *The Rest Is Noise* (New York: Picador 2007); Ross writes: “In public [...] Schoenberg tended to explain his latest works as the logical, rational outcome of a historical process. Perhaps because he was suspected of having gone mad, he insisted that he had no choice but to act as he did. To quote again his 1910 program note: the music was the product of ‘necessity’.” (Ross, *The Rest Is Noise*, 62).
- 53 Schoenberg, “New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea,” 115.
- 54 Lukomsky and Gubaidulina, “My Desire Is Always to Rebel, to Swim against the Stream!,” 9.
- 55 *Ibid.*
- 56 *Ibid.*, 9-10.
- 57 Ross, *The Rest Is Noise*, 42
- 58 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 44.
- 59 Adorno reverses the concept of “mimesis”: “Ultimately, the doctrine of imitation should be reversed; in a sublimated sense, reality should imitate the artworks.” (*Ibid.*, 174).
- 60 Markus Mantere, “Musilkin medioituminen,” in Erkki Huovinen and Jarmo Kuitunen (eds), *Johdatus musiikkifilosofiaan* (Tampere: Vastapaino, 2008), 131-176, at 174; Mantere refers to the issue as reflected by Georgina Born in her article “On Musical Mediation: Ontology, Technology and Creativity,” in *Twentieth-Century Music* 2/1 (2005), 7-36. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S147857220500023X>
- 61 Mantere, “Musilkin medioituminen,” 164; Mantere also makes the point that in its typology, the thinking of Adorno relates to the same historical discourse that was established in the nineteenth century, by Eduard Hanslick among others, which makes the “autonomy” of a work of music the norm. (*Ibid.*, 162).
- 62 Wolterstorff, “The Work of Making a Work of Music,” 128.
-