

BODY, MUSIC AND ELECTRONICS: PIERRE SCHAEFFER AND PHENOMENOLOGY OF MUSIC

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ABSTRACT. The article presents a phenomenological investigation of body and music, with particular emphasis on electronic music. The investigation builds on theoretical framework developed in phenomenological investigations in art by Edmund Husserl, Mikel Dufrenne and Roman Ingarden. It is guided beyond these analyses by investigations of particular musical examples in avant-garde acoustic and electronic music. In the former case it tackles music from which body is being consciously erased. In the latter case, the erasure occurs instantly. This negative approach elucidates the function of body in music. In case of electronic music, the article focuses on writings and music of pioneer of *musique concrète*, Pierre Schaeffer. Central argument is that electronic music always has been and still is defined by absence of body, here phenomenologically considered as *Leib*. As a consequence of the phenomenological elucidation, it is ultimately shown that erasure of body has been one of the avant-garde music's crucial techniques, and that this avant-garde residue remains in electronic music as such, both experimental and mainstream.

Keywords: Schaeffer, Husserl, phenomenology, music, body, aesthetics

It is a truism to say that body and music are intertwined, and it is likewise generally recognized that body is not a simple mean of translation of music created in the mind into physical sounds. Yet, when it comes to questions of what is the particular function of the body in the music, what it does, what it actually brings into music, the issue gets more opaque. Phenomenological aesthetics, as developed by philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty, Ingarden, Dufrenne, and also Husserl,¹ shall

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¹ While Husserl has never written a book on aesthetics, he has written continuously on the subject a lot. For example, first texts in *Hua XXIII* date from 1898, last appendices to *Krisis* concern art. And one must agree with Crowther when he says about *Hua XXIII* that "within nearly 600 pages (and, in fact, over 700 in the English translation) there are enough relevant arguments to yield a short monograph on aesthetics, one, indeed, with highly original content". Paul Crowther, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Consciousness and Phantasy*, Routledge, 2022, p. 1.

be particularly well-positioned to address and answer these questions. Particular investigation of phenomenon of body and music is, however, mostly lacking in the texts of these authors.

Nonetheless, they do develop a theoretical framework which will allow us to investigate the relationship between body and music properly. And in order to get into heart of the matter, we can let the actual music guide ourselves, since it is certainly true—as Merleau-Ponty points out—that art can be ahead of philosophy that investigates it.² Or it can serve as a leading clue, to use Husserl’s term.³ In this text, the phenomenological analysis follows the particular musical examples where body is being consciously erased or excluded. While this may seem a paradoxical undertaking given that the topic is music *and* body, it will prove a fruitful undertaking. This is, in part, because there is certain affinity between such music and the notion of phenomenological reduction whose purpose is to elucidate the phenomena—an affinity which will at one point be expressed explicitly. But the argument in favour of such investigation can be put more simply: erasure or exclusion of the body from music sharply highlights what the body actually does when it is present and to the degree it is present.

In the first section, I will therefore briefly overview the aesthetic conceptions of Husserl, Ingarden, Dufrenne and Merleau-Ponty. The crucial notions developed there will be those of typology or schemata on the basis of which we identify sound as music. Then I will focus on the first set of examples: avant-garde acoustic music in which the body is deliberately erased. We will see how typology is re-configured in such music, whereby the situation will be explained by Husserlian distinction between *Leib* and *Körper*. In the next section, I will focus on second set of examples—on electronic music, where this erasure of the body happens in an instant. In particular, I will focus on music of pioneer of electronic music, Pierre Schaeffer.⁴ Schaeffer’s writings will feature prominently, too, although they will not be followed canonically. Including Schaeffer in phenomenological analysis is especially useful, though, since Schaeffer himself claimed an affinity to phenomenological method:

² For example, with regard to literature, Merleau-Ponty claims that “for its own part, literature has been in advance of the interest shown in it by the philosophy of language”. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Themes from the Lectures at the Collège de France, 1952-1960*, Northwestern University Press, 1970, p. 12.

³ For succinct exposition of Husserl’s notion of a leading clue [*Leitfäden*], see Anthony J. Steinbock, *Home and Beyond. Generative Phenomenology After Husserl*, Northwestern University Press, 1995, pp. 42-48.

⁴ Though it can be noted that Schaeffer did not compose the first piece now considered electronic *musique concrète*. Work *The Expression of Zaar* by Halim El-Dabh, from 1944, predates first published Schaeffer’s piece, *Étude aux chemins de fer*, by four years. I am thankful to James Kopf for this reference.

For years, we have time and again been doing phenomenology without realizing it, which is better, all things considered, than talking about phenomenology without doing it. It was only after the event that we recognized the concept of the object postulated by our research in the definition given by Edmund Husserl, with an admirable insistence on precision to which we are far from aspiring.⁵

In these sections we will gradually see, with help of theoretical phenomenological framework, what the body does in the music. In the short final section, I will once again reconsider relationship between body and music *vis-à-vis* proliferation of electronic music, which has long left the confines of academic avant-garde, and I will conclude briefly by looking at the inherently experimental nature of electronic music.

Music and Body in Phenomenological Aesthetics: A Very Brief Overview

Concerning the relationship of body and music, not much is actually useful in “classic” phenomenological texts. Much of the discussion there is focused on the questions of ontology of the musical work. Husserl, for example, considers the existence of Beethoven’s *Kreutzer Sonata* itself to be ideal, persisting as identical through various performances.⁶ This brief mention of ontology of musical work is subjected to critique by Ingarden, who claims that we should distinguish between ideal and intentional objects (his use of the term “intentional object” does not mirror Husserl’s use of the term in the sense of noema),⁷ whereby the musical work, being dependent on and originating in subject’s intentionality, shall be considered an intentional object.⁸ Much of this discussion concerns relationship between score and performance, which, however, is from the point of view of phenomenology a red

⁵ Pierre Schaeffer, *Treatise on Musical Objects*, University of California Press, 2017, p. 206. Stahl, in turn, references Heidegger on this point, claiming that “electronic music, emerging primarily out of influences from the Schoenberg/Berg/Webern school in the 1950s, adopted a strikingly Heideggerian attitude towards sound”. Gerry Stahl, “Attuned to Being: Heideggerian Music in Technological Society,” in *boundary 2*, 4(2), 1976, p. 638. Stahl’s text is inspiring, but leaps to soon towards social critique (employing Marx and Adorno alongside Heidegger) and is dependent on interpretation of electronic music as a subset of avant-garde music, that is, as a peculiar social practice. By grounding analysis of electronic music in phenomenology of body and phenomenological aesthetics, though, we will see in the end—leaning towards Benjamin in his late debate with Adorno concerning mainstream art—that even “pop” electronic music keeps a certain critical potential.

⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, Martinus Nijhoff, 1969, p. 21.

⁷ Cf. Roman Ingarden, *On the Motives which led Husserl to Transcendental Idealism*, Martinus Nijhoff, 1975, p. 67.

⁸ Roman Ingarden, *The Work of Music and the Problem of Its Identity*, MacMillan Press, 1986, pp. 116ff.

herring—what a phenomenologist must focus on is musical piece as sounding, heard and perceived aesthetically, and not on the score as a contingent means of historical preservation of the musical piece.⁹ And while Ingarden analyzes the musical piece as “intentional object”—in a sense of incomplete musical work in itself, which concretizes itself only in aesthetic perception, with “places of indeterminacy” filled in by aesthetic qualities—he was mistaken in identification of the score with musical work itself, and of the aesthetic concretization with performance, respectively.¹⁰ Husserl’s or Ingarden’s focus on the relationship between score and performance had much to do with their conservative tastes in classical music, rather than with a necessity of phenomenological analysis.

Ingarden was actually forced to backtrack on phenomenological significance of the score precisely when Zofia Lissa challenged him with *musique concrète*, where distinction between score and performance makes no sense.¹¹ This backtracking was justified, but it caused him to miss the actual distinction between electronic and acoustic music, which lies in the function of the body.

Productive analyses stemmed from Husserl’s analysis of time consciousness and passive syntheses, especially since Husserl used perception of music prominently to demonstrate his notions of retention and protention (or primary recollection and primary anticipation).¹² The takeaway is that speaking about music would make no sense without retention of the just heard and certain passive anticipation of the further course of the musical piece which may be fulfilled or disappointed, whereby on that basis we can, for example, judge the piece as harmonic or dissonant, respectively, or even judge it to be a result of some mistake or failure.

Dufrenne further explained this structure of anticipation, fulfilment and disappointment by positing the existence of harmonic and rhythmic schemas as prerequisites for understanding of a musical piece *qua* music:

⁹ I explain why the issue of performance and score is, phenomenologically, a red herring in Michal Lipták, “Roman Ingarden’s Problems with Avant-garde Music,” in *Estetika: The European Journal of Aesthetics*, 50(2), 2013, pp. 190ff. Another detailed argument, though more from musicological point of view, with which I agree, can be found in Bruce Ellis Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue: A Phenomenology of Music*, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

¹⁰ I have provided detailed arguments for this in Lipták, “Roman Ingarden’s Problems,” pp. 190-199.

¹¹ Zofia Lissa, “Some Remarks on Ingardenian Theory of a Musical Work,” in Piotr Graff and Sław Krzemień-Ojak (eds.), *Roman Ingarden and Contemporary Polish Aesthetics*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1975, p. 132. For Ingarden’s response in this part, see mainly Roman Ingarden, “Uwagi do Uwag Zofii Lissy,” in *Studia Estetyczne*, 3, 1966, p. 119.

¹² Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917)*, Kluwer, 1991, pp. 40ff.; see also Edmund Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, Kluwer, 2001, pp. 610-612.

We can reach [the musical object] only by participating in it through an act of imagination which is defined by the schema and which is the first stage in an act of understanding, for the rational aspect of the musical object is already present in the schema. Counting and measuring are schemata in which imagination serves as a prelude to understanding.¹³

Dufrenne posits these schemas as a kind of spatiality within music, and in particular “spatiality experienced by the body upon hearing the music”.¹⁴ A body is involved, since spatiality for Dufrenne also denotes externality with regard to consciousness:

These schemata are both means of access to the work and constitutive elements of the work. In this way, they contribute to the work, considered as duration, consistency and plenitude—consistency and plenitude which call forth spatiality insofar as space signifies externality to consciousness as well as the reality of the object. For this reason, music, though a temporal art, does not exclude space.¹⁵

Situation would be put slightly differently in writings of Husserl and Ingarden, while ultimately reaching similar conclusion. Considering the musical object *qua* aesthetic object as experienced in neutral attitude,¹⁶ and qualifying time of musical piece perceived aesthetically as quasi-time torn out of objective temporal nexus,¹⁷ the question would not be whether there are schemata guiding our musical perception,

¹³ Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, Northwestern University Press, 1973, p. 262.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

¹⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, Martinus Nijhoff, 1983, p. 277.

¹⁷ Ingarden, *Work of Music*, p. 70. In the same way, a literary work of art is quasi-temporal; see Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art*, Northwestern University Press, 1973, pp. 233-241. Referring to Husserl's writings, what Husserl qualifies as temporal with the prefix “quasi-” are objects of imagination, which are approached in an imaginative or neutralized mode of consciousness, as opposed to positional consciousness. “The object of imagination is present to consciousness as temporal and temporally determined, enduring in time; but its time is a *quasi-time* [...] it is a time without actual, strict localization of position.” Edmund Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, Routledge, 1973, pp. 168f. Similarly, with regard to dance as art, Sheets-Johnstone writes that “the audience is aware of the dancer's body not as an actual body, but as a center of force which presents changing linear designs”, and speaks of a dancer's gesture, of such a linear design, as “a quasi-real visual-kinetic form. [...] The areal design of the body is an imaginative visual-kinetic form which does not actually exist.” And she concludes that “in dance, movement as movement does not exist. In dance, movement appears as a revelation of sheer force emanating from a body which appears as a center of force”. Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, Temple University Press, 2015, pp. 98-100, 120.

but rather what motivates us enter the aesthetic attitude and remain in it. Put simply: when do we quit musical perception because it is, for example, just a random noise? Or what makes us listen to some sound as music? For Ingarden, it is a “certain rationality, and in particular a *rational perspicuity*”¹⁸ of the sound, a certain rational configuration of aesthetic qualities, or aesthetically valent forms.¹⁹ Husserl’s approach is not in conflict with Ingarden on this point. While Husserl would not refer to “rationality” as a defining aspect of music, his notion of protentions commits him to teaching of fulfilment or disappointment of anticipation, and this teaching likewise presupposes certain schemata which allow us to recognize future fulfilment and disappointment as fulfilment and disappointment.²⁰ Overarchingly, he would explain the motivation to enter into aesthetic attitude through notions of type and typology [*Typus; Typik*].²¹ There are certain types of sonic phenomena which invite us to perceive themselves aesthetically, whereby the types are at the same time both *a priori* and intersubjective, that is, historically changeable. Dufrenne builds on this understanding and particularly struggles with this apparent contradiction, but concludes that a notion of certain historically determined *a priori* correctly explains the aesthetic experience:

Without a constantly contingent encounter with the work of art, that is, without a history of art, there would be no history of affective categories, since they would remain within us as unawakened. They would not be absent but, instead, implicit and unused. The *a priori* is actualized only through the *a posteriori*.²²

There is a clear reference to Kant’s schemata in Dufrenne’s use of the term, and as Lohmar explains, Husserl’s notion of type serves the same function in his transcendental phenomenology as do the schemata in Kant’s transcendental system.²³ As a result, thus, despite differing terminology, Husserl, Ingarden and Dufrenne are not that

¹⁸ Ingarden, *Work of Music*, p. 96.

¹⁹ Roman Ingarden, *Ontology of the Work of Art*, Ohio University Press, 1989, pp. 65f. For succinct elucidation of “aesthetically valent qualities”, also elsewhere translated as “aesthetically valuable qualities”, cf. Roman Ingarden, “Artistic and Aesthetic Values,” in Margolis, Joseph (ed.), *Philosophy Looks at the Arts*, Temple University Press, 1987, pp. 130ff.

²⁰ Which is not to say that there are not important differences between Ingarden and Husserl in other aesthetic matters. A significant difference, for example, concerns the interpretation and scope of modification of neutrality, as I have analyzed in detail in Michal Lipták, “How can we Err in Aesthetic Judgements?” in *The Yearbook on History and Interpretation of Phenomenology*, 2, 2014, pp. 113f. However, it is not necessary to tackle these differences here.

²¹ See e.g. Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, pp. 124ff.

²² Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, pp. 495f.

²³ See Dieter Lohmar, “Husserl’s Type and Kant’s Schemata. Systematic Reasons for Their Correlation or Identity,” in Don Welton (ed.), *The New Husserl. A Critical Reader*, Indiana University Press, 2003, pp. 93ff.

distant from each other, and it is fitting that Dufrenne in particular concludes his treatise of phenomenological aesthetics by introducing the abovementioned notion of historic *a priori*. And, indeed, even body is let into play by Dufrenne when introducing the notion of schemata, but the function of body is not developed further. Ingarden, for his part, speaks of musical work as the only type of work of art which consists of a single stratum,²⁴ that is, it is a “purely qualitative particularity”.²⁵ While he does not refer to Kant in this place, it is clear that such qualitative particularity or individuality implicitly presupposes schemata (which he terms “rational”) according to which it is established; otherwise there would be nothing to distinguish between non-musical sequence of sounds and music.

Merleau-Ponty’s brief description of music as “too far on the hither side of the world and of the designatable to depict anything but certain sketches of Being—its ebb and flow, its growth, its upheavals, its turbulence”,²⁶ implicitly invokes the body as that which is ultimately intertwined with world as flesh. But this statement is actually dismissive of music: there is as if too much body in it, and not enough distance to either allow contemplation or flesh out the engagement with the world. In this, Merleau-Ponty ultimately channels Kant’s dismissive attitude to music.²⁷

What all these phenomenologists have in common is that—when they are not occupied with red herring of the ontology of the score—they do approach music from the point of view of a listener. There are fundamental reasons for this: a musical object exists necessarily as the aesthetic object, which means aesthetically valuable object,²⁸ and the musical object presents itself as aesthetic object only to aesthetic

²⁴ For a concise overview of Ingarden’s teaching on strata, see Jeff Mitscherling, *Roman Ingarden’s Ontology and Aesthetics*, University of Ottawa Press, 1997, pp. 129-139.

²⁵ Ingarden, *Work of Music*, p. 64.

²⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” in Toadvine, Ted and Lawlor, Leonard (eds.), *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, Northwestern University Press, 1973, p. 353. To be fair to Merleau-Ponty, in an unpublished note he wrote down that “music, like painting, is to the sensible world what the philosophy is to the entire world”. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Two Unpublished Notes on Music,” in *Chiasmi International*, 3, 2001, p. 18. However, in the published texts he sought to distinguish the two alongside abovementioned lines.

²⁷ “If [...] one estimates the value of the beautiful arts in terms of the culture that they provide for the mind and takes as one’s standard the enlargement of the faculties that must join together in the power of judgment for the sake of cognition, then to that extent music occupies the lowest place among the beautiful arts (just as it occupies perhaps the highest place among those that are estimated according to their agreeableness), because it merely plays with sensations. The pictorial arts therefore far surpass it in this respect.” Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 206.

²⁸ Husserl explicitly claims that “all art is ‘aesthetic’; it is delight in what is seen *in concreto*.” Edmund Husserl, *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory (1898-1925)*, Springer, 2005, p. 654. We will see later that Ingarden likewise considers aesthetic value as *conditio sine qua non* of existence of a work of art.

perception, that is, to the listener. A musical performance, though genetically prior, appears as derivative phenomenon in this sense. The sounds produced by a person improvising with an instrument, for example, require aesthetic perception in order to be recognized as music. That does not mean that aesthetic perception “turns” the sounds “into” music, but rather that only in aesthetic perception is the musical piece originally given, and that is thus where—according to principle of all principles²⁹—should the phenomenon of music be studied. And insofar the musician is aware of performing the musical piece, there is an aesthetic perception always co-present alongside the playing.³⁰ This is succinctly captured by free-improv musician Mike Bullock reflecting on his performance:

The border between performer and audience is porous, at least as far as perception of improvised music is concerned. The performer is simultaneously an audient; s/he also continues to be a performer, even at the moments that s/he is not making sound. So why not consider audience a form of performer?³¹

Phenomenologically, however, such complete reversibility between performer and listener cannot be justified. Phenomenology of music, approaching the phenomenon from the point of view of the listener, could apparently very well work without concerns for the body. As opposed to theatre or dance, body is simply not a part of an aesthetic object;³² it is present there in peculiar way which will be elucidated

²⁹ Husserl, *Ideas I*, pp. 44f.

³⁰ That does not mean that the decisions an improvising musician is doing are some quick active judgments of the shape of improvised musical piece performed until now. Similar as a sportsman or sportswoman enmeshed in the game, the passive syntheses are involved. Cf. Seth Vannetta, “A Phenomenology of Sport: Playing and Passive Synthesis,” in *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 35, 2008, pp. 68f. But the passive syntheses are thoroughly transformed by neutrality modification and any perception co-present alongside the playing, even if on the margin of the attention, is thus aesthetic perception. For Husserl’s account of a body of an actor in a theatre play, see Husserl, *Phantasy*, p. 616ff. In case of a dancer, Sheets-Johnstone speaks of her body as “virtual body” or “body as symbol”, which is nonetheless “related to the dancer’s pre-reflective awareness of the body”; which means, in other words, that it is the sphere of passive syntheses which is transformed in dance as aesthetic object. Sheets-Johnstone, *Phenomenology of Dance*, pp. 35f. However, Sheets-Johnstone opposes in this manner dance against sport, which in her opinion can be analyzed as reduced movement, and “analyzed apart from the lived experience, as a functional unification of objectively determined space-time coordinates and vector quantity of the actual force expended”. Ibid., p. 123.

³¹ Mike Bullock, “Listening into the BSC,” in Bhob Rainey (ed.), *Manual*, NO Books, 2011, p. 88.

³² When analyzing the performance of folk string bands in Slovakia, Ambrózová suggests that the criteria are developed which would be “reflecting the movement patterns and the way of handling the musical instrument with the right and left hands”. Jana Ambrózová, “The Rhythmic Accompaniment in Traditional String Bands in Slovakia: The Analysis of *osminový duvaj*,” in Sonja Zdravkova Djeparoska (ed.), *Tradition and Transition*, ITCM NC Macedonia, 2020, p. 106. This is

below, but it is not, so to say, *reel* part of it. The questions of musical virtuosity can be effectively addressed through Merleau-Ponty's notion of *habitus*,³³ in the similar way sports or handicrafts are tackled.³⁴ But none of this is crucial for phenomenological analysis of musical piece as aesthetic object. After all, precisely the electronic music performed a crude "reduction" by cutting the body out of the proceedings thoroughly—and yet, the pieces resulting from electronic composition are no less musical pieces.

In the phenomenological investigations disclosed above, we shall let ourselves guided by the notion of passive protentions and, mainly and as logically related, by presupposition of certain types or schemata guiding these protentions, which is what all these "classic" phenomenological accounts, despite their different terminology, have in common.

Erasing the Body in Acoustic Music

When we speak of a body here, it must be understood not as a kind of inanimate object which I animate or move, but as a psychophysical unity³⁵ or, more precisely, something Husserl later calls bodily-mental [*leiblich-seelische*] unity:

The body [*Leib*], which we apprehend as expression of spiritual life, is at the same time a part of nature, inserted into the universal nexus of causality, and the spiritual life, which we grasp through the bodily [*leiblichen*] expression and understand in its nexus of motivation, appears, in virtue of its connection with the body [*Leib*], to be conditioned itself by natural processes and to be apperceived as something of nature. The unity of body [*Leib*] and spirit is a two-fold one, and, correlatively, a two-fold apprehension (the personalistic and the naturalistic) is included in the unitary apperception of the human.³⁶

mostly a reflection of limits of standard music analysis *vis-à-vis* particular socio-cultural situation of folk music which is its essential aspect, and it does not undermine the separation of aesthetic object and body in music; however, it nonetheless points to interesting intertwining of body and society, with the aesthetic being a kind of central meeting point.

³³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Routledge, 2012, p. 139.

³⁴ For initiating ideas with regard to phenomenology of crafts, see e.g. Vydrová's text in this issue. Jaroslava Vydrová, "Possibilities of a Hand: A Phenomenological Perspective," in *Studia UBB. Philosophia*, 67(1), 2022.

³⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, Kluwer, 1989, p. 257.

³⁶ Husserl, *Ideas II*, p. 259.

This notion of unity, as well as distinction between *Leib* and *Körper*,³⁷ must be kept in mind when we speak of body in the following text. The decisions of the performer can be result of long intentional deliberations, but ultimately they must become embodied, expressed through body as “*organ of will*” [*Willensorgan*].³⁸ The body of the performer therefore always presumes such psychophysical unity.

We can say that the behaviour of a body in music can be two-fold: opaque or transparent. As such, these notions are, however, idealized end points of a continuum, and we should be speaking of relative degrees of opacity and transparency.

By the body being “opaque”, I mean that the body of the performer is drawing our attention to itself. This drawing of attention can happen when we are listening to different performances of the same piece, but also when listening to the piece we have not heard before and also in the improvised pieces,³⁹ simply by virtue of letting ourselves guided by certain types of experience, certain types of aesthetic objects. There may be, for example, certain rashness to the gesture or certain hesitation in the musical line which draws our attention and invites certain aesthetic valuation. We are invited to determine the sense of such unexpected deviations, and the sense can be manifested in positive or negative aesthetic valuation. The deviations may impress us, force us to reconfigure our expectations, our types, our schemata. But they may also very well be signs of a bad performer, who commits mistakes during performance.

Such issues are kept to minimum when body is transparent. There are no gestures that strike us as peculiar, no unexpected deviations. Rather, the music is performed in a way perfectly, according to certain established typology. Whether this results in a work of art which is considered artistically valuable, or whether the good works must not surprise us in some way, shock us in some way,⁴⁰ is not something that needs to bother us at this point.

The situation is complicated by the fact that transparent performance may appear as opaque if the deviations from the typology are contained within the work itself or within the framework or “philosophy” of improvisation (see, for example,

³⁷ Husserl’s notion of *Leib* is sometimes translated as “lived-body”, “lived body” or—as is the case of English translation of *Ideas II*—as the Body with capital “B”. In contrast, *Körper* can be translated as “physical body” or body with lowercase “b”. In this text, whenever Husserl’s concepts are referenced and the distinction must be sharply drawn, either the original German is included in order to avoid confusion, or German words “*Leib*” and “*Körper*” are used directly.

³⁸ Husserl, *Ideas II*, p. 159.

³⁹ Benson’s cited work is basically a continuous—and impeccable—argument why there no strict dividing line between composition and improvisation exists. Among other things, I fully subscribe to his criticism of idea of *Werktreue*. Benson, *Improvisation*, pp. 3ff.

⁴⁰ Dufrenne in this regard speaks about “provocation of astonishment”. Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, p. 409.

John Zorn's game pieces), as is the case in avant-garde music. For example, Irvine Arditti performs Cage's technically extremely difficult *Freeman Etudes* (1977-90) as they are written, therefore in as transparent way as possible. For a listener, though, they come off as random (and the score is, actually, generated by random processes), and there may actually be little difference between a virtuoso like Arditti playing such an extremely difficult piece, and a dilettante playing random notes.

Objectively, therefore, the source of the deviation may not be only in a performer's body. Similar aesthetic perception can be thus achieved both in cases where body is opaque, or where body is transparent. On the other hand, perfect harmony between the piece and the body can be achieved only when body is transparent.

However, as I said, transparency is more of an idealized aspiration. There is always certain peculiar expression, certain gesture, which remains and which is perceptible by the trained or attentive listeners.⁴¹ Nevertheless, avant-garde music in 20th century was fascinated by exploring the impossible and investigating the dead ends. I will therefore firstly look into avant-garde musical pieces which sought not only transparency, but erasure of the body.

Within avant-garde music, we will once again consult John Cage in more detail. He often recounted his visit to an anechoic chamber, which has been a formative story which concerned his effort at sonic erasure of his body, and subsequent failure:

It was after I got to Boston that I went into the anechoic chamber at Harvard University. Anybody who knows me knows this story. I am constantly telling it. Anyway, in that silent room, I heard two sounds, one high and one low. Afterward I asked the engineer in charge why, if the room was so silent, I had heard two sounds. He said, "Describe them." I did. He said, "The high one was your nervous system in operation. The low one was your blood in circulation."⁴²

This experience gestated into his most (in)famous piece, *4'33"*, which calls for any number of performers on any instruments to do nothing—to remain silent. It must be added that Gann questions the biological source of sounds that Cage heard—he suggests it was actually tinnitus.⁴³ Whatever it was, the point is that the body cannot be erased sonically. Interestingly, Husserl suggests that tinnitus is an

⁴¹ See, for example, the attentiveness of the ethnomusicologist's ear. Cf. Ambrózová, "The Rhythmic Accompaniment," pp. 105ff.

⁴² Quoted in Kyle Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence. John Cage's 4'33"*, Yale University Press, 2010, pp. 162f.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

example of “null point of accommodation” [*Null der Akkomodation*] which points ultimately to the presence of my body [*Leib*], “but prior to all this insertion in the body [*Leib*] something like that is in itself a null character”.⁴⁴ Cage found similar link:

There is no such thing as an empty space or an empty time. There is always something to see, something to hear. In fact, try as we may to make a silence, we cannot... Until I die there will be sounds. And they will continue following my death. One need not fear about the future of music.⁴⁵

One could hear here the anguish of Beckett’s Unnamable: “Ah if only this voice could stop, this meaningless voice which prevents you from being nothing, just barely prevents you from being nothing and nowhere.”⁴⁶ However, an effort to completely erase the body can be found in recording of Cage’s late piece, *One*⁷. This piece is instrumented for “for any way of producing sounds” and it is a reduction of an earlier piece, *Four*⁶, where “performers on unspecified instrumentation choose twelve different sounds each, with fixed amplitude, overtone structure, etc., and play within flexible time brackets”.⁴⁷ Wergo liner notes for Liebner’s recording of *One*⁷ specify:

The fixed time brackets show exactly when a musician should begin a pitch or tonal event and when it should come to an end. With the flexible brackets, it is left to the interpreter to decide within a predetermined time frame when an instrument enters and when it falls silent.⁴⁸

Given the “instrumentation”, the existing recordings of *One*⁷ are, as expected, vastly different. A recording by Cage himself from 1991, released in 2009 (Mode, 200), exists. It is a “vocal” performance and Cage selects sounds such as humming, snoring or shouting. However, we will look at recording by pianist Sabine Liebner released in 2014 (Wergo, WER 6797 2). Liebner plays both on the keys, inside the piano, and on the piano’s body, and she is using both her hands and little electronic machines placed on the piano’s body or strings. The selected sounds include playing keys themselves, tremolos, knocking on the piano’s body, stroking the strings, rattling

⁴⁴ Husserl, *Ideas II*, p. 325.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence*, p. 162.

⁴⁶ Samuel Beckett, “The Unnamable,” in *Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*, Everyman’s Library, 2015, p. 424.

⁴⁷ “Four⁶”, in *John Cage Trust*, https://johncage.org/pp/John-Cage-Work-Detail.cfm?work_ID=89 [accessed on 19.12.2021].

⁴⁸ “One⁷ / Four⁶”, in *Schott*, <https://en.schott-music.com/shop/one7-four6-no323748.html> [accessed on 19.12.2021].

sounds cause by machines inserted on the strings, and so on. The sonic events are interspersed by long stretches of silence going sometimes for a minute or more, and as a result, the 30 minute piece is extremely sparse.

Any room for the performer's expression in this music is not only basically excluded, but conceptually undesired; and this holds irrespective of the fact that the actual sequencing of sounds is chosen by the performer, that as written the piece is indeterminate. When listening to this recording, the listener hears series of events arranged somehow objectively. The body is absolutely detached from the sounds as a potential source. When the performance is seen live, the "virtuosity" of the body comes off as negative only; it involves a certain sort of asceticism, which means that no undesired sound should be emitted by the body aside from those required by the objective sequencing. The non-existence of the body, which Cage found unattainable in the anechoic chamber, is here infinitesimally approached by means of contrast of sonic events from which the body is completely excluded.

In other words, the virtuosity of the body is here reduced to its rigidity, to the slowness of the movement, to its silence, to its non-performance. However, such a body, whether seen live or imagined when listening to the piece, is not in the musical piece as it is delimited phenomenologically—as a neutralized aesthetic object. With regard to imagining, in particular, Dufrenne correctly claims—building upon his critique of Sartre's notion of imagination and its role in aesthetic experience—that imagination's role in aesthetic perception is "modest"; it may stabilize the images or extend an understanding, but it is not proper part of aesthetic perception, of the world of an aesthetic object which "exists in comprehension or intension, not in extension".⁴⁹

Phenomenologically speaking, thus, what we have in Liebner's performance of *One*⁷, when perceived as an aesthetic object, is series of sonic events separated by long stretches of silence from which any sort of expression is excluded. Body only exists as imagined, and in imagination it is negated, catatonic, and infinitesimally dead.

This issue with body can be likewise precisely analyzed in so-called non-idiomatic free improvisation—whereby I will use the music of Boston free-improv collective The BSC as an example—which stems directly from Cage's indeterministic compositions,⁵⁰ since improvisation involves a body by definition. "An improviser can never ignore the body, because at some point, all operations must occur through the body."⁵¹ Non-idiomatic improvisation, however, strives for radically new music that is, as name implies, free from all idioms. This involves suppression of crucial bodily tendencies in improvisation, "dissolving and rethinking natural inclinations":⁵²

⁴⁹ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, pp. 360f.

⁵⁰ Aaron P. Tate, "Reconstructing the History and Methods of the BSC," in Rainey, *Manual*, p. 32.

⁵¹ Ben Hall, "The BSC and Recent Approaches to Collective Improvisation," in Rainey, *Manual*, p. 84.

⁵² Tate, "Reconstructing," p. 48.

Intuitions and instincts—or what BSC members repeatedly referred to as “natural tendencies” (or in James Coleman’s terminology, “body-time”)—are precisely what the BSC have actively worked to undo, rethink, and redeploy.⁵³

As an example, there is a natural tendency to follow up a drone played on a tape with a similar prolonged sound on a trumpet. Such reaction is, however, obvious and expectable. The point is to avoid this. Therefore, the body cannot be excluded in improvisation, but it is consciously manipulated against its own tendencies. Such “free improvisation” is in a way the unfreest kind of music-making. This conscious manipulation is most apparent in case of vocalist Liz Tonne, because she has nothing but her voice—that is, her body—to work with:

Liz Tonne’s range of vocal timbres is rooted primarily in a single technique, which she originally learned as an exercise in vocal flexibility. “I try to let [my voice] be as loose as possible, and try not to have any judgment of the sound.” Essentially, the voice is allowed to relax in a way that reduces control over specific intonation but allows the singer to concentrate on the physical vibration of the body. A note is sung on whichever vowel sound is the most relaxed position for a given register. The note warbles and moves around the central note, rather than settling on a note, which would require more precise control from the singer. The intention is to feel the resonance in the abdomen constantly, while gradually adding resonances in the skull as her voice moves up the scale.⁵⁴

Speaking in Husserlian terms, we could say that typically understood virtuosity—where we could imagine, for example, Liszt’s virtuoso piano pieces—involves training of body as *Leib*. There are objective obstacles to my ability to play the piece, objective limits of my body, but in training I am trying to overcome these limits. In doing so, *Leib* conquers *Körper*. My body as dead object posing as an obstacle to performance, unable itself to perform, becomes, when properly trained, a lived body able to perform. There are, of course, some outside limits beyond which a human body as such cannot be trained, but, recognizing these limits, we could—following Canguilhem’s analysis of the somatic⁵⁵—call this kind of virtuosity a normal virtuosity.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 53.

⁵⁴ Mike Bullock, *“The Kind of Music We Play”: A Study of Self-Idiomatic Improvised Music and Musicians in Boston* [doctoral dissertation], Rennselaer Polytechnic Institute, 2010, p. 78; quoted in Tate, “Reconstructing,” p. 72.

⁵⁵ Georges Canguilhem, *On the Normal and the Pathological*, D. Reidel, 1978, pp. 132-135.

Tonne counters this notion of virtuosity. In Husserlian terms, we would say that she tries to use her lived body as a physical object, as *Körper*. And because it is *Leib* itself that is used as *Körper*, nothing should remain from *Leib* if this operation succeeds. Similarly, nothing should remain from Liebner's slow-moving, rigid body *qua Leib* if she succeeds in performance of *One*⁷. And remaining *Körper* is only imagined, not co-present in the musical piece as an aesthetic object. Hall calls whatever "virtuosity" that is contained in this laborious approach a virtuosity of non-fixity or non-movement.⁵⁶

The problem here is that if phenomenological aesthetics are right, a success here should cause a breakdown of aesthetic experience. Much more straightforwardly: such "music" may not be perceived as music at all. In Dufrenne's understanding, an aesthetic object is "a quasi subject".⁵⁷ Aesthetic object is defined by its depth which "must be sought in the object's power to express, through which it is the analogue (as a result of being the proxy) of a subjectivity".⁵⁸ And pursuing this analogy further:

To possess depth means to situate oneself on a certain level where one becomes sensitive throughout one's being, where a person collects himself together and commits himself. Having such depth can best be understood in contrast with those ways of being indifferent, detached, or superficial when the subject is not really himself.⁵⁹

Aesthetic object subjectifies itself,⁶⁰ but inexpressive aesthetic subject can desubjectify itself and thus invite indifference. This is aesthetically more catastrophic than if the music is ugly, horrifying or repulsive. As Ingarden further reminds us, being indifferent means that

no aesthetic object [is] constituted at all. A real object which was intended by the artist as a work of art is then completely irrelevant to us aesthetically; we pass it by without any aesthetic excitement, since the original aesthetic emotion does not begin at all. If we did not have at our disposal some external information that the object in question is supposed to be a work of art, it would never occur to us to occupy ourselves with it aesthetically. We then sometimes judge such a "work of art" negatively, by criticizing it; but we do so unjustly, since it warrants no aesthetic judgment whatever but only indifference.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Hall, "The BSC and Recent Approaches," p. 83.

⁵⁷ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, p. 393.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 411.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 403.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 415.

⁶¹ Ingarden, *Cognition*, p. 212.

Turning to Husserl's notion of type to describe this situation, we could say that successful non-idiomatic improvisation or successful indeterminate composition destroy the types that function as motivational foundation of an aesthetic experience, whereby aesthetic experience should then be impossible. Moreover, we see that this work of types is necessarily linked with the quasi-subjectivity of musical work; and this also means that musical work is, in a peculiar, indirect way, a quasi-*Leib*, indirectly co-present in the piece. We see that one of avant-garde methods is removal of this quasi-*Leib*, its reduction to *Körper*. And if it succeeds, there is in return no modified, neutralized quasi-*Körper* in such non-idiomatic musical work; *Körper* can be, at best, extraneously imagined.

Insofar this kind of avant-garde music realizes its ambitions, it ceases to be music. Insofar it succeeds as music—which in my opinion it does—it always does so because it fails to realize its ambitions completely, and the residua of the pursuits of these dead ends are beautiful in a kind of quixotic way. We see, however, that investigation of body and music leads us stubbornly to questions of what the music actually is. I have sketched the ways in which the avant-garde music operates through failures elsewhere.⁶² Moreover, Kopf is certainly right when he concludes that “if we speak of a ‘border between the musical work and a succession of uncoordinated sounds and noises’, we should understand that this *border does not, by necessity, phenomenologically exist*”.⁶³ It does not, indeed, exist by necessity. It does exist, though, as malleable, fluid border; it does exist in a contingent way in a given space and time. Avant-garde music is risky precisely because it walks on this border as a tightrope walker, and in the end it either pushes the boundaries or falls beyond the boundary it tries to push. According to its own criteria it fails either way, but pushing the boundaries allows it to regroup and try again, while falling beyond the boundary destroys it as a music. And not even existence pieces like 4'33" can ensure by necessity that this latter risk of destruction will no longer exist.

The resulting anxiety will be apparent in writings of Pierre Schaeffer. The situation he found himself in, once he developed technologies to produce electronic music, was one of instant success of this avant-garde effort at erasure of the body. What he sought to do was to take advantage of this situation in order to produce music that is radically new, but at the same time he consciously sought to undermine this instant success; he sought to produce music recognizable as music. This involved, surprisingly, a desire to return to body, too.

⁶² Lipták, “Roman Ingarden’s Problems,” pp. 199ff.

⁶³ James M. Kopf, *Investigations Concerning Music and the Soundscape: Heidegger, Ingarden, Reik* [doctoral dissertation], The Pennsylvania State University, 2021, p. 146.

Electronic Music Without a Body

The earliest dating of electronic music may be in 1910s, when Futurist painter Luigi Russolo developed the noise-generating instruments called “*intonarumori*”, although the importance of these noise-machines for avant-garde electronic music is a bit doubtful. Benjamin calls Futurism as such the “reactionary attempt to sever technologically constituted forms from their functional contexts and turn them into natural constants—that is, to stylize them”.⁶⁴ Other examples of uses of non-musical pre-recorded or machine sounds in music followed—aside from Russolo’s *intonarumori* there were, for example, airplane propellers used in Antheil’s *Ballet mécanique* (1924) or sine-wave test recordings used in Cage’s *Imaginary Landscape No. 1* (1939). However, these works contained electronic noises alongside regular acoustic instruments. There were also electronic instruments such as *theremin* and *ondes martenot*, both invented in 1928, but these were instruments to be played, so they did not erase the body.

For the proper beginnings of electronic music, we should look to works in institutions such as *Groupe de recherche de musique concrète* (GRMC), founded in 1951 at *Radiodiffusion française nationale* by Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry. What Schaeffer in particular sought to do was to compose music that is completely electronic.

Schaeffer coined the term “*musique concrète*”, concrete music, for his approach, since the musical piece is composed directly, without mediation, on the medium of a recording, which otherwise is only one of the devices ensuring the preservation of a musical piece.⁶⁵ This contrasts with abstract music,⁶⁶ which preserves the musical piece indirectly through the device of score, which has to be interpreted—turned into an actual musical piece.⁶⁷ However, Schaeffer considers an electronic music that is “performed” according to a score akin to abstract music, too.⁶⁸ From the other side, improvised music could also be considered an abstract

⁶⁴ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 558. Another founder of Futurist movement, Filippo Marinetti, “was one of the founding members of the Italian Fascist Party”. Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Late Twentieth Century*, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 178. Stahl adds that Italian Futurists “ended up glorifying precisely those social phenomena which must be criticized”. Stahl, “Attuned to Being,” p. 656.

⁶⁵ For phenomenological analysis of notion of a “preservation” of a musical piece, see Lipták, “Roman Ingarden’s Problems,” pp. 190-194.

⁶⁶ Schaeffer, *Treatise*, pp. 27f.

⁶⁷ Ingarden calls performance in this case a “concretization”, but this is incorrect *vis-à-vis* the peculiar meaning the notion of “concretization” has in Ingarden’s aesthetics in general. See Lipták, “Roman Ingarden’s Problems,” pp. 194-199.

⁶⁸ Schaeffer, *Treatise*, p. 143. Possibilities of scores for electronic music were outlined at the beginning of *musique concrète* in 1950s, for example, by Boulez: “Score-notations will relate to the lengths of

music, since no matter how unstructured the improvisation, it points to the would-be score at least implicitly.⁶⁹

The distinction between “abstract” and “concrete” music, however, will not lead us far. In the first place, not only improvisation, but also *musique concrète* can be converted into the score, as shown, for example, by Wehinger’s ex-post 1970 score to Ligeti’s *Artikulation* (1958),⁷⁰ rendering such distinction meaningless. And as Taruskin notes, justification for distinction between “abstract” and “concrete” may have been more modest, seeking actually to differentiate between individual period practices within the field of electronic music.⁷¹ It would be therefore useful not to follow Schaeffer’s distinction between abstract and concrete, and focus on his practice of electronic music and his later theoretical reflection of this practice.

The technique that Pierre Schaeffer discovered in 1940s is similar to what would be later called sampling. He used pre-recorded sounds, and earliest experiments were done with locked grooves on vinyls, but soon Schaeffer moved to use of a magnetic tape, which allowed for much easier and thorough manipulation. In order to produce compositions, the tape was slowed down or sped up, and then cut up in order to isolate some sounds and glued together with other sounds. The various methods of cutting up and gluing together (for example, cutting the tape diagonally in 45° angle) were used in order to produce various transitions between the sounds.

Schaeffer believed such music was radically new. The novelty lies in the total absence of body in music-making—with consequences for absence of aesthetic typology which interest us here. Boulez, calling this one of the most radical developments in history of music, marvels at the crumbling of obstacles: “Everything that was a limitation becomes unlimited, everything one thought ‘unmeasurable’ suddenly has to be measured with absolute precision.”⁷² Schaeffer, however, with the same breath simultaneously mourns this absence:

recorded tape. With a few conventions defining, for each work, the material used and the tablature that corresponds to it, the notation will be as readable as that of any ordinary score.” Pierre Boulez, *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, Clarendon Press, 1991, p. 138. Stockhausen also scored his first electronic pieces. Cf. Taruskin, *Music*, p. 190.

⁶⁹ “It is impossible to escape the influence of the past in the improvisations of the present. For improvisation is a kind of ‘composition’ in the sense of ‘putting together’.” Benson, *Improvisation*, p. 136.

⁷⁰ The idea that Wehinger’s “*Hörpartitur*” is actually a score has been criticized by Taruskin, who calls it “more a sort of parallel objet d’art”. Taruskin, *Music*, p. 52. However, since music as heard phenomenon comes phenomenologically first, every score is phenomenologically secondary and serves the purpose of either analysis or of a historically contingent mean of preservation of the piece. I have tackled this issue in detail in Lipták, “Roman Ingarden’s Problems,” pp. 190ff. Wehinger’s *Hörpartitur* can easily function as an analysis of Ligeti’s piece.

⁷¹ Taruskin, *Music*, pp. 187f.

⁷² Boulez, *Stocktakings*, p. 158.

In concrete music, glue and scissors are simply a test of patience, where the intellect alone is involved. How prone to err the intelligence is, cut off from both an interior melody and an external projection of its melody in and through the muscles of others! And how we would love to rediscover somewhere that happy muscular difficulty, the safeguard of a well-crafted performance!⁷³

Of course, when we speak of absence of body, this must be further qualified. Body is present here in form of trained fine motor skills, comparable to skills of a surgeon or a watchmaker. This holds even for much of the digital electronic music, as long as sound editing software is used; in electronic music that is based solely on algorithms,⁷⁴ body is excluded completely. But even if body is present, it is not present as a body of a musical performer. This means, in particular, that all the intuitions and instincts, all the natural tendencies, regardless of whether they function as conductors of expression or as obstacles to be dissolved, are excluded.

Schaeffer's *musique concrète* was soon theoretically challenged by school of *elektronische musik* developed mostly in studio in Cologne under auspices of Karlheinz Stockhausen; the difference being mostly that Stockhausen initially insisted on using purely electronically produced, sinusoidal sounds which did not exist before the technological inventions of the machines.⁷⁵ Schaeffer, on contrary, used—and continuously expanded, too—vast archive of pre-recorded sounds, which included both field recordings and recordings of musical performances. However, this distinction is not important for this investigation, since it concerns different efforts to achieve radically new sounds, without involvement of the body. Schaeffer did not use the recorded sounds as they were, but manipulated them in order to estrange them or make them unrecognizable. He called this approach

⁷³ Schaeffer, Pierre, *In Search of a Concrete Music*, University of California Press, 2012, p. 175. It should be added that Boulez is likewise aware of some loss, too: "The disappearance of the performer would be nothing to get worked up about, if some part of the 'miraculous' in music did not go with him." Boulez, *Stocktakings*, p. 161. Moreover, ways to involve the body have been certainly found later. As Hall writes of Stelzer: "Even when playing what could potentially be the least corporeally involved instrument—the tape deck—Howard Stelzer manages to invent new ways to involve the body. I've seen him take the performativity of consumer grade electronics to new levels, hoisting up a leg to slow down an errant deck that needed reprimand and for which an extra appendage was necessary. These were the moves of the trick D.J. but without the gimmickry." Hall, "The BSC and Recent Approaches," p. 84. This is, however, as will be explained further below, a reverse process of erasure of body from acoustic body, but similarly laborious. Schaeffer and Boulez, on other hand, capture very well the disappearance of a body in an instant at the inception of electronic music, an instant disappearance which will never cease to trouble electronic music.

⁷⁴ See e.g. Iannis Xenakis, *Formalized Music*, Pendragon Press, 1992, pp. 277ff.

⁷⁵ Schaeffer, *Treatise*, p. 496. Cf. also Boulez, *Stocktakings*, p. 152. This *elektronische musik* is what Taruskin suggests Schaeffer may have been opposing by his use of the adjective "concrete".

acousmatics,⁷⁶ by which he meant separation of the sound from its source. In case of using recorded musical performances as source material, they are thus likewise separated from the lived body of the performer.

According to Schaeffer, acousmatic approach should lead us to “reduced listening”, where Schaeffer directly references Husserl’s phenomenological reduction. He asks:

Could we, by freeing ourselves from the ordinary, “throwing out the natural” as well as the cultural, find an authentic *sound object*, the offspring of the *époché*, that, if possible, would be accessible to every listener?⁷⁷

When Schaeffer speaks of sound objects, he does not mean sound as a kind of physical object, analyzed, for example, by an oscilloscope. “The fact is that in reality the physical signal is not *sound*, if by this we understand that it is taken up by the ear. It belongs to the physics of elastic media.”⁷⁸ Sound objects are thus to be understood as phenomena, as what we hear.

Schaeffer further distinguishes *sound objects* from *musical objects*. Musical objects are always sound objects, or assemblies of sound objects, but they are capable of triggering an aesthetic perception.

Schaeffer then sees his function as two-fold. One is the vocation of experimenter, whose goal is to achieve complete typology of sound objects as phenomena of perception.⁷⁹ The other is the vocation of a composer, whose goal is to find such an arrangement of sound objects that the resulting total sound object could be called, and would be perceived as, a musical work. Early in his research, in 1952, Schaeffer disclosed the situation in following way:

Meanwhile, we are reduced to constructing new works, either by following an instinct that takes much more account of instrumental contingencies than personal aspirations, or by applying experimental structures from which, as I have said, we must expect experiments rather than works.⁸⁰

Constructing typology of sound objects through experiments is precisely what Schaeffer intends by “doing phenomenology”; it is a phenomenology in practice, phenomenology which results not only in much richer description of sonic

⁷⁶ Schaeffer, *Treatise*, pp. 64ff.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

⁷⁹ See, for example, schema of foundational typology of sound objects in *Ibid.*, p. 351.

⁸⁰ Schaeffer, *In Search*, pp. 176f.

phenomena compared with very rough examples used by Husserl, Ingarden or Dufrenne, but moreover in formalization and categorization of such phenomena, thereby doing as much justice to Husserl's idea of phenomenology as rigorous science as is realistically possible.

But as we see, for Schaeffer this typology of sound objects is not an end in itself: "The object is made to be useful, I was saying. Useful for what? For making music. The whole question is how to go from sound to the musical."⁸¹ With regard to music, the function of this typology is two-fold: on the one hand, one is to get better grasp of sound as phenomenon, and inquiry into sound objects shall provide the composer with more materials. On the other hand, its function is also critical: the goal is to destroy established, unreflected prejudices which not only cause the music to get stuck in repeating "natural tendencies", but which also hinders communication with other cultures. Schaeffer puts this in following terms:

In sketching out a "generalized" music theory, going way beyond the immediate needs of present-day composers, we had two applications in mind: one concerns musics that are "different" from our own (ancient or non-Western), where it is our contention that the present way of deciphering them is poor, crude, and inaccurate as long as we apply the Western frame of reference to them; the other concerns musics yet to be invented, which clearly preoccupy musicians of our time.

And he adds that "this new way of looking at music might enable us to explore musical civilizations".⁸² Stahl correctly notes that this music "hopes to re-educate our ears".⁸³

However, organizing sound objects into musical objects is itself a sort of experimentation,⁸⁴ but one that is much more difficult to rigorously organize or formalize. When Schaeffer rejects serial organization—used by Stockhausen in Cologne or suggested by Boulez in GRMC⁸⁵—as a substitute for musical composition,

⁸¹ Schaeffer, *Treatise*, p. 538.

⁸² Both quotes in *Ibid.*, p. 480. It may be noted that aside from being an electronic music pioneer, Schaeffer was also a co-founder of important ethnomusicological label Ocora.

⁸³ Stahl, "Attuned to Being," p. 654.

⁸⁴ Schaeffer honestly calls it as such, for example with regard to quasi-fugues he called *biludes*. Schaeffer, *In Search*, p. 141.

⁸⁵ Boulez, *Stocktakings*, pp. 135-138. Boulez considers serial organization to be solution to Schaeffer's worries: "To date, *musique concrete* has mainly displayed a curiosity about and appetite for sound objects, without great concern to organize them." *Ibid.*, p. 136. In a way, Boulez solution to these sound objects may have been directed by his more generalized notion of "formants"—building blocks of musical works—which could correspond to Schaeffer's "musical objects". Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 17. Later, Boulez—

he resorts, simply said, to experimenting with what sounds good, hoping that work with sound objects will have sufficient transformative effects on his compositional practice. “Too original” sound objects are, for example, useful for purposes of inventing a typology, but in musical composition one will strive for “golden mean between the too ordinary and the too original”.⁸⁶ Elsewhere, Schaeffer will use a help of a kind of anachronistic device—a programme in music, which was the case of *Symphonie pour un homme seul* (1949-50),⁸⁷ composed in collaboration with Pierre Henry. In principle, however, as we have seen above, Schaeffer ultimately relies on “instincts”, to the point that he mourns the absence of a body which would be conducive for the instincts within this newly discovered sphere of sound objects. But there is also some implicit hope that, because the instincts cannot be introduced in this kind of music through body, instincts will be refracted through all these theoretical and, especially, technological innovations, and result in music that is both aesthetically valuable and radically new.

Put this way, this almost contradictory conundrum, however, concerns only musical production. The solution, for Schaeffer, ultimately lies in a phenomenology of musical perception—which, as has been mentioned above, is a natural habitat of phenomenological analysis. Crucial here is his notion of *allure* [*l'allure*], which Schaeffer formally links to sustainment of the sound, but which can be best defined as a “life” or “behaviour” of sound itself as a phenomenon, as it gives itself to a perceiving subject. One result of Schaeffer’s countless experiments—his phenomenology in practice—is that it is due to the allure that human and non-human sounds can be distinguished, and that these sounds are distinguished pursuant to a set of identifiable qualities. A longer quote shall be excused here, just to show the detail into which Schaeffer’s phenomenological investigation of allure went:

The action of the [...] hand, the finger vibrating on the fingerboard, the vibrato, reveals the sentient presence through an *allure* that can in turn be described independently of profile or mass: it will be *broad, dense, ample, tiny*, or again, *generous, brilliant*, never *irregular* or *mechanical*. [...]

who cooperated with Schaeffer, for example, on *Cinq études de bruits* (1948)—became very dismissive of Schaeffer’s experimental approach, calling it, among other things, “a musical flea market, where the bric-à-brac alas conceals no hidden treasure”. Ibid., 227. For Boulez, the most intriguing way forward was electro-acoustic music, where he achieved best results much later in his piece *Répons* (1981).

⁸⁶ Schaeffer, *Treatise*, p. 388.

⁸⁷ Schaeffer, *In Search*, pp. 48-58.

This is a very common question asked by man about any object, musical or otherwise: “natural or artificial? craftsman or machine? wood or plastic?” With the musical object it is allure that gives the answer. In allure, perception focuses on everything that can reveal the presence of the differentiated, the living.

What seemed only to be a second-order dynamic aspect of sound is therefore linked to a fundamental question. We immediately distinguish a very regular vibrato played by a violinist from another produced by a machine: where form is concerned, the difference between the two is not great. However minimal it is, it is immediately seized on and interpreted by a faculty of perception that seeks to know if the event, dependent on natural laws, is totally predictable, if it is the product of human will or merely of chance. We must not think for one moment that this endeavor is beyond the capacities of the ear: in the domains into which the ear is led by ancestral training in decoding clues, it is capable of grasping second- or third-order information very easily and shows extraordinary skill in deducing from the smallest fragment of sound whether its origin is human or mechanical, its character predictable or random.

The allure that gives equilibrium to a tangle of small events, the *fluctuation* characteristic of a living agent, is a central class or type in all modes of sustainment. On the two sides we will put predictable mechanical *order* on the right, and the unpredictability of chance, *disorder*, on the left.⁸⁸

The implied mean sphere between mechanical order and disorder of chance may seem, at first glance, to invoke phenomenological notions of optimum⁸⁹ or normal,⁹⁰ but these notions refer to the phenomena that are settled, to the fully formed noematic sense. Normal allure of sound produced by humans is linked to this sense of normality, but in a peculiar way as a normal resistance of the body, which is—finally—what we should understand when Schaeffer wrote in his diary about “happy muscular difficulty”. This is thus unsettled normality, but it is happily unsettled, in a sense of interrogating an open but known horizon. It is thus not “unsettling”; what is unsettling is complete cutting off of horizons, which requires a complete reconfiguration on our part.

⁸⁸ Schaeffer, *Treatise*, pp. 443f.

⁸⁹ Cf. Husserl, *Analyses*, pp. 61f.; or e.g. Husserl, Edmund, *Thing and Space. Lectures of 1907*, Springer, 1997, pp. 286f., 319-322.

⁹⁰ Cf. Husserl, *Ideas II*, p. 63ff., for links between notion of “optimum” and “normal”. For detailed analysis see Steinbock, *Home and Beyond*, pp. 138-147.

It could be said that confronted with discovery of electronic music—music without body—one could follow two strategies. First strategy is the reconstruction of this normal resistance of body by mechanical means, which for Schaeffer practically means “to deceive the listener about origins”⁹¹ of sound. Aesthetic success of such music, the transformation of sound objects into musical objects, then lies in the success of the deception. Second strategy lies in expansion of typology that triggers aesthetic perception. This strategy in electronic music aligns it partially with acoustic music disclosed above, which pursues erasure of the body from music which objectively must be produced by a body. Throughout the history, this alignment has been sometimes demonstrated quite straightforwardly, too, for example in works such as *Piano Phase* (1967) by Steve Reich, where the pianist ostentatiously mimics the tape-loop; in Kraftwerk’s “*Mensch-Machine*” utopia; or in music of bands such as Elektro Guzzi or Nisennenmondai, which perform the most mechanical minimal techno live on instruments, whereby they likewise try to deceive the listener: but now to convince her that there is nothing human in such music, that the body turned completely into automata. But, in general, this expansion mostly proceeds by certain osmosis between technology and body. Schaeffer, for his part, could not choose between these strategies; or, rather, attenuated the one with the other when he felt he went too far. It is at this crossroad where we shall now leave Schaeffer.

Body in a New Key

We have seen how hard composers and performers worked within acoustic music to arrive at radically new avant-garde music, which for them involved, naturally, the erasure of body as residue of natural instincts and tendencies. This, in particular, meant erasure of *Leib* as peculiar form of normal resistance—an obstacle one needs to work with, and which is the source of musical expression. We have seen that within electronic music, through absence of body, this radically new situation appeared as a default, but that problem was felt in opposite way—rather than working within this easily conquered field, the concern was that results will not be musical at all. In acoustic music, this worry was not felt that strongly—in part because letting the body perform in concert hall even in absurd, non-musical manner, was always to be ensured as “artistic” by virtue of presence of such spectacle in some

⁹¹ Schaeffer, *Treatise*, p. 444.

cultural institution.⁹² In electronic music, the danger was felt always quite clearly, though, that such music may be dismissed as pointless machine hiss. Therefore, electronic music worked in opposite direction: reconstruction of this normal resistance, reintroduction of these natural tendencies, even if it had to proceed by means of deception.

Technology, in any case, seeps into typology inevitably. The very first of Schaeffer's noise etudes, *Étude aux chemins de fer* (1948), contains mechanical repetition just by virtue of the locked grooves used for its creation. White noise, sine waves, impossibly cut attacks or impossible density,⁹³ perfect glissandi, mechanical rhythms, glitches—these all further penetrate the music and, using Husserl's terminology, establish themselves intersubjectively as types able to trigger aesthetic experience. It still holds that absence of body is the only defining feature of electronic music; however, this absence no longer means absence of types. In other words, it no longer causes a collapse of aesthetic experience.⁹⁴

⁹² Intriguing bonds between performer and audience can be formed even through completely absurd endeavors. I here recall, for example, wonderful conceptual art of Bruce Naumann; for a kind of demented dance performance, see his short film *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner Around the Perimeter of a Square* (1968). See also La Monte Young's series of "musical" pieces called *Compositions 1960*.

⁹³ Such impossibly cut attacks actually help to distinguish MIDI recordings of Ligeti's and Xenakis' piano works, which is the only way to perform them at proper tempi, from their human renditions. Cf. Iannis Xenakis, *Music for Keyboard Instruments — Realised by Computer*, NEOS (NEOS 10707), 2008; and György Ligeti, *György Ligeti Edition 5: Mechanical Music - Barrel Organ; Metronomes; Player Piano; 2 Player Pianos*, Sony Classical (SK 62310), 1997.

⁹⁴ The full implications of this extension of typology are, obviously, vast, and ultimately beyond the scope of the article. To use Kopf's term, this extension may announce the invasion of "xenomusic", non-human music which entirely questions the notion of music as something that is ours. However, when Kopf considers particular examples of xenomusical elements, he considers both avant-garde music—for example, Brötzmann and Bennink's site-specific free improvisation *Schwarzwaldfahrt* (1997)—and traditional, "ancient" music, namely that of Mbuti people of central Africa. Kopf, *Investigations*, pp. 136ff., 207. Many other examples can be found, of course. Local geography intervened in the traditional Slovak hay songs [*trávniče*] of peasants, where voices negotiated with the valleys they needed to traverse (and the aesthetically troubling issue is then that these hay songs sound a lot like Belorussian work songs as released on Schaeffer's label Ocora (C 560210, 2006); it is troubling, since Belarus is mostly a windy flatland and geography should thus be negotiated in different ways). The ultimate question in this regard would be whether "xenomusic" is discovered by avant-gardes, or whether it is our primordial sonic environment which we have lost throughout the history. In other words, the extension can likewise be interpreted as a kind of return that is initially painful but later develops into hedonism. Phenomenological investigation of body and music here suggests that "extension" is indeed the proper term, taking the lived body as primordial phenomenon to which lifeworld is correlative; and it would maybe allow us to interpret the earliest musicians precisely as experimenters; whereby it would be the anthropological meaning of particular experimentation that would mark the difference between early musician negotiating with her natural *milieu* and electronic

Where does this leave us as far as relationship between body, music and aesthetic experience is concerned? The starting point, in acoustic music, was that while body was not present directly in the aesthetic object, it was present there indirectly as quasi-*Leib*, where *Leib* appears as reservoir of types, as natural resistance, that grounded the aesthetic object—or that was capable of turning pure sound into music. But *Leib* is no longer the sole reservoir, machines join it. What is the effect of this extension of grounding of music beyond body?

One may tend to muse, alongside Baudrillard, about hyperfunctionality in which body and technology become a “single, large synchronous machine”.⁹⁵ Phenomenological analysis, however, requires us to be more cautious with regard to such sweeping conclusions. Husserl’s phenomenology offers us here a possible

musician negotiating the industrial *milieu*. That also means that—against Stahl, who claims that “music probably had its origins in mimesis, in imitation of natural sounds” (Stahl, “Attuned to Being”, p. 642)—I would make case rather for “reverse mimesis”, where nature is interrogated from within music, on the basis of types established within musical performance. When Stahl marks “bodily rhythms” (Ibid.) as other potential source, however, this aligns with phenomenological investigation of body and music, but these two sources of music must be distinguished. Schaeffer, for his part, also differentiates between nature and body as potential sources, and claims that latter is the probable source. See Schaeffer, *Treatise*, p. 24.

⁹⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulation and Simulacra*, The University of Michigan Press, 1994, p. 118. As a side note, one may mention that Baudrillard arrives at notion of hyperfunctionality in analysis of Ballard’s novel *Crash* (1973), where further curious links can be found. There is a remarkable passage in *Crash* during narrator’s sexual intercourse with crippled Gabrielle, where her multiple wounds and scars—results of many car accidents—become “the templates for new genital organs, the moulds of sexual possibilities yet to be created in a hundred experimental car-crashes”. James G. Ballard, *Crash*, Fourth Estate, 2014, p. 146. One is reminded here of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s distinction between neurosis and psychosis: “Yet it would never occur to a neurotic to grasp the skin erotically as a multiplicity of pores, little spots, little scars or black holes, or to grasp the sock erotically as a multiplicity of stitches. [...] Comparing a sock to a vagina is OK, it’s done all the time, but you’d have to be insane to compare a pure aggregate of stitches to a field of vaginas. [...] Is it still a question of a comparison at all? It is, rather, a pure multiplicity that changes elements, or *becomes*. On the micrological level, the little bumps ‘become’ horns, and the horns, little penises. [...] [This is] art of molecular multiplicities.” Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 27. “Molecular multiplicities”, of course, return many times—as a crucial theme, a kind of *ritornello*—in *A Thousand Plateaus*; but most significantly for us, they also return when Deleuze and Guattari tackle Luciano Berio’s electronic musical work *Visage* (1961), where pre-recorded voice of Cathy Berberian is manipulated beyond recognition: “The sounds accelerate the deterritorialization of the face, giving it a properly acoustical power, and the face reacts musically by in turn inducing a deterritorialization of the voice. This is a molecular face, produced by electronic music. The voice precedes the face, itself forms the face for an instant, and outlives it, increasing in speed—on the condition that it is unarticulated, asignifying, asubjective.” Ibid., p. 546. Where hyperfunctionality implies absolute control, absolute submission, the total marriage of body and technology—not a product of *Crash*, of course, only greatly exemplified in it—similar operation may likewise disrupt these implications by promise of deterritorialization, a certain destructive, schizoid liberation.

solution by means of notion of “reactivation”,⁹⁶ which does not commit us to claim the complete intertwining of body and technology, but, at the same time, it allows us to take stock of some of the intertwining throughout the history of modern music. Following this Husserl’s teaching, we would say that no matter the generation and osmosis of *Typik* between and among the acoustic and electronic music, there is always an option to reactivate the natural tendencies of acoustic music and—more significantly for us—to reactivate the strangeness of electronic music as an instant avant-garde victory in a quest to erase the body in search of radically new, counterintuitive, irrational music.

But here one must always, with the same breath, recall Adorno’s reproach against phenomenology of art, especially against the implicit search for source: “Art [...] is not what it was fated to have been from time immemorial but rather what it has become.”⁹⁷ While Adorno’s criticism is based more on a caricature of phenomenology rather than phenomenology as actually practiced, these words should caution us against a tendency to disregard historical development as phenomenologically irrelevant. The truth is that in contemporary electronic music, not only deception is sometimes total, but—much more significantly—even where it is not, the body is transformed in new ways. Against the previously mentioned examples we should add an obvious example of electronic dance music—whose one iteration is, symptomatically, called “electronic body music”, better known as EBM—where we see that mechanical rhythms of locked grooves have soon moved the bodies in different ways, or that spontaneous rhythmic transition, which have come to be known as “Amen break”, have been cut up and disjointed in myriad forms in jungle or breakcore loops, and these stammering machines have again moved the body in dance and have newly trained the playing of drummers. When *vis-à-vis* this empirical evidence I maintain that absence of body is still useful as defining characteristic of electronic music, and when I maintain that this absence persists as a possibility of reactivation, I mean by that that electronic music has still not lost its avant-garde roots, its experimental edge, even in its popular manifestations. That means that electronic music always offers an irrevocable option to defamiliarize the music itself—at least for a fleeting moment—that it still in an instant, by means of technological shortcut, introduces problems which in acoustic music are only laboriously fought for by avant-garde techniques. No amount of readymade solutions, accumulated over the history of electronic music and now often literally encoded in music-making software, can completely cover up the existence of the

⁹⁶ Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Northwestern University Press, 1970, pp. 361ff.

⁹⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, Continuum, 2002, pp. 351f.

unsolvable problem in the heart of electronic music; the fact is that—short of complete deception which, however, completely eschews what is peculiar in electronic music—this central problem lacks the ultimate solution, because the ultimate solution only lies in “natural tendencies” of the body. Put yet differently: this phenomenology of electronic music would lead us to conclusion that every electronic music, even the most conform one from the point of view of established contemporary genres, holds a certain subversive potential. It also confirms and grounds Stahl’s statement that electronic music maintains an “experimental *élan*”.⁹⁸

I thus wonder whether Benjamin’s misdirected hopes which he put in film may not yield fruit when imagined as statements on electronic music. Take these statements on film:

Unfolding [...] of all the forms of perception, the tempos and rhythms, which lie performed in today’s machines, such that all the problems of contemporary art find their definitive formulation only in [its] context. [...]

Only [it] can detonate the explosive stuff [...] accumulated in that strange and perhaps formerly unknown material which is kitsch. But [...] abstraction can be dangerous. [...]

[It] today articulates all problems of modern form-giving—understood as questions of its own technical existence—and does so in the most stringent, most concrete, most critical fashion.⁹⁹

Could *it* be, rather, an electronic music? Could electronic music live a secret double life in contemporary mass culture, exist both as pacifier, mind-cleaner for tired workers—partying, for example, in industrial Detroit to sounds of nascent techno music—and as avant-garde’s Trojan horse, carrying the seeds of subversion? This phenomenological account certainly points to that direction, and provides an experiential ground for Benjamin’s theses. However, at the same time, such phenomenology always simultaneously describes the mechanisms of pacification. What is important is that it discloses a rupture that cannot be healed and that is always a potential source of tensions. It remains to be seen whether these tensions will be creative.

⁹⁸ Stahl, “Attuned to Being,” p. 650.

⁹⁹ Benjamin, *Arcades*, pp. 394, 396, 530.

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