

This is called:

*-sand and seven, -sand and seven*

*[each of the following broken lines is read aloud with identical rhythm and intonation as the first bold-printed line]*

### **27 Questions For A Start**

To What Degree Is This Kind Of Music  
So Experimental Are There Pre-  
Conceptions Is The Group Constella-  
tion already a composition  
All Element Is This Music On-  
ly For Musicians And Specialists  
Is there any "popular" poten-  
tial In This Kind Of Music Would It  
Be A Good Thing If It Became Pop-  
ular Is Music A Language Or  
Something Beyond Does Our Musical  
Scene Simply Reproduce Capital-  
istic Structures To What Degree Is  
This Kind Of Music Improvised Is  
It All About Learning To Make De-  
cisions Without Being Able To  
Fully Analyse The Current Sit-  
uation Due To A Lack Of Time  
And/Or Capacity Does It Swing  
Can This Music Help To Stop Global  
Warming Is Our Musical Scene Mere-  
ly A Resort For Failed Existenc-  
es And Dysfunctional People Is

It Easier To Play Than Not To  
Play Is failure one of our main sour-  
ces For Progress Are There Different  
Levels Of Listening Should Ever-  
ything Be Possible At Any  
Time Do We Listen Differently  
To An Improvisation Than To  
A Composition Does A Record-  
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A Completed Piece Of Work Do We  
Have To File It Under A Gener-  
ic Term How Can Stasis Be Avoid-  
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Composition In Progress Is It  
Possible To Have No Expecta-  
tions Does Music Anticipate Chang-  
es In Society Is this a  
Gender-, Race-, Education- And Re-  
gion-Specific Form Of Art  
Is It Possible To Have A Non-  
Hierarchical Group Interact-  
tion Do We Need A Dedicated  
Space Burkhard Beins Bertrand Denzler Phil  
Durrant - Trio Sowari Two-thou

So I guess my starting point is something like the modern "division of the sensible." The Arts. The Performing Arts, the Fine Arts, the Literary Arts... & all the further categories within these.

& following this division would be the historical hierarchy of these senses in which the visual and the textual have almost always taken precedence over the auditory.

Looking at these things I think we might be able to account for the historical poverty of musical theory & discourse in general (in comparison to all the writing and talk about the literary & the visual) & thus also account for what sometimes seems like a generalized confusion in many people's understandings of music itself.

Although these're pretty general and abstract starting points, I was led to talking about them quite specifically by thinking about my experiences so far of Labor Diskurs. From the outset (the email invitation & the 27 Questions) I was attracted to what I saw as the possibility of something really necessary for the "new music" scene finally happening: facing, thinking about and trying to understand just what it is that we're all doing in a self-reflexive, self-critical, and most importantly fundamental way. Up until last November I'd been considering seriously for a while how I might start discussions like this myself (somehow via Ensemble Zwischentöne, I'd thought).

So although I haven't actually made it to many of the sessions, I've tried to follow what all's been happening & the more I've observed, the stronger I've had a sense of what my contribution might be. Particularly in relation to certain discussions that have struck me as being almost more radical than one might think, I think I have something to add: to certain moments of discussion when basic assumptions and definitions of music making in general have been challenged (practically, theoretically, or both) in a way that one rarely experiences in the music world (for example, talking about written down improvisations, composed improvisations).

As I see "new music" (if you'll excuse the term) in general at the moment in an almost crisis situation, and as I have thus a certain degree of hope that the discussions at Labor might then be of a certain importance, I'd like to offer my own take on some of this with the added hope of perhaps slightly shifting the terms of the discussion.

So returning to my starting points, I've decided to frame this statement with a discussion of the concept of the "medium" in relation to music.

The problems of thinking or talking about music in extra-musical terms, or rather thinking about music according to the terms of other sensory/intellectual paradigms is for musicians nothing new. We experience this constantly in cases ranging from casual remarks such as "did you see the concert last night?" to the total foreclosure of any understanding of the musical according to the musical in metaphors of the musical (in, for example, poetry or philosophy). What I wonder or what I'd like to

suggest however is that this problem of understanding music in terms of the visual, literary or what have you is even more far-reaching and deeply engrained than these few examples suggest and actually extends into the very definitions of music as an artistic discipline or as a "medium" in itself (even into our own, regardless of our own stylistic radicality or conservatism).

This problem in my mind centers around the old notion that a medium in general is defined by its materials – or rather, is not so much defined by its materials but IS its materials. Of course what historically counted in the visual arts was a material object, & there's thus a certain obvious kind of sense distinguishing between painting, sculpture, drawing, etc. But to what degree this has much bearing in itself on a categorization or definition of the musical is something I'd argue is more than questionable. Even if one accepts a material definition of the musical today, when one listens closely, things fall apart: for to what degree from a "physical," acoustic standpoint, from the perspective of the phenomenology of sound itself, are sounds themselves actually even "material?" Aren't what we perceive as sounds actually gestalts of *changes of pressure* in a given physical medium (usually air) caused by specific physical triggering events that initiate vibrations?

And of course if one approaches this question by way of something like a cultural understanding musical praxis the whole discussion breaks down on all sides. From this standpoint it would seem almost self evident that a much more relevant approach to categorizing and thinking about the musical would be in considering the varieties of human approach to whatever various materials and the human relations implicit in these. Indeed, one sees the relevance of this approach when one considers on the one hand how little significance a categorization of visual artists according to "improviser" or "composer" (or much less, "performer" or "interpreter") would be, and on the other hand how critical these same role divisions are in music. (& it's in this sense that I've found some of the positions put forward here at Labor Diskurs so radical.) And yet, it's this object based conception of medium and discipline that's been exported and enforced on musical discourse at least since the renaissance: the idea of a musical or sound object, of fixed musical "material", of music as a physical medium. And it's this same confused conception that one can still find operating almost anywhere today from IRCAM to Ausland.

In a sense then, one might take Cage, or at least his reception, as the culmination of this way of thinking: instead of challenging or suggesting a new understanding of sound and music, Cage generalized (or radicalized) the traditional conception of sound and the musical to all audible "material". Instead of abolishing the erroneous concept of a sound object, the "Cagean" paradigm makes all "individual" sounds equal. In this way, it's not until artists such as Cardew or Wolff or say, Anthony Braxton (all of whom would of course have been impossible without Cage) that one begins to find musical praxes that to various degrees and in various languages operate outside or according to other fundamental assumptions of music and music making.

Now of course, this formal, material understanding of media in general is something has been for a long time thoroughly questioned and challenged from various quarters throughout the visual arts. It's sadly ironic then that only still within the world of music, where this notion was perhaps least compatible, are these conceptions given significant weight. The double irony of the situation is that a theorization of the musical medium according to both the phenomenology and relationality of music (that is, medium in the sense of the word as something between different entities) might come surprisingly close *in itself* to many of the most sophisticated, recent theoretical understandings of media in other arts. If one understands music as an interstice between a physical process (sound waves) and a social, intersubjective relation (performance, interpretation, composition, improvisation, listening), that is if one understands music not as an objective thing, but as something oscillating between material and process, as oscillation itself!, one arrives at something very close to what, for example, Rosalind Krauss has described as "differential specificity." Based on a discussion of Marcel Broodthaers' embrace of "primitive cinema" in her short book "A Voyage on the North Sea, Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition," Krauss describes this exemplary cinema in terms quite close to those I've been trying to apply to the musical: "as a phenomenological mixture of presences and absence, immediacy and distance... a medium whose specificity is to be found in its condition as self-differing... aggregative, a matter of interlocking supports and layered conventions". She tells us that, "the specificity of mediums, even modernist ones, must be understood as differential, self-differing, and thus as a layering of conventions never simply collapsed into the physicality of their support."

Diedrich Diederichsen also comes close to this and directly in relation to music in his recent article about Christian von Borries, "Conceptual Music." He acknowledges and clearly describes the fundamental differences between the functioning of music and visual art, writing:

[In music] the work form is less bound to objects [as in the visual arts]...The primary reference point of musical reception, the recognition of the part or the whole, the comprehension of internal (as well as external) references, resemble the determination of originality. On the structural level of hearing...the listener precesses differences and similarities, which go back to the same processes that also decide the legal ontology of the music in question.

But in spite of this the development of the music object – unlike that of the art object – has always been characterized by appropriation. Scores are instructions for appropriation; recordings are reproductions, first of public performances, later of organized recitals for the purpose of household use...and certainly since the digitalization of all sounds, every musical production has simultaneously been a potential part of its next appropriation. The fact that the music object, which on one hand is what first qualifies the work as a work, simultaneously makes possible its disintegration, is a fundamentally different situation from that of visual art. The continuing attempt to make music a commodity and to sustain its commodity nature cannot be

pinned solely on its objecthood; rather, it must rely on quite different, often repressive measures that can no longer be camouflaged as inherent to art.

So all this finally leads me back to Labor Diskurs. What I see as at stake in these discussions is nothing more than the possibility of a group of musicians' rearticulating and rethinking the musical in such a way that might be of radical significance at a time and place where various forms of "professional" musical consensus seem to be on the rise.

Rosalind Krauss takes care to position her discussion of "differential specificity" & media in the specific historical context of the global. In the same way, I think this is absolutely critical for us. Krauss positions her theoretical construct (which I've tried to show might be something implicit in a slight redefinition of the musical) in opposition to the generalized international institution of installation art (a phenomenon she comes close to equating with the globalization of market capitalism). She writes:

In the intermedia loss of specificity [...] the individual arts [...] will have recourse to every material support one can imagine, from pictures to words to video to readymade objects to films. But every material support, including the site itself – whether art magazine, dealer's fair booth, or museum gallery – will now be leveled, reduced to a system of pure equivalency by the homogenizing principle of commodification, the operation of pure exchange value from which nothing can escape and for which everything is transparent to the underlying market value for which it is a sign.

[...] Within this situation, however, there are a few contemporary artists who have decided not to follow this practice, who have decided, that is, not to engage in the international fashion of installation and intermedia work, in which art essentially finds itself complicit with a globalization of the image in the service of capital. These same artists have also resisted, as impossible, the retreat into etiolated forms of the traditional mediums – such as painting and sculpture. Instead, [these] artists have embraced the idea of differential specificity, which is to say the medium as such, which they understand they will now have to reinvent or rearticulate.

The possible emergence of something like this in the musical world in opposition to the ever more omnipresent "multimedia" hybrids that are more and more taking the place of any serious form of musical experimentation (similar maybe to record shop & myspace "experimental" genres) is what I'd hope might come of an enterprise such as Labor Diskurs, and what I'd like to challenge us to make happen.

Once more to the "27 Questions for a Start":

*[& once again, each of the following broken lines is read aloud with identical rhythm and intonation as the first bold-printed line]*

**To what degree is this kind of music experimental?**

Are there preconceptions in the group constellation already?

Why a compositional element in this music on?

Why for musicians and specialists is there any pop?

What potential in this kind of music would it be a good?

What if it became popular is music a language or?

Something beyond does our musical scene simply reproduce?

Capitalistic structures to what degree is this kind of?

Music improvised is it all about learning to make do?

Decisions without being able to fully analyse the?

Current situation due to a lack of time and/or cash?

Capacity does it swing can this music help to stop global?

Warming is our musical scene merely a resort for failed?

Existences and dysfunctional people is it easy?

Whether to play than not to play is failure one of our main sources?

Ways for progress are there different levels of listening?

Should everything be possible at any time do we list?

Even differently to an improvisation than to a?

Composition does a recording turn an open process?

Into a completed piece of work do we have to file it?

Under a generic term how can stasis be avoided?

Is an improvisation a composition in progress?

Is it possible to have no expectations does music?

Anticipate changes in society is this a genre?

Der-, race-, education- and region-specific form of art?

Is it possible to have a non-hierarchical group?

Interaction Do we need a dedicated space Burkhardt?

Beings Bertrand Denzler Phil Durrant Trio Sowari two-thou?

Danke.