

Quick, quick, now, now!

To the Reader

“Quick, quick, now, now!”—that’s how many magic spells end, also the invented and made-up ones. For one of my latest pieces, “An den Mond,” I contrived and made up such magic spells. It is not at all clear whether such products and artifacts would be less effective than the ‘true and real.’ This confession is, however, first of all a warning sign not to fall too easily into the pitfalls one has made. The unconditional of ‘now’ accompanied my work like a vision, but ultimately also hurled me into the deepest and most desperate abysses: to admit complete defeat in the face of my own demands. I had to painfully realize that the perception on which I had relied on so much to reach the now, that this perception lies: the now is always an illusion. But it is exactly here that the wondrous turn begins, the renewed ascent out of the darkness. Because there is something completely unexpected to discover in this illusion. With Alenka Zupančič we could call it “The Real of an Illusion”—that is the title of one of her books—something that provides an important argument in the longest and perhaps most labyrinthine of the texts collected here, “A Music That Withdraws.” This not-being-what-it-first-appears arguably also denotes the relationship between music and writings. The writings here are not ‘thinking’ independent of the ‘work.’ No philosophy. They cannot be understood without the music they accompany. They are themselves part of the ‘work’ and only understandable in relation to the whole. Only in exceptional cases are the writings something like work texts, or even work explanations. Much more often they are about visual art, architecture, philosophy, music history or even questions about the not-yet-existing work. Music and texts are like two legs of the ‘work’: they support it. But they are also what makes walking possible: a step on one side is the prerequisite for the step on the other side—very well: sometimes I hop on one leg to land a step farther with the same leg. Or: maybe this is not about a biped at all, but about a tripod, or a multipede—even a beetle? Drawing and photographing is—to a not-so-extensive degree—finally also part of the sequence of steps. But never do I consider the other legs (activities) as anything other than being, or at least imagining, the music itself (or an aspect of it). And there is something of all aspects (legs) here. The present book is based on the German edition of my writings up to 2015. The selection for the English edition is not quite as extensive, but to compensate for this it is supplemented with some more-recent texts in which the “wondrous turn” outlined above continues to unfold.

My notebooks are the breeding ground of all my work. In them, I jot down not only thoughts about possible future pieces, but ideas and reflections on more general thematic

strands. Such entries are often accompanied by fleeting drawings that are not illustrations, and certainly not visual art, but an abbreviated representation, a shorthand for the respective thought or musical concept at hand. The most important reason for making these notes is to be allowed to forget them. The point is to be able to quickly file the respective thought somewhere and have one's head free again for the particular current piece. And it works: I actually forget the existence of quite interesting pieces or concepts for pieces—until I perhaps stumble across them again many years later and think, whoops, why didn't I publish that long ago? The notebooks probably contain ten times as much text as has been published, ten times as many pieces as those realized. So, whenever I'm asked for a text contribution, or for a piece, I first start browsing through my notebooks and choose from them whatever seems most appropriate for the request. So basically, everything that is requested already exists.

In fact, many of the chapters are compilations ('compositions') of such existing entries. And since I am so good at forgetting, I often use the same passage in different texts; these would be the refrains in this book.

The texts are arranged chronologically, but the aforementioned montage principle leads to tangled, Möbius strip-like chronologies: so that, for example, the first longer text "Expression/Sonata" can be dated 1982–2007. With the following texts, the date narrows in a funnel-shaped manner, "Metaphors" 1983–2004, "Listening to See" 1984–2000, and so on, to come across a non-collage text for the first time with "Culture and Catastrophe," which is also my first text publication from 1989.

This arrangement means that at the beginning there is a normal-language, almost musicological text on expression, a content that is very important to me personally because its discussion of musical rhetoric refers to something that seems to me to be completely underexposed. It is followed by "Metaphors," a text that talks a lot about my career and the concepts behind it. This is followed by a rather more "poetic" reflection on the interpenetration of the visual and the acoustic. Thus, the conceptual field is marked out, and is differentiated in further texts and supplementary materials.

So the text types are quite diverse, ranging from essay, to notebook entry, to poetry. The different layouts, but also a certain playful handling of, and deviations from standard notation, are meant to bring out the differences of 'tone' of the texts. Texts with sparse or even missing punctuation marks, for example, are mostly borne in a certain 'holy' tone; they are almost 'prayers.' The model for this are those sacred Hebrew texts written without punctuation or vowel points—these would have tainted the script.

Yet a different key is struck by the more recent texts from "A Music That Withdraws" onward. In them, a downright presumptuous attempt is made to point out the limits of philosophy and to show possible incursions into music: an area on which philosophy must remain silent. And as every concert-goer knows, this silence is the unmistakable sign that the music can begin. My hope/wishes for the book are in the direction of being able to add a few incessant, if not eternal questions to put things in a different light.