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*Sprachmusik* (Speech music) as Critical Composition:  
A case study of Cornelius Schwehr's *Deutsche Tänze* (1989).

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## Abstract

The German 'genre' of 'critical composition' is briefly summarised as critique that not only includes critique on musical material, but also focuses on the critique of the social and political aspect of music. Cornelius Schwehr's *Deutsche Tänze* can be considered as 'critical composition' and uses a text by Bertolt Brecht to critically evaluate language in a musical form. Further, it critically evaluates semiotics, social and political material. *Deutsche Tänze* asks for an active participation by the listener. However a perception of critique in critical music is questionable. *Deutsche Tänze* can be seen as a two-level critique. There is the composer's individual critique and secondly the Brechtian idea of 'epic theatre' that asks for an active participation of the listener. *Deutsche Tänze* presents material that confirms the aesthetics of critical composition along the semiotic theories by Umberto Eco and Jean-Jaques Nattiez. Schwehr focuses on the 'paradox of language' to achieve a multi-layered critical association of critique. Therefore *Deutsche Tänze* on one hand deals with a critical evaluation of musical and linguistic material and on the other hand opens up different spaces of association for the listener. *Deutsche Tänze* can be analysed via the theory of the 'signifier' and 'signified'. Therefore outlining that *Deutsche Tänze* as a composition is a sign created by Schwehr, but only becomes a 'meaningful sign' if interpreted by an individual listener. *Deutsche Tänze* focuses on the Brechtian ideology of fighting against totalitarian systems where free speech is prohibited. This ideology forms the starting point of Schwehr's individual critique and remains a central point throughout the piece. In order to achieve individual 'spaces of associations' Schwehr fragments Brecht's text into phonemes and syllables. Therefore a semantic meaning is not always audible. Generally *Deutsche Tänze* moves from text-based sounds to speech music, where the focus is on the 'natural' speaking and sound of the voice. It outlines Schwehr's concept of multi-layered critique and might outline an answer to the question of the perception of critical composition.

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## ***Sprachmusik (Speech Music) as critical composition:***

### **A case study of Cornelius Schwehr's *Deutsche Tänze***

#### **1) Introduction**

This essay will outline critically the use of the German term 'critical composition' via *Sprachmusik* (speech music) and focuses on Cornelius Schwehr's *Deutsche Tänze* (1989) as a case study. *Deutsche Tänze* includes various theoretical and compositional concepts relating to critical composition aesthetics. Further, Schwehr uses a text by Bertolt Brecht to present his personal aesthetics and concepts of evaluating *Sprache* (language) in a musical context. I will therefore not only analyse *Deutsche Tänze* in connection to the 'Critical Theory' of the Frankfurt School and thus the critique of traditional musical material. I will also outline a socio-political and cultural critique presented in relation to *Deutsche Tänze* and a general concept of critical composition. Further, the perception of critique in a critical composition is questionable, and therefore *Deutsche Tänze* might delineate what critical composition means in practice.

#### *1.1) Introduction to Critical Composition*

Critical composition is not a widely used term in the United Kingdom or English-language musicology. Therefore a brief explanation of the German use is necessary. Critical Composition is mostly associated to a group of composers based in Southwest Germany, including its most prominent figures: Helmut Lachenmann, Nicolaus A. Huber and Mathias Spahlinger. They are all known for their critical evaluation of traditional material as well as

(Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf outlines) their intellectual, socio-theoretically charged rhetoric.<sup>1</sup> Generally one can define critical composition as a reflection upon the social functions of music as well as rejecting the idea of using musical material as a stylistic ideal.<sup>2</sup> John Warnaby refers to this group of composers as “A New Left-Wing Radicalism”.<sup>3</sup> Therewith Warnaby implies the political and social-critical character of the music where a critical evaluation of empirical material as well as music’s function within society is questioned.

As critical composition derives from the development of the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, Adorno’s theory asking for a critique on the prominent modes of reason<sup>4</sup> should be seen as a starting point for the German term critical composition. “Critical Theory” can be briefly characterised as a contextualisation of the object to be criticised. As a result this process does not only include the object’s social and historic function but also the interaction between the subject and the object. This concept outlines the relationship between the individual and society.<sup>5</sup> In 1961 Adorno mentioned three points of musical criticism that can be seen as a point of departure for the development of a theorised as well as compositional approach to critical composition.<sup>6</sup> In his “Theory as a critical reflection” Max Paddison summarises Adorno’s three points as the three levels of: ‘immanent’ analysis, sociological critique and philosophical-historical interpretation.<sup>7</sup> Paddison’s main point is the critical re-contextualisation of established theories as well as practice that are otherwise seen as autonomous and cultivated. Using this approach to outline the German compositional

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<sup>1</sup> Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, “What Does “Critical Composition” Mean?”, in *Critical Composition Today*, ed. Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf (Hofheim: Wolke Verlag, 2006), 80.

<sup>2</sup> Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, “What Does “Critical Composition” Mean?”, 89.

<sup>3</sup> John Warnaby, “A New Left-Wing Radicalism in Contemporary German Music?”, *Tempo* No. 193, German Issue (Jul., 1995), 18.

<sup>4</sup> Max Paddison, *Adorno, Modernism and Mass Culture. Essays on Critical Theory and Music*, (London: Kahn and Averill, 1996), 14.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>6</sup> Dieter Mersch, “Medial Paradoxes. On Methods of Artistic Production”, in *Critical Composition Today*, ed. Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf (Hofheim: Wolke Verlag, 2006), 63.

<sup>7</sup> Max Paddison, *Adorno, Modernism and Mass Culture. Essays on Critical Theory and Music*, 15.

approach to critical composition one could summarise it as follows: First, the work-aesthetic (*werkästhetisch*) approach that mainly includes a critique of the musical material on offer. This includes all musical material and the composer's individual critique of it. Second, the reception-aesthetic (*rezeptionsästhetisch*) which summarises the idea of using the subject in a reflecting and negative way. This means that music becomes a language (not in the semantic way) that can via disclosure criticise itself and the object it is dealing with. Third, the socio-politically (*gesellschafts-politisch*) orientated approach that includes the participation of the listener.<sup>8</sup> Umberto Eco focuses on this aspect in his *The Open Work* (1962).<sup>9</sup> Eco presents three main concepts that deal with the question of social commitment within art; his concepts of alienation will be later discussed. In the late 1960s Nicolaus A. Huber recognised that music still has to be connected to human emotions and has a need for a physical effect.<sup>10</sup> Especially if critical composition aims for a sociological change, the only way for it to do so is by connecting the human's natural emotional reactions to the music. Huber writes "Today, critical composition means to analytically compose music that not simply produces music, but rather tells us something about music. 'New Music' says something 'about' music. However this can only be done productively if its says something about human beings."<sup>11</sup>

Ultimately critical composition can only find fulfilment in critical listening. Only by critical listening is the concept of critical composition achieved. Thus attempting to change music's role in society and relates to the Brechtian idea of an actively participating audience.<sup>12</sup> Eco's "alienation theory" as well as a general understanding of the perception of semiotics including

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<sup>8</sup> Nonnenmann, Rainer, "Die Sackgasse als Ausweg. Kritisches Komponieren ein historisches Phänomen?", *Musik und Ästhetik* 9. Jahrgang, no. 3 (October 2005), 38.

<sup>9</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cangogni (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 29.

<sup>10</sup> Nonnenmann, Rainer, "Die Sackgasse als Ausweg. Kritisches Komponieren ein historisches Phänomen?", 46.

<sup>11</sup> "Heute bedeutet kritisches Komponieren analytisches Komponieren, das nicht einfach Musik herstellt sondern über Musik Auskunft gibt. >Neue Musik< sagt etwas >über< Musik. Das aber geht sinnvoll nur, wenn sie etwas über den Menschen aussagt." My translation. Ibid., 47.

<sup>12</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, 11.

the “narrative as communication” theory<sup>13</sup> by Roland Barthes outline a perceiver’s contribution that is asked for in critical composition. Umberto Eco’s “open work” theory can be described as the need for an active participation of the perceiver to realise a piece of art. Eco outlines three stages of alienation that are relevant in order to understand the theory of the socio-political character in critical composition. There is the ‘alienation from’ (*Verfremdung*/estrangement) that relates back to Adorno and Paddison to criticise cultivated material. ‘Alienation in/to’ (*Entfremdung*) that is linked to the Marxist theory of “social and economic separation”.<sup>14</sup> As alienation “in” can occur in every relationship that someone has with someone or something thus abandoning oneself to some extraneous powers one becomes “other” in something outside oneself. Meaning if a composer rejects the tonal system that would alienate the composer in/to cultural values.<sup>15</sup> Although there might be a common agreement on a certain approach towards critical composition there is still the composer’s individual approach and the critique that he/she makes through music to be considered. Generally the point of criticism should be examined which means that it needs to be assigned with negative values, with criteria or elimination. Mathias Spahlinger says, that where music rejects or negates a *topoi* one is able to include or add another emotional world (*Gefühlswelt*) in.<sup>16</sup> Paddison would describe this as “re-contextualising” of a given object and is in relation to Eco’s theory of alienating a material from its usual place in order for it to be perceived via a different context.

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<sup>13</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 11.

<sup>14</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, 26.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>16</sup> Heinz-Klaus Metzger, *Geschichte der Musik als Gegenwart. Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht und Mathias Spahlinger im Gespräch* (München: Edition und Kritik, 2000), 73.

There is also the time dimension one needs to consider when analysing critical composition; as Paddison outlines it: art gets shaped by the “dominant powers”<sup>17</sup> within a particular period. Therefore for example Lachenmann’s critique on the aesthetic apparatus (*Ästhetischen Apparat*), aesthetic apparatus refers to the idea to recycle the traditional orchestra and all its implemented cultural representations, can only be valid once this orchestra has been established and lasted as such for a period of time.<sup>18</sup> Spahlinger is also aware of the time dimension of critique as critical composition is always an “*Antwort auf Antwort*” (answer on answer), where critique can only negate or act once a preceding system or material has been established.<sup>19</sup>

Lachenmann sees the only purpose critical music has to achieve to be the critique of itself.<sup>20</sup> Referring mainly to the aesthetic apparatus, he states that music has the obligation to contribute a meaning to life. Music can try to smuggle experience in and this in order to arouse an irritation. Where the individual subconsciously feels and acts.<sup>21</sup> Being aware of the problem of socio-political critical music and the question of perception and sociological change, Lachenmann focuses on a composer’s critique, describing a composer’s main tool as his/her “critical thinking”. This critical thinking includes everything a composer is surrounded by; the composer should evaluate a chosen material and then shape it to put it into a musical context. Lachenmann’s four main aspects of critical composition and the dispute with tradition are as follows: tonality as a synonym for tradition and the entity of the aesthetic

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<sup>17</sup> Max Paddison, *Adorno, Modernism and Mass Culture. Essays on Critical Theory and Music*, 35.

<sup>18</sup> Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, “What Does “Critical Composition” Mean?”, 77.

<sup>19</sup> Heinz-Klaus Metzger, *Geschichte der Musik als Gegenwart. Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht und Mathias Spahlinger im Gespräch*, 23.

<sup>20</sup> Nonnenmann, Rainer, “Die Sackgasse als Ausweg. Kritisches Komponieren ein historisches Phänomen?”, 44.

<sup>21</sup> “Musik hat die Pflicht ihren Beitrag zum Leben zu leisten, sie kann nur versuchen bestimmte Erfahrungen hineinzuschmuggeln und dadurch eine Irritation herbeiführen. Wo der Einzelne unterbewußt doch fühlt und handelt”. My translation. Helmut Lachenmann, *Musik als existentielle Erfahrung* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1996), 93.

apparatus; secondly the acoustic-physical experience of sound and its mechanic/energetic requirement; thirdly the use of structure mainly as deconstruction or disorganisation, not as order (against serialism) and fourthly the sounds' aura to be the fundamental condition for associations, memories and the archetypal-magical in music.<sup>22</sup> Lachenmann's attitude is not only closely linked to Eco's *Entfremdung* (alienation in/to), but seems to be the first instance for finding a starting point of analysing critical composition.

Approaching an analysis of critical composition one has to be aware of the various approaches there are, as there is certainly a difference between a composer's intention and the perceiver's response. Often a composer's intention is stated somewhere and especially having access to a score and reading relevant literature makes the process of analysis less complicated. However, the fact is that when listening to a critical composition one cannot presuppose that information and therefore one should be aware that this critique is not necessarily perceivable.

The approaches to critical composition are as diverse as there are composers choosing this compositional approach. Therefore it is difficult to systemise one theory, technique and composer's aim. As critique always needs a position from where a critique can be carried out, it therefore can only be related to an individual work and composer. However as a guideline I chose Jean-Jaques Nattiez's three level approach he outlines in his "A Theory of musical semiotics" published in his *Music and Discourse. Towards a Semiology of Music* (1990).<sup>23</sup> Firstly, the examination of the object that includes the composer's individual critique. Secondly, the "operations upon external material"<sup>24</sup> that includes the perceiver's response to

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<sup>22</sup> Helmut Lachenmann, *Musik als existentielle Erfahrung* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1996), 109.

<sup>23</sup> Jean-jaques Nattiez, *Music and Discourse. Towards a Semiology of Music*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 12.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

the presented material as well as the socio-political character and outlines the relationship between the signifier (composer) and signified (society/perceiver). This leading into the third point: the “production of the work”, linked to Eco’s “open work” where the perceiver actively contributes to the “final product” of art.

## **2) The musical language of Cornelius Schwehr**

Schwehr seeks for a musical dispute with the traditional musical material in a similar way to Lachenmann. Lachenmann and Schwehr both include the idea of critical composition into their technical approaches to working with material. Schwehr’s compositional technique deals with the critique or a critical evaluation of old material and therefore indirectly emancipates musical material, as this will be outlined later. Schwehr acknowledges the fact that tonality has been embedded into the human’s psyche for centuries and therefore can be described by Carl Gustav Jung’s “depth psychology”<sup>25</sup> which outlines that tonality is an archetypal prerequisite and therefore inevitably related to the listener’s disposition. It is to use Spahlinger the *conditio humana*, the empirical embedded experience of humanity.<sup>26</sup> Therefore Schwehr deliberately confronts tonal leftovers, for example modes and chants as in *Deutsche Tänze*, and other social or artistic experiences to work against musical stultification. Instead of strictly working in an atonal, a-semantic and a-linguistic way he relates his material back to tonal and semantic elements. He uses the approach of “Verfremdung” (alienation) as also known by Bertolt Brecht’s idea of epic theatre<sup>27</sup> and related to Eco’s “alienation from”, by using cultivated or pre-positioned material. This material gets fragmented, changed, confirmed or negated. In doing so something familiar turns into something unfamiliar and is

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<sup>25</sup> Nonnenmann, Rainer, “Die Sackgasse als Ausweg. Kritisches Komponieren ein historisches Phänomen?”, 47.

<sup>26</sup> Heinz-Klaus Metzger, *Geschichte der Musik als Gegenwart*, 73.

<sup>27</sup> Bertold Brecht, *On Art and Politics*, ed. Tom Kuhn and Steve Giles (London: Methuen Drama, 2000), 36.

alienated. Most of his music deals with bi- or multipolar structures that overlay, penetrate, intensify, cancel and mirror each other alternately.<sup>28</sup> The experienced or traditional use of material seems to be a vital compositional attitude as he states:

I spend a lot of time and passion to understand what music and art mean and meant in its historical context. I like to know as much as possible about those various context and aesthetics. Evaluating this I can then develop my own attitude that I use to write my music.<sup>29</sup>

In relation to compositions for *Musik und Sprache* (music and speech) Schwehr adds language as an independent, influencing, negating and related layer on top of his musical one. One should understand that language or speech as well as music are both individual sign systems (both have semantics, but in different ways and via the use of different material) that Schwehr tries to combine. Roland Barthes outlines that a “sentence can be described linguistically on various levels phonetically, phonological and contextual”.<sup>30</sup> Working with language Schwehr generally differs between the “how and the “what”, the “Sprachlaut” (phonemes) and the “Bedeutung” (meaning or context).<sup>31</sup> A phoneme does not work semantically but creates rhythm and tone colours.<sup>32</sup> Opposite to this is the meaning of a word or text: by questioning and working with a text one can open different doors. The metaphor of doors refers to Schwehr’s concept of association spaces (*Assoziationsräume*).<sup>33</sup> It outlines the

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<sup>28</sup> Rainer Nonnenmann, *Des Widerspänstigen Fügung, zum dialektischen Komponieren bei Cornelius Schwehr* (Saarbrücken: Pfau Verlag, 2005), 6.

<sup>29</sup> “Ich verwende sehr viel Zeit und Kraft darauf, zu verstehen, was Musik, was Kunst, bezogen auf ihren jeweiligen Zusammenhang, war und ist, und versuche, soviel als möglich davon zu wissen und in Erfahrung zu bringen. Auf diese Weise bin ich dabei, mir eine Haltung zu erarbeiten, von der aus ich meine Musik schreiben kann.” My translation. Schwehr, Cornelius. “Ist die Kunst am Ende; hat es noch Sinn, den bestehenden Werken neue hinzuzufügen?” <http://cornelius-schwehr.de/fileadmin/images/Texte/Vortraege/IstDieKunstAmEnde.pdf>, 2003; accessed 17 September 2011.

<sup>30</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, 85.

<sup>31</sup> Cornelius Schwehr, “Sprachmusik. Vom Umgang mit Musik und Sprache”, 2012 in print, see appendix.

<sup>32</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, 85.

<sup>33</sup> Cornelius Schwehr, “Sprachmusik. Vom Umgang mit Musik und Sprache”, see appendix.

“paradox of the language”<sup>34</sup> each individual might interpret a sign in a different context and meaning. Thus opening a door to enter a different room or space to interpret a given sign. Eco explains that “proposition with a referential function”<sup>35</sup> ask for an active participation of the perceiver, but that does not mean that each individual would get to the same meaning. Schwehr’s interpretation of *Assoziationsräume* divides words into syllables and removes them from their conventional structure. It puts a word or phoneme into a different context and therefore opens a door to various ‘rooms or spaces of association’.

*Deutsche Tänze* (1989/90) is based on one of Brecht’s prose from his *Flüchtlingsgespräche* (Discussions by fugitives) that he wrote during his exile between 1940 and 1944. Schwehr uses the twelfth conversation between the two protagonists namely *Lapland oder Selbstbeherrschung und Tapferkeit/Ungeziefer* (Lapland or self-control’ and ‘bravery/vermin’).<sup>36</sup> The extract tells the story of a man who jumps onto a ferry where everyone has been sentenced to death. The man is the last one alive. When the soldiers find out that he should not have been on the ferry he is questioned and asked why he did not say anything while everyone else was getting shot. He tells them that all his siblings have died because they said something they should not have said. Therefore the man decided that speaking is dangerous. During his examination he gets into rage and says something he should not have said and gets shot. It is important to keep in mind that the last sentence is not present in *Deutsche Tänze*. Schwehr describes his decision to use Brecht as follows, “This is language on its highest level that turns into simple speech again. It is so exciting that something is so artificial that it turns into everyday speech again”.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, 86.

<sup>35</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, 29.

<sup>36</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Flüchtlingsgespräche*, (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2000), 70.

<sup>37</sup> “Sprache auf allerhöchstem Niveau handelt, die dann wieder einfach wird. Es ist unglaublich aufregend, daß etwas so artifizuell ist, daß es wieder umschlägt und wieder zur Umgangssprache wird”. My translation. Rainer Nonnenmann, *Des Widerspänstigen Fügung, zum dialektischen Komponieren bei Cornelius Schwehr* 7.

Schwehr's *Sprachmusik* deals with showing the word as a unity of phonemes and meaning, a unity of sounds that should be taken as words. Even if a voice speaks it is not about the meaning, but about the sound. This refers to the idea of working on two levels with the text on offer; on one hand he only concentrates on the phonemes and tries to remove them from their linguistic meaning. On the other hand he uses the natural structure and sounds of language to include it into *Deutsche Tänze*. Thus, to use Derrida, 'deconstructing' Brecht's text to open up new associations in order for Brecht's text to be evaluated with a different context.

### **3)Analysis**

#### 3.1 Sounding text – text-based sounds

Broadly speaking *Deutsche Tänze* moves from being a sound-text based composition into Sprachmusik (speech music). Sound-text here refers to sounds created by the voices that are always based on the phonemes of natural speaking as well as Brecht's text. The phonemes often get altered via various singing or speaking techniques. When dealing with Brecht's text, Schwehr focuses on the transparency of the precise phonetic material and the contextual statement by making the text sound as a sounding text and creating the sounds with the use of text (text-based sounds).<sup>38</sup> In general Schwehr uses three main compositional levels to structure the work: First, sound gestures that are sounds related to language for example breathing or tongue clicks. Second, the use of the original sounding text that only occurs whispered and fragmented over five voices. The third level is a rhythmic and metric level that is closely related to dances and suite forms, therefore reaching a broader musical context and association.<sup>39</sup> All three levels work with and against each other and can appear in combination or on their own exploring all the possible combinations.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 7.

Concentrating on the sounding material, *Deutsche Tänze* is based on Schwehr's "how" and "what" approach in regards to language. Using phonemes and semantic meanings leaves him two main sound categories, one is the original text that mainly occurs in a whispered and accentuated way and the second is the sounds created by the human voice and based on the text and the human speech organ. Schwehr bases his compositional sound techniques on Lachenmann's *musique concrete instrumentale*, where the aesthetic apparatus of traditional playing is questioned and 'new' performance techniques are introduced. Where Lachenmann reinvented the sound of a string quartet in *Gran Torso* (1972), Schwehr uses this technique entirely with respect to the human voice in order to re-invent the use of the human voice in chamber music. The techniques Schwehr uses are not his own; he uses techniques that have been developed throughout the history of sound poetry (starting with the Dada movement) as well as including foreign language pronunciations. The post-war generation of sound poets (mainly the French *Lettrism* movement) were especially interested in using extended vocal techniques. However singers like Cathy Berberian and Joan La Barbara most certainly brought those linguistic techniques into the concert halls.

As *Deutsche Tänze* is *Sprachmusik* (speech music), music that is mostly based and concerned on the use of language, all singing instructions are related to the natural ability of the human voice. Consequently sung notes are an exception, because they are immediately related to the artificial voice of opera singing. Dieter Schnebel criticises *bel canto* singing,<sup>40</sup> because it is unnatural to the human voice. In the 1970s Schnebel was mainly concerned with the voice and its natural habitus. He took speech music literally and based one of his most famous works *Maulwerke* (mouthworks) on the human's natural vocal organ. *Atemzüge* (1976) is another of these pieces: it is entirely based on breathing and various techniques and

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<sup>40</sup> Heinz-Klaus Metzger und Rainer Riehn, *Dieter Schnebel*, (München: Edition Text & Kritik, 1980), 53.

indications of breath. It is an approach using the natural speech organ as a musical material to criticise the cultivated way of opera singing.

In *Deutsche Tänze* the voices mainly speak in approximate pitches. This is in some ways related to Schönberg's use of *Sprechmelodie* in *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912). Where Schönberg still used precise pitched and asked for an alternating of tone colour, Schwehr mainly differs between low, medium and high pitch in order to achieve a change of perception in the spoken parts. As mentioned, the conventional singing notation and pitch are rarely used. Schwehr gives indicative instructions for singing techniques. If a pitched note appears it is usually indicated as unvoiced, whispered or breathed (*verhaucht*), this – as it will be outlined later - is based on Brecht's main point namely that “speaking is dangerous”. Schwehr's instructions use various note heads to describe the sounds he wants the voices to create. Usually Schwehr does not ask for experimental or highly complicated singing techniques that would strain the voice, such as Beberian and La Barbara are known for. He uses what the human voice is naturally capable of doing, so that one finds tongue clicks, vocal chord rattle (*knattern*) and whistling.<sup>41</sup>

### 3.2) The Brechtian language

Brecht wrote his *Flüchtlingsgespräche* while in exile in Scandinavia in the 1940's. They mainly deal with the Nazi regime and human's right of political and individual freedom. Generally this prose belongs to what Brecht called the “theatre of the scientific century” (das Theater des Wissenschaftlichen Jahrhunderts), a didactic genre. In this case it is a genre that wants to illustrate a totalitarian system's true intention. The word *Wissenschaft* (science)

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<sup>41</sup> for a full list of techniques see appendix p. 35.

refers here back to its original meaning, namely exploring and experiencing.<sup>42</sup> It also includes its own pedagogy: the teaching of practice (thinking) within itself and therefore the perceiver is ‘participating’ in education. Furthermore this genre deals with current history and social circumstances in order to educate the reader. Brecht’s idea of “epic theatre” is well known, and thus attempts to educate the audience by making them participate and therefore think on their own. This is in opposition to the Aristotelian idea of passive empathy and catharsis, where the listener becomes the protagonist on stage and therefore emotionally is attached to them; Brecht wants the audience to objectively evaluate the story and meaning on stage to be able to independently draw a conclusion from this. Brecht, “(...) turns the spectator into an observer (...) forces him to take decision”.<sup>43</sup> “Kenntnis, Erkenntnis, Bekenntis” (knowledge, understanding, conviction) are Brecht’s key words in describing his concept of ‘epic theatre’. It is interesting to notice that N. A. Huber’s compositional approach is in relation to Brecht’s idea of the audiences ‘self-education’.<sup>44</sup> This means that the composition itself is not the message carrier, but rather acts as a catalyst, opening up the listener’s mind in order to actively participate in the process of critique. This Marxist aesthetic is one of the foundations of understanding critical listening and therefore critical composition, since critical composition asks for a critique of the object as well as an active response of the perceiver towards the presented object.

As already pointed out Brecht moves from very complex to very simple language, however this is only in regards to the written and spoken words; there is still the complexity of the meaning of Brecht’s text. He has the idea of minimal versus maximum: Brecht’s language is occasionally very minimal (as opposed to for example the poetic language by Goethe) and

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<sup>42</sup> Frederic Jameson, *Brecht and Method* (London, Verso, 2000), 3.

<sup>43</sup> Bertold Brecht, *On Art and Politics*, ed. Tom Kuhn and Steve Giles (London: Methuen Drama, 2000), 37.

<sup>44</sup> Nonnenmann, Rainer, “Die Sackgasse als Ausweg. Kritisches Komponieren ein historisches Phänomen?”, 48.

very scientific.<sup>45</sup> Especially in *Flüchtlingsgespräche* he tries to create a back and forth between first and third person narrator. It often feels in Brecht's text that the protagonist speaking falls into the role of a lecturer; the story is rather recited than told. This creates the well-known alienation between audience and plot, meaning that there cannot be any identification between the audience and the plot, therefore a critical listening approach is asked for in order to evaluate the plot on stage. Interestingly, Schwehr uses exactly this kind of Brechtian language. Although the text is very political and deals with the issue of free speech in an oppressed political system, it does not create an emotional connection due to the disconnection between protagonist and told story. Schwehr makes use of this distance between story or meaning and words. First of all the language in Brecht's text is very simple and non-expressive, even at points where people are getting shot it remains scientific. As an opposite to poetic literature this extract is very raw and less connotated and therefore opens a broader surface for Schwehr to work with. On one hand this offers Schwehr the possibility to work with the phonemes and thus creating his sound-text and on the other gives him the chance to open up various *Assoziationsräume* (spaces of associations that have been outlined earlier) to create an extra-musical statement.

### 3.3) Compositional approach to Sprachmusik

Having established an overall idea of what to expect in *Deutsche Tänze* I will now focus on Schwehr's compositional techniques and aesthetics to achieve the pre-outlined points. As mentioned earlier the question whether critical composition can be perceived as such by the audience is always present, however using language as material for critical composition makes the presence of critique more approachable, especially if a semantic is audible. The piece moves from being a fragmentation of vocal sounds and words to finally focusing

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<sup>45</sup> Frederic Jameson, *Brecht and Method* (London, Verso, 2000), 50.

entirely on language. As *Deutsche Tänze* is divided into seven sections I will try to consecutively follow this structure as it is important in order to see Schwehr's move from one approach to the other as well as the fact that Schwehr works along Brecht's text consecutively.

At the start of the piece we are immediately introduced with the entire catalogue of Schwehr's sound material. Until bar six one is introduced into a very sparsely breathed (*verhaucht*) and subtle text-based sound world where the concentration is on vowels and breath notes. From bar six onwards the text enters in its original form, however each syllable is fragmented over the five voices, being whispered throughout. Although the first section has no clearly sung note somehow a feel of melody or change in pitch arises due to the use of vowels. Each vowel naturally has its own tone colour and where consonants create percussive-similar sounds, vowels naturally have frequencies (formants) that automatically give rise to pitch perception. Just by using a "tone" row of vowels (i.e. a-e-i) one can see that the pitch rises (bar 16 and 17, example 1). Schwehr moves with this 'natural' rise of pitch, but also makes use of the natural frequencies of vowels (bar 17) by building 'chords' of vowels. He uses this throughout his composition, bar 17 presents such a 'chord' where 'o' and 'u' are layered on top of each other. 'U' is naturally higher in pitch perception than 'o'. Although the first section seems to overall be an introduction of the sound material there is a rhythmic motif (of tongue clicks) in bar 20 that will reappear during the piece and is related to Hitler's favourite march "Badenweiler". I will focus on this motif a bit later as it reappears throughout the entire piece. A more traditional technique Schwehr uses (bar 24) is related to simple word painting. Schwehr uses the word "springt" (jump) to sonically visualise the physical movement of jumping. First of all he uses "s" and "sch" fricatives (bars 23-25) to delay the word "springt" and therefore implies a jump. Further and more importantly this jump – as the text reads – from the shore onto the ferry is literally translated into the music by "jumping" from section

one into two. This all builds up to a first climax in bar 25 where in the middle of those phonemes a single soprano hums on vowels (example 2).

Example 1. Cornelius Schwehr, *Deutsche Tänze*, bars 16-17 illustrating the use of vowels.

The second section is much more interesting in its use of language and traditional musical material. As I have established Schwehr sees critical composition as a *Verfremdung* (alienation) of the traditional material in order to open up the pre-disposed ear. This second section includes all of Schwehr's compositional approaches when dealing with music and language that I have outlined earlier. After being introduced to word syllables for a short while we enter the atmosphere of chant and modes (in this case Gb Lydian mode, example 3).

Example 2. Schwehr, Deutsche Tänze, bars 24-25, 's' fricatives implying jump and solo soprano.

This short moment of known-texture gets immediately destroyed. Various text fragments get layered on top of each other distributed over all five voices. This makes it nearly impossible to understand and follow the text, but requires – as Schwehr wants - a listening to the phonemes of language. However as this part is the first time that only whispered text occurs, something else is worth pointing out. This part of Brecht's original text deals with the ambiguity of the story itself, namely the fact that people are being shot and the reason for this is unclear. Schwehr takes the text into the music, the ambiguity and disorder is audibly and visually presented in the music. This time it is not a word-painting process, but it is a questioning and exploring the text and the language. Instead of trying to create sounds that would suit the text or interpret it, he uses the text in its original form and rhythmically and this is where the text becomes musical spreads it over all five voices.

The image shows a musical score for five vocal parts. The lyrics are: "bis die Fäh-re am ten die (ü) (i) (i) (o) (e) (e) (m) (a) (o) (u) (i) (e) (a) (u) (i) (e) (i) (o) (o) (u) (i) (o) (a) (u) (i) (o) (e) (m) (a) (e) (e) und". The score includes dynamic markings such as *pp*, *ppp*, and *pp*, and features triplet markings over various notes. The music is written in a complex, multi-measure rest system.

Example 3. *Deutsche Tänze*, bars 34-35, outlining the use of traditional musical material.

This first presentation of pure *Sprachmusik* is very brief and abruptly stops and one enters the first and third sound category (gestural and rhythmic, as presented in the structural overview earlier). This part (section three and four) of the music is focusing on the “how” of language, mainly using unvoiced fricatives and suppressed vowels. After Schwehr has explored the “what” (although in this case still very ambiguous), one now explores the phonemes, that can be seen as the structure of language and thus have no meaning. The connection to the human is created through the very breathy and unvoiced phonemes. Those breathy sounds have a *gestisch* (gestural) meaning, gestural here refers to presenting a sign in order to be interpreted. Thus the breathy phonemes (sign) tell the listener something. Although Schwehr is exploring the foundation of language and somehow expects a focused listening to the sounds, one inevitably can interpret this section, hence gestural. It is not telling, but through its gestures

telling us something. As Bruno Liebrucks puts it:” There is nothing for the human that he does not connect or interpret in a linguistic way.”<sup>46</sup>

Brecht’s point is the danger of speaking in an oppressed political society and the only consequence free speech brings with it is death. As this point is the basis of *Deutsche Tänze* one cannot deny the fact that a sudden break – at the point where everyone else on the ferry is dead- is an interpretation or conclusion to the told story. Instead of simply continuing with *Sprachmusik* Schwehr stops this and returns to a sound-text section, where the focus of listening gets changed and the listener has to think again in order to understand the narrative. As the gestural part (breathing) alone would not achieve this, Schwehr uses rhythm in order to physically create a tension. He uses a very simple quaver rhythm that at first is divided over two voices and increases to a climax with all five voices. These phonemes are presented in their natural speaking rhythm, they are short and Schwehr only wants to present them in their natural structure. Therefore a simple quaver rhythm seems to be the most suitable approach (see example 4). This rhythmical breathing in and out carries the tension to the listener via the gestural performance thus a certain association can reach the perceiver.

In section five the text is audibly fragmented over all five voices and one syllable is heard at one time, therefore an audible perceivable meaning is approached for the first time. The important part about the end sections is the fact that the language moves more and more into the foreground and Schwehr concentrates on putting the speech into a musical frame. The only way of achieving this is by working – as Schwehr does - with the linguistic material. Rather than destroying it he creates a sound world based on *Sprache* and includes fragments of *Sprache* into his whole sound concept, therefore familiarising the audience with those

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<sup>46</sup> “dass es für den Menschen schlechterdings nichts geben kann, was nicht sprachlich vermittelt wäre”. My translation. Cornelius Schwehr, “Sprachmusik. Vom Umgang mit Musik und Sprache”, 2012 in print., see appendix.

sounds. He then was able –after establishing the acceptance of sound or speech as one- to present the all-day language as a musical sound.

Example 4. *Deutsche Tänze*, bars 62- 64, outlining a “gestural” approach.

As we are now moving away from the compositional approach and entering the critical and extra-musical level of *Deutsche Tänze*, I would like to go back to a tongue click motif (example 5) that I have mentioned earlier. This tongue click march is also very present at bars 138-149 from a compositional point of view it presents the structure to the listener, and moreover it relates to the text and its political meaning. The fact that the tongue clicks imply Hitler’s “Badenweiler”<sup>47</sup> march does relate back to Brecht’s personal experience in exile as well as the political message in his prose of political oppressed Nazi Germany. Furthermore *Deutsche Tänze* becomes not only a statement about history but also takes on a political attitude that is antimilitaristic and antifascist. This is one point of critique to keep in mind when listening.

<sup>47</sup> Jan Kopp, “Die deutschen Tänze von Cornelius Schwehr”. <http://cornelius-schwehr.de/fileadmin/images/Bibliografie/deutscheTaenze.pdf>. Accessed 17 September 2011.

The image shows a musical score for five staves, labeled Example 5. The score is in 4/8 time and consists of five staves. The notation is primarily rhythmic, using eighth notes and rests to outline a melody. The first staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The second staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The third staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The fourth staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The fifth staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The notation is primarily rhythmic, using eighth notes and rests to outline a melody. The first staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The second staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The third staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The fourth staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The fifth staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat.

Example 5. *Deutsche Tänze*, bars 21-23, only using the tongue clicks to outline the “Badenweiler”.

As an end to this brief analysis of *Deutsche Tänze*, I will briefly focus on the gestural (again gestural refers to the listener’s interpretation through given signs) final section. The end section is entirely concentrated on rhythmic speech; the text is recited (in demisemiquaver beats) by the third voice, accompanied by text fragments and sounds. This can be easily compared with a use of the ‘traditional’ melody with accompaniment texture. Finally the climax is reached: Brecht’s point that “speaking is dangerous”. As soon as the text becomes audible the voices stop at exactly this point in the middle of speaking (example 6). As in Brecht’s text once the man/voices have spoken they are shot or in *Deutsche Tänze* not allowed to continue any further. Schwehr effectively ends the piece with a gestural sign; the voices stop talking but have to end the piece by pretending to breath in and therefore have their mouths open.

Example 6. *Deutsche Tänze*, bars 162-164, presenting the last section.

'sfz' silent, only a body gesture (as if you would breath in)

#### 4) The 'critical' in *Deutsche Tänze*

The title of the piece *Deutsche Tänze* itself carries various analogies to history and culture. The most obvious one is the relation to the German dances of the nineteenth century. This was a dance that initially was a mixture of various dance styles, including court dances and folk dances.<sup>48</sup> It is a peasant dance similar to the waltz and was later replaced by the more famous "Ländler". Many German composers have written "Deutsche" (German dances) the most prominent ones are Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert. One should not consider Schwehr's *Deutsche Tänze* a successor of the old genre, but is looking at dance-like elements that show us the relation to tradition and German history. In order to support this argument I

<sup>48</sup>Cliff Eisen, "German Dance".

[http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/10937?q=deutsche+t%C3%A4nze&hbutton\\_search.x=0&hbutton\\_search.y=0&hbutton\\_search=search&source=omo\\_t237&source=omo\\_gm\\_o&source=omo\\_t114&search=quick&pos=3&\\_start=1#firsthit](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/10937?q=deutsche+t%C3%A4nze&hbutton_search.x=0&hbutton_search.y=0&hbutton_search=search&source=omo_t237&source=omo_gm_o&source=omo_t114&search=quick&pos=3&_start=1#firsthit) (accessed, March 12, 2012).

would like to include Rainer Nonnenmann's proposal that *Deutsche Tänze* are actually related to the Baroque dance suites.<sup>49</sup>

Rainer Nonnenmann mentions the relation to the Baroque dance suite from section two of *Deutsche Tänze* onwards. Indeed there seems to be a relation in structure to the dance suites. In addition, the fact that we know that Schwehr likes to take tradition and traditional musical material into his works can confirm Nonnenmann's thesis. Especially the fact that from bars 26-52 (example 7) Schwehr follows a strict alternating metre between 2/8 and 3/8. This alternating confirms the traditional rhythmic structure of the courante (6/4 and 3/2). Courante literally translates as 'running' and not only does this section have a very jumpy and forwards moving feel to it, the text itself is at that point describing the man's jump from the shore onto the ferry.

springt hin - ü - ber *p* (q) (sch) *p* *ppp* (m) (q) (m) *p* *ppp*

(m) *ppp* (sch) *p* man macht im Platz (sch) *p*

(q) *p* (m) *ppp* (q) *p* wie-wohl die Leut

(q) *p* (sch) *p* (m) *ppp* (sch) *ppp* (m)

(sch) *p* (m) *ppp* (q) *p* (m) *ppp*

Example 7. *Deutsche Tänze*, bars 26-29, implying dance-like elements.

<sup>49</sup> Rainer Nonnenmann, *Des Widerspänstigen Fügung, zum dialektischen Komponieren bei Cornelius Schwehr* (Saarbrücken: Pfau Verlag, 2005), 7.

However this is not as simple as Nonnenmann presents it to be. Schwehr might be using the dance suite structurally as guidance but totally reinterprets them and breaks the rules. I think the reason Nonnenman's thesis is important is to highlight a relation between the piece's title *Deutsche Tänze*, the compositional approach and these dances, although the dance-like rhythms are not audible, are the skeletons of the piece. Each beat and each possible use of time is enlarged and shifted, deconstructed and turned around by Schwehr. It is as if he attempts to get all possibilities from the traditional dances. This relationship should rather be seen as a compositional technique Schwehr uses in order to structure his piece. More importantly it is a critical evaluation of musical material and relates back to Adorno's 'critical theory'.

However much or little *Deutsche Tänze* is related to any dance is irrelevant as long as one sees the critical evaluation of a culturally established musical material. Using something known and rooted in culture and to turn it around and putting it into a new cloak changes the perception of it as well as being a critique. As outlined at the start, critique does not mean a negative or contrary attitude as we might find in serialism and the deliberate attack on tonality. It is simply an evaluation and thinking process that tries to expand the boundaries. Therefore Schwehr critical evaluates traditional material and uses his own language to present it. One could therefore say that the title and the compositional skeleton have been critically chosen and evaluated in order to alienate known material. Hence it is expected that there will be a critical evaluation on the behalf of the perceiver who has to critically evaluate in order to understand the piece. On one level Schwehr like Lachenmann chose a critique of the aesthetic apparatus. Moreover, as briefly mentioned at the beginning, using text or speech adds a different language (language as in a different artistic statement, not the spoken word) to a piece of music.

As I have outlined the compositional approach to *Sprachmusik*, I have excluded the fact that Brecht's text itself is a critical response to his political time. As Brecht's Marxist attitude is in itself a critique on Nazi Germany, it contains automatically the critique of the socio-political situation as outlined at the beginning. The title is therefore also in relation to German society's past and present. As seen in *Deutsche Tänze* Schwehr slowly moves from sounds based on the text and produced by the human vocal organ to spoken words. As Brecht states, "Speaking is dangerous". Schwehr interpreted this statement and moved from non-speaking or suppressed speaking, so to say, to whispered normal speaking and then lets the music stop. Earlier one focused on the critique of established material; here one finds another level of critical evaluation. Schwehr critically uses the text, interprets it and puts it into a musical context, by saying, "It is a questioning of how one can evaluate a certain state, where there is no way of not answering."<sup>50</sup> His point is that Brecht's statement is neither changeable nor interpretable since it is a statement, however Schwehr use this culturally embedded statement to critically and artistically use it. This is where Schwehr succeeds instead of destroying the Brechtian language and politics, he adds the linguistic and musical languages together and makes them work and questioning each other. Therefore not only does he use German dances critically to structure a new piece of music, he also critically evaluates a historically and political based text. Thus we can find a relation to Lachenmann's critical response to the aesthetic apparatus as well as to composers and more apposite at this stage to Mathias Spahlinger. As for Spahlinger there is an actual relation between music and socio-political thought.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> "Hinterfragung, wie ein Verhalten in Zuständen möglich ist, denengegenüber es keine Möglichkeit gibt, sich nicht zu verhalten." My translation. Cornelius Schwehr, "Sprachmusik. Vom Umgang mit Musik und Sprache", 2012 in print, see appendix.

<sup>51</sup> Heinz-Klaus Metzger, *Geschichte der Musik als Gegenwart*, 72.

The compositional approach of critique has been outlined, that if one has access to the score and relevant literature seems to be straight forward, but what about extra-musical critique? This might be answered with the pre-outlined points, namely the critique of fascism (as well as any other dictatorship or political suppressed cultures), the fact that speaking is a natural human act and free speech should be allowed for humankind. The question as to whether the perceiver can access this critique is still open. Although Brecht's text is very closely embedded into his political time of the 1940's, Schwehr understands that single gestures and words can open up various "association spaces". The text's statement is always present in the music, as a listener one has the chance and possibility to see one of those "association spaces" to critically interpret them to a more current situation. This is not necessarily the composer's critique. Not contemporary, but as Schwehr wrote *Deutsche Tänze* in 1989/90 just at the time of the German reunion, one also has to relate it back to this important part of German history. Firstly the history of East Germany (GDR) and its socialist dictatorship relates to Brecht's text. However Schwehr claims that this is rather a coincidence than an intentional comment on current political issues.<sup>52</sup> Even if *Deutsche Tänze* has not been intentionally written for this purpose it still comments on it. As "speaking was dangerous" in the GDR and free speech not even allowed in your own house, a perceiver in 1989 might have related *Deutsche Tänze* to this situation. Language is timeless as it always gets reinterpreted through its extraneous cultural powers, therefore Brecht as well as Schwehr's music are timeless. Putting it more generally a piece of music can be perceived always in conjunction to a temporal dimension. Therefore an interpretation is always time-dependent. As art should have the right to speak and criticise, as this is art's purpose one could interpret *Deutsche Tänze* into this direction as well. *Deutsche Tänze* pleads for free art. Today artistic groups like the Russian *Voyna* are still imprisoned for being 'politically incorrect'. Bruno Liebrucks writes that: "Art differs from the other explanations and understanding methods of reality in so that art openly presents its

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<sup>52</sup> Rainer Nonnenmann, *Des Widerspänstigen Fügung, zum dialektischen Komponieren bei Cornelius Schwehr*, 6.

critique. This is where art has a higher truth in comparison to all the other sciences. They might know about their critique, but cannot present it”.<sup>53</sup> As Schwehr uses this statement in one of his essays,<sup>54</sup> one can assume that firstly Schwehr uses his music to openly present his critique and secondly and maybe even more importantly wants the perceiver to hear it.

## **5) Conclusion**

Two questions have shaped this analysis. Is *Deutsche Tänze* a critical piece of music in terms of the German understanding of critical composition? How much of the critique can be perceived in a concert performance? Schwehr established two critical levels in *Deutsche Tänze*: The intra-level the statement or message presented through the music that has been critically evaluated by the composer, and the outer-level presented through the use of Brecht’s text as well as the ‘association spaces’ of language and asking for an active participation of the perceiver. However those levels are inseparable linked. One should be aware that critical composition asks for an equal contribution to the object (the composition) by signifier (composer) and signified (listener).

As a result Schwehr, like N. A. Huber, is concerned with the sociological argument of music. The question how much and how far music and art can ‘educate’ (to use Brecht’s words) a human. N.A. Huber pleads for *Mitresonanz*<sup>55</sup> (sympathetic resonance). He criticises the serialist movement and its loss of active connection to the recipient. Schwehr makes use of traditional material; as a result his use of form (the dance) in itself becomes a content, namely the approach of creating a point of reference for the recipient. This use of traditional material

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<sup>53</sup> Cornelius Schwehr, “Sprachmusik. Vom Umgang mit Musik und Sprache”, 2012 in print, see appendix.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Nonnenmann, Rainer, “Die Sackgasse als Ausweg. Kritisches Komponieren ein historisches Phänomen?”, 43.

is critical as he re-evaluates the material. On the other hand the use of pre-positioned material represents culture, as a result the 'point of reference' turns into a focus on the perceiver. Especially if the concern is about the *Mitresonanz*, an approach that most certainly focuses on the listener. Generally speaking art that is concerned about the human's reaction or putting the human into a central focus of a piece of art does not produce and cannot produce a piece of critique. Since an objective critique should not have a result in mind, but should only be concerned with the origin of critique. Consequently Huber's *Mitresonanz* would make "critical composition" pointless. Therefore I will focus on the theories that Barthes and Eco outline, since their point of alienation and active participation seems to be the foundation of aesthetics in critical composition.

Since the German group of critical composers have established some kind of 'guidelines' of 'critical listening' and in the Brechtian style ask for a 'didactic' piece of music. According to their understanding of music it needs to have a function in society. Nevertheless focusing on the perceiver of a 'critical piece' of music one should ask oneself whether the critique could be audibly presented. Having used Liebrucks' quotation earlier ('human always listens in a linguistic way') one should see that the individual approach might differ from the composer's intention. Also thinking of Marxist aesthetics (devaluation of subjectivity) I think it is important to outline that the perception of this particular music is also 'class' dependent. As Marx was correct in criticising the fact that a certain genre of art can only be understood by a certain 'class', I should outline that *Deutsche Tänze* with all its critique and political meaning is not a globally accessible piece of music and most certainly can only be perceived by a certain group of listeners. Whether that is a positive or negative evaluation should not be outlined here, but it should be stated.

The perception of critical music is time dependent as well as the fact that *Deutsche Tänze* can only be fully understood if being familiar with Brecht's text as well as having a chance to analyse the score. The question is whether Schwehr really sees his music as a Brechtian 'educational' process or rather uses the idea of critical composition in order to create and structure a piece of music. If the composer's intention was asking for a critical response how could he make this happen? How can a piece of music reach the listener's mind in such a way that the composer's request will be fulfilled?

Herbert Marcuse outlined the relation between 'affirmation and critique'<sup>56</sup> and that they are inseparable. Even the most extreme negative critique still has an affirmation. As Schwehr critically evaluates not only musical material, but also critically uses Brecht's text, there is the critique, the evaluation of the linguistic material as well as the political statement. This leads into the affirmation of the political statement and that furthermore should find acceptance with the perceiver. Further Barthes outlines the paradox of language<sup>57</sup> that Schwehr describes as 'association spaces'. In relation to Marcuse as well as to Eco the answer lies in the paradox of language and a perceiver's individual response to semiotics.

As I have tried to make clear this approach does vary individually. Lachenmann's critique of the aesthetic apparatus and his concern with the intra-aesthetic situation as a critique point for critical composition seems to coincide with Schwehr's aesthetic. Lachenmann, like Schwehr, sees music's main purpose in an intra-critical approach, therefore it is opposite to the approach of *Mitresonanz*. Where *Mitresonanz* is concerned with the perceiver's response and therefore focuses on the human's reaction Lachenmann states, that "music as a result of critical thought will, and must, provoke a critical evaluation with itself. This is the only

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<sup>56</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, (London: The Macmillan Press, 1979), 58.

<sup>57</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, 109.

contribution to society it has to make.”<sup>58</sup> Lachenmann clearly outlines that music cannot and should not directly influence society. I think that also Schwehr’s concern is not the ‘change’ of society or *Umerziehung* (re-education). It is rather in the style of Brecht’s alienation process where the result should not be the *Umerziehung* but a new impetus for the perceiver. Marcuse says, that art cannot change society and does not have to (as outlined by Lachenmann), all it can do is to change the perceiver’s consciousness. Further, Spahlinger uses Liebrucks to outline a composer’s contribution to society: “ An artist does not create something to tell someone something, but firstly he/she tells something to him/herself”.<sup>59</sup> However, by criticising cultivated musical material as well (as especially in *Deutsche Tänze*) the use of linguistic material, do composers not inevitably criticise society and thus including the human automatically in their critique? Schwehr therefore automatically asks for a participation of the listener and confirms the Brechtian idea of ‘epic theatre’. Nonetheless the listener’s response cannot be identified, but then again critical composition asks for a critical contribution to the presented object and thus would not expect a perceiver’s critique identical to the composer. Moreover *Deutsche Tänze* is not a didactic piece of music, it uses a political topic to be presented in a musical mantle. Schwehr uses the two sign systems (language and music) artistically in order to present an actual state of society. One can agree on this being a fact, one essentially does not have to expect a critical response to it. What most certainly should be aimed for is a critical listening and as Marcuse outlines an opening of the human’s consciousness is an achievement that art can offer. At this point agreeing that the question whether a piece of art has to have a social content can remain unanswered.

The risk now would be to think of critical composition as a purely compositional technique or simply label it as an artistic product and therefore achieving a neutral position within society

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<sup>58</sup> “Musik als Niederschlag kritischen Denkens wird und soll ihrerseits die kritische Auseinandersetzung mit sich selbst provozieren.” My translation. Helmut Lachenmann, *Musik als existentielle Erfahrung* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1996), 96.

<sup>59</sup> Heinz-Klaus Metzger, *Geschichte der Musik als Gegenwart*, 80.

which would make critical composition useless. Since clearly the critical evaluation of musical and linguistic material bases the foundation of *Deutsche Tänze*, Schwehr's individually critique is undeniably present. It still remains a critique that one would not understand in a concert situation.

Avoiding a neutral position in society the post 1960s composers had to critically respond to music before that point. Before, a clear statement without the social content was acceptable in the arts and was perceived as such, therefore achieving a neutral position in society without the connection to it. Serialism and aleatoric music are critical in terms of 'alienation' and Adorno's 'Critical Theory' as they were criticising the 'oppressing' tonal system, Eco describes composers like Debussy, Schönberg and Stravinsky as the "Revolt against the tonal system".<sup>60</sup> It was critical, but not critical composition. How then does *Deutsche Tänze* differ? Clearly the fact that the socio-political aesthetic is added changes the music's perception and makes it eventually more approachable. Schwehr's approach differs from Lachenmann and Spahlinger via the use of multi-layered critique. Lachenmann being concerned with the aesthetic apparatus and Spahlinger with the political message music has to transmit. Schwehr combines the intra and outer aesthetic and consequently adds the room for personal interpretation that he refers to as *Assoziationsräume*.

One point one should not forget at this stage is that critical composition is an established musical genre at least in Germany. The problem of the established term critical composition is that it is already integrated into the new classical music scene. Therefore as Heinz Klaus Metzger so correctly puts it the music is losing its "negative effect".<sup>61</sup> Negative effect here refers to the idea that critical music arouses a certain critical thinking in the listener's mind.

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<sup>60</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, 139.

<sup>61</sup> Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, "What Does "Critical Composition" Mean?", 88.

The obvious jeopardy a composer falls into is the situation of becoming a puppet in its own aesthetic. Lachenmann and Spahlinger have their focus on one particular point of critique. Spahlinger is mostly concerned with negativity – any acceptance by the audience is a betrayal to his work- and no one has the right to influence an artist process of working, Spahlinger most recently (2012) outlined this in an open letter<sup>62</sup> where he refused to take funding from the ‘Ernst von Siemens Musikstiftung’ for a premiere of one of his works, as this would have been an influence on his creative process. Spahlingers neurotic obsession with negativity is most certainly a positive one, but limits him as well that a negative reaction by the listener becomes a positive one. Due to the acceptance of Spahlinger’s music and therefore his negativity will and is an accepted negativity, thus having lost its negative effect. I am trying to point out that as an established musical genre critical composition loses its critique or “negativity”.

Critique (in terms of evaluating, questioning and negating material) is one of the tools a composer uses. The composer’s individual aesthetic has to change in order to free herself/himself from a specific genre. As Schwehr belongs to the successive group of composers to Lachenmann and Spahlinger one can agree that his critique also includes the critique of Lachenmann and so on. Thus *Deutsche Tänze* is also a response to the genre of critical composition in the sense of negation. Lachenmann and Spahlinger’s music can be seen as music on music.<sup>63</sup> Schwehr moves a bit further, *Deutsche Tänze* includes the Lachenmannsche aesthetic apparatus as well as the social-political ‘apparatus’. However as this has been my main point of critical composition, Schwehr critically evaluates this approach and combines it with his own critique on the linguistic material.

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<sup>62</sup> <http://www.nmz.de/online/direkter-angriff-auf-meine-selbstachtung-matthias-spahlinger-lehnt-foerderung-durch-die-ernst>. Accessed 1 March, 2012.

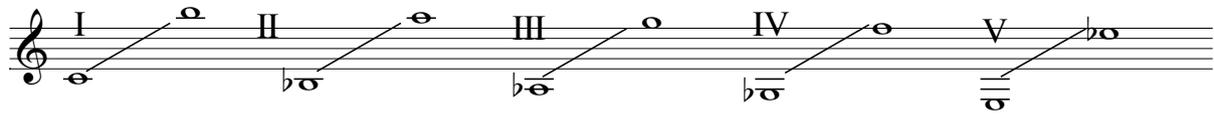
<sup>63</sup> Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, “What Does “Critical Composition” Mean?”, 84.

Critique is an individual approach and only critique that is evaluated outside a group or genre can be considered as critical. Therefore the genre critical composition has lost its negativity as it is already embedded into the music society. However composing is an ideology as it is never neutral and always has an intention. Further ideologies get shaped in various ways therefore a certain acceptance in groups cannot be prevented. Critique, as I established the term, will remain an individual approach as well as an individual perception by the listener.

## 6) Appendix

### 6.1) A translation of Cornelius Schwehr's instructions to Deutsche Tänze

#### I Voice register

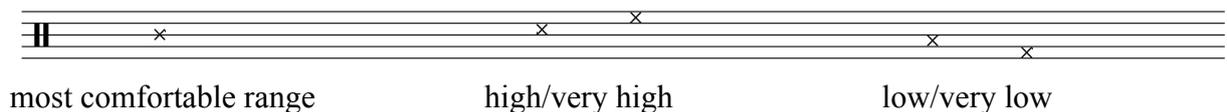


#### II

The text is fragmented into syllables and should always be whispered, voiceless, short and pronounced as sharp as possible.

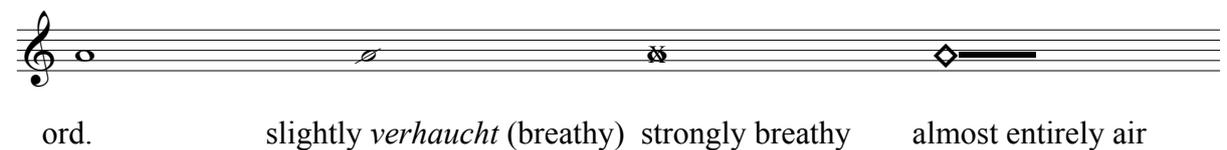
Each syllable is assigned to one rhythmic value (due to spacing issues it might be that the text does not fit under each rhythmic value).

The following rules apply to the range of the whispered parts:



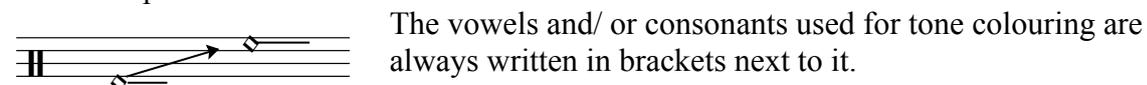
#### III

The sung parts are notated as:



#### IV

Unvoiced parts are notated as:



There are two places that differ from the above instruction and have to be sung. They are individually marked in the score.

In general the pronunciation of vowels and consonants follow the German-speaking pronunciation. Furthermore following rules apply:

(h) a very strongly aired 'h' (always in combination with alternating vowels)

(Ç) means 'ch' as in 'ich'

(x) means 'ch' as in 'ach'

a closed mouth is always indicates as: (m)

#### V

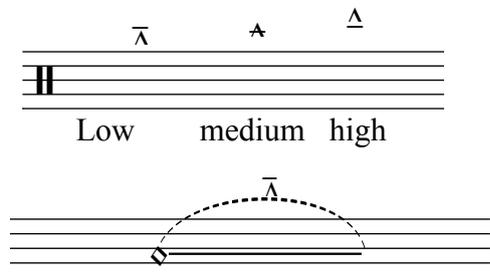
breathing out and in are indicated as: II V

'gespr.' will appear at places where an increased air pressure is required. (Also at sung sections).

gespr. = gradually apply pressure

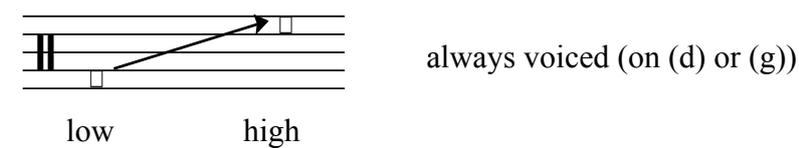
gespr. ord. = gradually take pressure away

## VI whistling



poco a poco whistling and then vanish (like a breeze)

## VII gurgle (in throat) (*glucksen*)

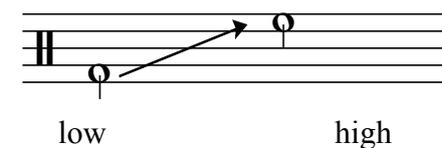


occasionally with exact pitch:



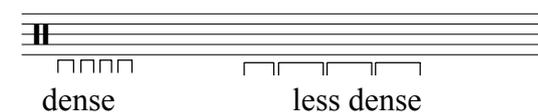
## VIII

tongue clicks (with tip of tongue at palate)



## IX

vocal chord cracking



## X

The indicated tempi should always be followed precisely and without the least fluctuations. (This does not forbid the possibility of playing certain sections slower or faster than indicated).

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