

Private and Public: Contemporary Composition and Politics

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INTRODUCTION

In the fourth century C.E., Aristotle reasoned that governments and societies arise from the instinct for self-preservation, reproduction, and advancement, saying that “man is by nature a political animal.”¹ His philosophy takes, as its starting point, the one-to-one relationships between man and woman and master and slave, invoking not only cooperation and reproduction, but power and subjugation.² In 1969, Carol Hanisch wrote an essay titled “The Personal is Political,” in which she explains how personal issues such as appearance, sex, abortion, and the division of household labor are conditioned by a society that prioritizes male domination over women. Hanisch states that the beliefs that shape the interpersonal dynamics between men and women are derived from the society in which they exist, and the way that individuals navigate these relationships in turn influences that same society.³ Ignoring the stark differences between the philosophies of Aristotle and Hanisch, both acknowledge that power relationships (i.e. political structures) are present at every level of human experience, from personal relationships to the structure of societies, countries, and states.⁴ Furthermore, there is a constant interaction between the private and the public in these relationships.

Given that power relationships are found in every area of human experience, then music, as a communal activity, must also have a political function. Though political power in music is often understood as being confined to a small subset of political pieces, usually including text, the way music operates politically is far more complex. Political influence in and of music can

¹ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Kitchener, Ontario: Batoche Books, 1999), 5. <https://socialsciences.mcmaster.ca/econ/ugcm/3113/aristotle/Politics.pdf>

² Ibid.

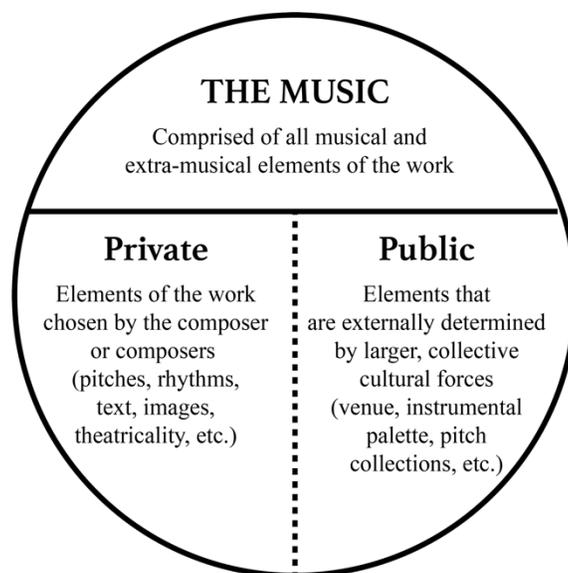
³ Carol Hanisch, “Introduction,” 2006, <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html>.

⁴ Ibid., Hanisch states that “political” was used here in the broad (sic) sense of the word as having to do with power relationships, not the narrow sense of electoral (sic) politics.” It is important to note that this is also how I use the term throughout this paper.

be understood by examining the relationships between three interconnected areas of political power relating to music; the music itself, the audience that interprets and legitimizes that music, and the network of institutional relationships that produce the music. Each of these domains contain two permeable dimensions, the private and the public. Understanding these relationships allows for a more complete perspective on the political function of music and the people who write that music. Studying the careers and works of past and present composers, such as Giuseppe Verdi and Jennifer Walshe in reference to these relationships allows for a broader understanding of how political influence is both exercised and navigated within composition communities of all periods. This holds a variety of implications for contemporary music scholarship, most specifically for the practice of contemporary composition.

PART I

Ex. 1: Illustration of the political relationships within music itself



The most commonly discussed area of politics in relation to music is the content of the music itself, particularly the extra-musical elements. In pieces like “Strange Fruit” by Billie Holiday, “Mississippi Goddam” by Nina Simone, or “Va, pensiero” by Giuseppe Verdi, the text

bears the weight of political meaning and the music serves to enhance the significance of the political statements. There is a sense that music cannot communicate politically without using elements outside itself. In *The Magic Mountain*, the character Herr Settembrini says, “there is something suspicious about music, gentlemen. I insist that she is, by her nature, equivocal. I shall not be going too far in saying at once that she is politically suspect.”⁵

Though Settembrini’s observation identifies the malleability of meaning in relation to music, it also implies that music’s political function cannot be understood. The concept of music as either politically neutral or functionally obscure is evidenced by the dichotomy often drawn by scholars between “absolute music,” music that has been crafted by the composer to include only sonic materials, such as pitches, rhythms, formal relationships, timbres, etc. and music that incorporates additional media, such as text, images, theatrical elements, etc.⁶ Roger Scruton describes absolute music as “an aesthetic problem,” saying:

“No music can be absolute if it seeks to be understood in terms of an extra-musical meaning, whether the meaning lies in a reference to external objects or in expression of the human mind. Absolute music is now made wholly autonomous. Its *raison d’être* lies entirely within itself; it must be understood as an abstract structure bearing only accidental relations to the movement of the human soul.”⁷

This quote encapsulates the problem of understanding music as incapable of meaning outside of itself, namely that music is always heard in reference to extra-musical experience. The extra-musical experience may be influenced by the composer when they set text to a melody,

⁵ Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain: a novel*, trans. John E. Woods, (New York: A. Knopf, 1995), 114.

⁶ Roger Scruton, “Absolute Music,” *Grove Music Online*, November 26, 2018, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/0-mo-9781561592630-e-0000000069> and Susan McClary, “Feminine Endings in Retrospect,” in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) x, and Bruno Nettl, *Heartland Excursions: Ethnomusicological Reflections on Schools of Music*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995, 130-131.

⁷ *Ibid.*

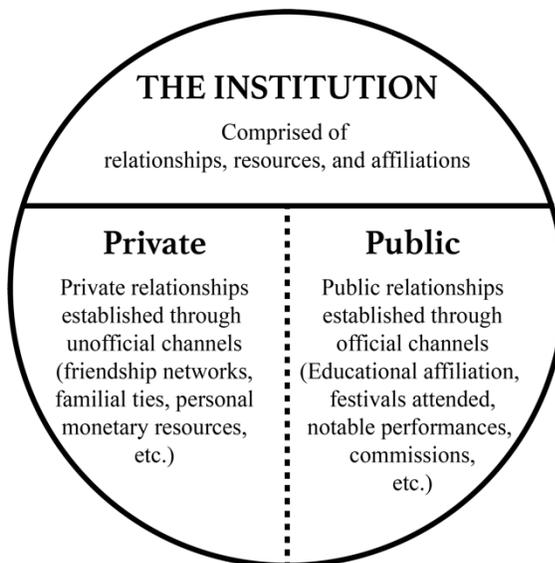
incorporate costumes, or employ other media, but this experience is also determined by external forces. For instance, the experience of attending any concert is steeped in culturally determined stimuli. The dress of the performers, the construction of the concert hall or venue, the types of instruments being played, and the etiquette of the audience are just a few examples of extra-musical materials that shape the meaning of the music for an audience member. When it comes to meaning, music does not exist in a vacuum, whether the composer desires this or not.

Even beyond the extra-musical, music itself has symbolic meaning. The use of tonality or atonality signifies an affiliation or alliance with a certain perspective and way of doing things, just as the decision to write a sonata vs. a pop song signifies cultural affiliation, and the timbre of a violin vs. an electric guitar invokes certain associations. Every element of music, even when written without explicit external reference is at least partially understood in relation to the context in which the piece is presented. A composer may choose the pitches and rhythms within a blues scale or a 12-tone row, but the broader meaning that those pitch collections have is not determined solely by the composer. Pitch collections, instrumental palettes, text, images, concert etiquette, and the venue of performance can all be brought under compositional control, but no piece can entirely prescribe the context for its interpretation. The meaning of the music is therefore shaped both privately by the composer and publicly by the institutions that the composer participates in.

Every musician has a relationship to the broader culture of which their music is a part and institutions are essentially formalized networks of these relationships. Organizations, such as universities, record labels, non-profits, conferences, festivals, student groups, ensembles, etc. function as political entities that each musician joins in exchange for the support of the organization in the form of legitimacy, exposure, and resources. The types of relationships that

comprise these institutions are both private and public, meaning that the rules and social structures of these institutions are both officially and unofficially established. The private relationships of an institution may include friendships, familial connections, and inclusion in the same cultural or aesthetic group and they are established through unofficial channels, such as networking, knowledge of and adherence to particular etiquette, nepotism, etc. These rules for inclusion are not publicly stated, but are required for inclusion in these informal groups. Alternately, public relationships are established through official channels and they include such data as educational affiliation, festivals attended, notable performances, albums produced, commissions received, etc.

Ex. 2: Illustration of the political relationships within institutions



In musical communities and elsewhere, public and private relationships influence each other by providing access to each other. Inclusion in a prestigious festival gives a composer access to a more influential network, allowing them to create personal connections with people who are in a position to foster further public relationships. Additionally, the establishment of friendship groups within institutions allow the interests of those particular groups to dictate the

priorities of those institutions. This creates an environment in which informal rules operate in parallel with formal rules. This has the effect of prioritizing the selection of a certain type of person for membership, the type of person who most clearly aligns with the values of the most influential members of the institutions.

In her article, “The Tyranny of Structurelessness,” Jo Freeman calls the private groups that control institutions elites.⁸ Freeman defines elites, “...as nothing more and nothing less than a group of friends who also happen to participate in the same political activities.”⁹ Freeman says that “these friendship groups function as networks of communication outside any regular channels for such communication that may have been set up by a group.”¹⁰ Freeman notes that these “informal structures can do very useful things,” however, the damage they can do is self-evident.¹¹ Freeman argues that in order for groups to function effectively, the rules by which groups operate need to be made publicly available.¹² Though Freeman was specifically addressing the way that some groups within the women’s liberation movement of the 1960s claimed to operate, her assessment of human behavior in groups is instructive.

In order for music to have a political influence, there must be an audience to hear the music. An audience is comprised of all who listen to a piece of music including the composer, the performers, the members of the institution, and anyone outside of these groups who come into contact with the music. The act of listening necessitates both interpretation and legitimization of the music and in this act there is, as in the other areas discussed, a private and a

⁸ Jo Freeman, “The Tyranny of Structurelessness,” *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (2013): 231-246, <https://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed November 26, 2018).

⁹ Freeman, 234.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

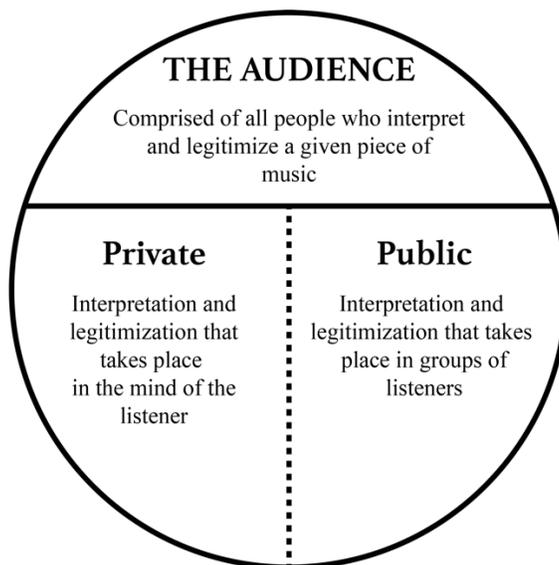
¹¹ *Ibid.*, 237.

¹² *Ibid.*, 233.

public dimension. The simplest description of this dynamic is that a listener privately interprets the music for themselves and afterward they compare their interpretations with those in their own network. When a given group of listeners has settled on an interpretation of the music, the music's meaning and power is concretized. This may suggest that the listener is free to interpret prior to their comparison of their thoughts with others, but this is not entirely the case. In his essay "Is There a Text in this Class?" Stanley Fish says:

"When my colleague is in the act of construing his student's question...none of the interpretive strategies at his disposal are uniquely his, in the sense that he thought them up' they follow from his preunderstanding of the interests and goals that could possibly animate the speech of someone functioning within the institution of academic America, interests and goals that are the particular property of no one in particular but which link everyone for whom their assumption is so habitual as to be unthinking."¹³

Ex. 3: Illustration of the political relationships within the audience



Fish's quote is an excellent description of the process of interpretation in the mind of a listener. Though Fish's essay deals specifically with the interpretation of language, the concept is still applicable. The "interpretive strategies" available to an audience member assessing a given

¹³ Stanley Fish, "Is There a Text in this Class?" in *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1980), 320.

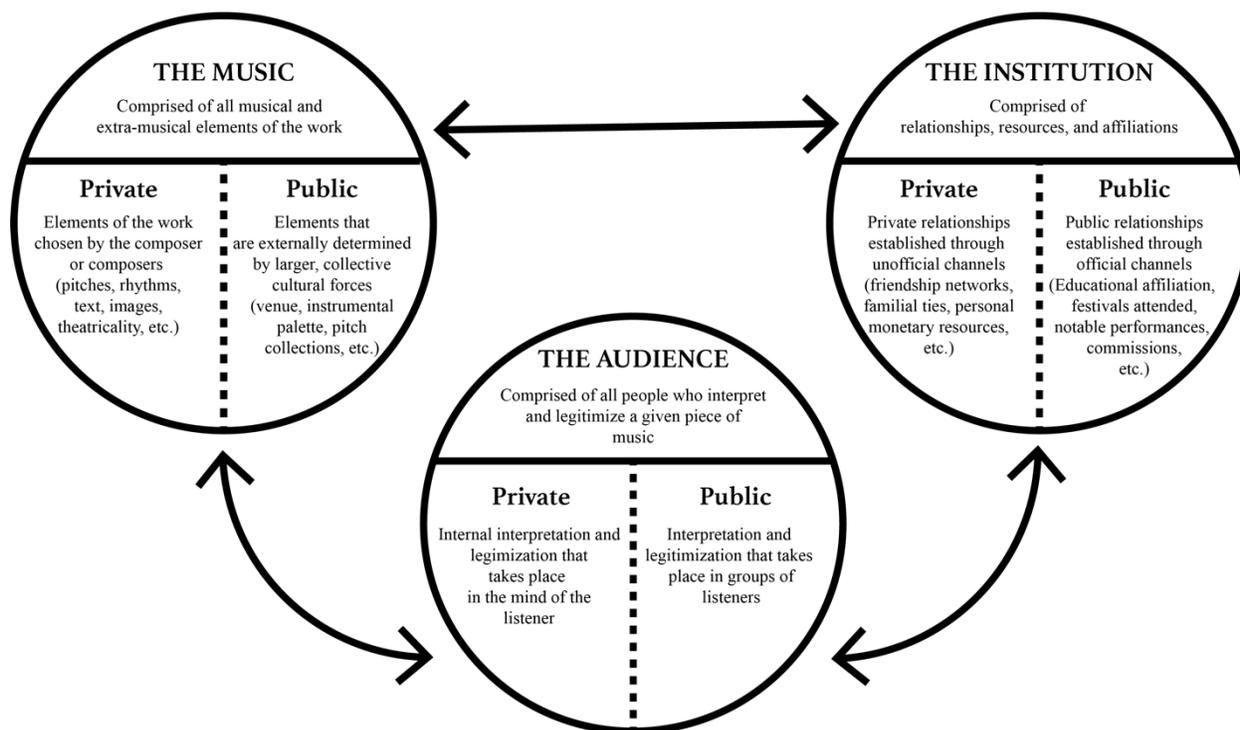
piece of music are not “uniquely theirs,” but are conditioned by a variety of experiences including their familiarity and experience with the type of music being played, the concerns of the composer and the institution presenting the work, and the social groups of which they are a part.¹⁴ Each audience member has a “preunderstanding of the interests and goals” of a composer and an institution that is derived from their experience with that environment.¹⁵ When an audience member reflects upon the meaning of a piece of music privately, the possible connections and interpretations they make are conditioned by their personal experience and their experience with the culture producing the music. Additionally, there is a close connection between the private and the public in the mind of every interpreter. Even without conversation an individual will compare their personal reaction to the presumed reaction of the community that they are a part of.

Apart from the internal relationships of these areas, they also influence each other. Just as the audience’s interpretation is shaped by the music itself, the audience also shapes the music. Positive audience reactions may influence a composer to continue writing music in a style that will elicit positive reactions, in the same way that institutional support will influence a composer to continue writing music that will ensure further support. Negative reactions by the audience may influence a composer to change their style or to become more entrenched in an aesthetic position. Finally, popularly held notions by the audience about the meaning of a piece of music can become a part of the mythology that surrounds a given work, adding a layer of power that the composer did not intend. In short, the audience also creates extra-musical meaning.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Ex. 4: Interaction between the various spheres of influence



The audience's interpretation and reaction also influences the institutions that present the music. A positive or negative reaction from the audience may lead institutions to program more of the same work or retract support for certain music. In the area of personal relationships, a positive audience reaction may increase the influence of an individual within their friend group, but may also foment resentment against their popularity, leading the friend group to withdraw support, which may have the effect of diminishing opportunities in the public realm.

The way that the choices of the composer influence the audience has already been discussed, but the influence of institutions on audience interpretation are just as powerful if not more so. By simply programming a piece of music, institutions confer legitimacy upon that music. Their decisions not to program certain music communicates just as clearly. Programming decisions form an important part of an institutions aesthetic philosophy. The more powerful the institution is, the more powerful that ideology is. Additionally, institutions provide the resources

for the production of the music. The amount of resources supplied to the music increases the likelihood of that music being interpreted positively. Advertising, presentations, receptions, speeches, etc. are all methods of encouraging the positive reception and interpretation of the music. This has the effect of not only shaping the interpretation of the audience, but of introducing additional extra-musical materials into the music itself.

The way in which the music itself influences institutions is perhaps the least straightforward relationship. The music is the supposed reason for the existence of the institutions and its membership is comprised of the composers and musicians themselves. The music therefore forms the identity of that institution. This means that as the music is produced it is either rejected or absorbed by the institution and is used to bolster the institution's legitimacy and power. In one sense, the music becomes the language of the institution, serving as a way to both vet new members and to let current members demonstrate their status. The use of institutionally specific language, such as the naming of pieces, composers, musicians, terminology, etc. allows members of the institution to differentiate themselves from the audience as-a-whole and to maintain access to the resources provided by the institution. In order for composers to achieve institutional support, they must not only produce work that aligns with the interests of the institution, but speak the language of that institution. Their musical work may, in rare cases, be significant enough to substantially alter the way institutions operate, but the music itself is a much less effective way to influence the institution than by direct action.

PART II

In the updated introduction to, *Feminine Endings*, Susan McClary discusses the tendency within music scholarship to view music as “autonomous” or free from meaning outside itself,

tracing the establishment of these ideas to both Eduard Hanslick and Igor Stravinsky.¹⁶ McClary states that her book was intended to bring “to music studies the kinds of projects that had long since become standard fare in most other areas of the humanities,” topics such as gender, sexuality, and cultural studies.¹⁷ McClary’s discussion of musical autonomy as a prevailing value within academic/classical music and her work to broaden the field of study to include additional areas of inquiry illustrates how certain perspectives are reinforced through institutional processes and how ideas that do not align with the interests, goals, and beliefs of the institution are discouraged.

Though areas such as the study of opera necessitates the study of extra-musical material, it is clear that institutional biases hold in this realm as well. One such bias, identified by Bruno Nettl, is the tendency to view the composer as a genius whose intentions and decisions should be discovered and honored at all costs.¹⁸ In terms of politics, this means the study of a work’s political function focuses primarily on the extra-musical associations that the composer has specifically put into the music, ignoring broader issues such as culturally determined extra-musical stimuli, the institutions surrounding the production of the music, and the actions by the composer outside of the music that shape the reception of their work. This has the effect of shifting attention for musicians, composers, and musicologists away from the political reality of their professions and their place within it, in favor of an idealized conception of political action and influence, where music is granted more political power than the people and institutions who produce it.

¹⁶ Susan McClary, “Feminine Endings in Retrospect,” in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) x.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, ix.

¹⁸ Bruno Nettl, *Heartland Excursions*, 12-13.

Much of the scholarship surrounding Giuseppe Verdi, focuses upon the political content of his music, while separating his business interests and his participation in the institutions of his time from the discussion of his political intentions. Paul Robinson, for instance, has conducted an analysis of the way that political elements function specifically within the musical materials of Verdi's operas, establishing a connection between Verdi's music and political rhetoric.¹⁹ Robinson focuses on the musical elements because the libretto, the conventions, the staging, etc., though politically influential, are externally prescribed both by Verdi's collaborators and by the cultural institutions in which he functioned. Though analysis of the way that Verdi may have communicated politically through the music of his operas is interesting, sole attention to the music or the themes of the operas creates a compartmentalized picture of a composer's political influence.

Bruno Cagli and Julian Budden have both described the actions Verdi took to establish the primacy of the score and the supremacy of the composer with the Ricordi publishing company, a company that still exercises significant influence in the world of classical/academic music today.²⁰ Cagli, in particular, says of Verdi that he placed "future composers on a completely different level than their predecessors" through actions such as serving on the committee charged with establishing the law on "literary and artistic property."²¹ In terms of political influence, the extra-musical content of Verdi's operas may have been significant during the time of the Italian *Risorgimento*, but the actions Verdi took as a member of the institutions of

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Bruno Cagli, "Verdi and the Business of Writing Operas," in *The Verdi Companion*, edited by William Weaver and Martin Chusid, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979), 112, and Julian Budden, "Verdi and the Contemporary Opera Scene," in *The Verdi Companion*, edited by William Weaver and Martin Chusid, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979), 82.

²¹ Cagli, "Business of Writing Operas," 112.

his time, are politically relevant to the state of academic/classical music today. This illustrates the way that idealized versions of political influence become prioritized over direct political actions.

Of course, the political power of Verdi's music itself is important, but the way that this power operates is more complicated than simply establishing Verdi's intentions in the music. "Va' pensiero" from *Nabucco* is a piece of music that has achieved mythological status as a rallying cry of the *Risorgimento* and serves as an unofficial Italian national anthem.²² On December 3, 2011 Riccardo Muti staged a protest against proposed cutbacks on musical institutions by the government of Silvio Berlusconi, in which he spoke directly to the audience before performing their requested encore of "Va' pensiero."²³ Muti, uses this song as a protest song and the political power of the music in that moment is striking.²⁴ Though the exact political nature of the song has been debated by many scholars, the song has real political power, regardless of Verdi's original intentions. This shows how both the audience and the institutions shape the meaning of the music outside of the composer's intentions and how the political meaning of music should be viewed as a product of these relationships.

Verdi stands as a member of the canon of established composers and is therefore a useful example for analyzing how composers are traditionally understood to exercise political influence. However, because Verdi's work is so far removed from our place and time a comprehensive understanding of his political influence is difficult. In contrast to Verdi, Jennifer

²² George Whitney Martin, "Verdi, Politics, and "Va, pensiero": The Scholars Squabble," *The Opera Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (2005): 109-132, (accessed November 26, 2018), <https://muse.jhu.edu/>.

²³ "Va pensiero – Muti speech with English translation and encore," YouTube video, 8:22, posted by misterrodger, May 25, 2011, (accessed November 26, 2018) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laSuOwGgVvQ>.

²⁴ Ibid.

Walshe is alive and composing. Furthermore, she is under the age of fifty and is a woman, providing a stark contrast to the composers usually selected for scholarly study. Walshe's example is highly instructive because her work and actions can be understood in the context of contemporary society.

Walshe has written a well-known essay on her working style and compositional approach titled "The New Discipline." On the website for the Borealis festival, for which the essay was written, the text is called "a compositional manifesto."²⁵ In her essay, Walshe identifies two priorities in her music.²⁶ The first is that she treats extra-musical materials such as "dance, theatre, film, video, visual art, installation, literature, (and) stand-up comedy" as equally important to the music.²⁷ The second is that she explicitly acknowledges the reality of the performers producing that music.²⁸ Walshe says at the end of her essay, "Perhaps we are finally willing to accept that the bodies playing the music are part of the music, that they're present, they're valid and they inform our listening whether subconsciously or consciously. That it's not too late for us to have bodies."

Walshe's statement directly refutes the idea of music as autonomous. It acknowledges the reality of the performers, the composers, and the audience members in the music and her focus on the "non-cochlear" explicitly engages with the multiple ways that we perceive and construct meaning in composition.²⁹ In Walshe's work, visual media, theatrical performance, choice of

²⁵ "The New Discipline: a compositional manifesto by Jennifer Walshe," Borealis Festival website, (Accessed November 26, 2018), <http://www.borealisfestival.no/2016/the-new-discipline-a-compositional-manifesto-by-jennifer-walshe-2/>.

²⁶ Jennifer Walshe, "The New Discipline," Jennifer Walshe's Website, (Accessed November 26, 2018), <http://milker.org/the-new-discipline/>.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

venue, and the sounds themselves are granted equal importance in the composition and thus every element that shapes our perception of music is treated as an important element of the composition.

The connection between Walshe's ideas and the ideas of feminist authors and thinkers like Carol Hanisch, Jo Freeman, and Susan McClary is clear. The emphasis on the physical act of making music by performers focuses attention on the person making the music, not the impersonal and abstract structures of the sound itself. Hanisch's description of the relationship between personal experience and institutional structures is a clear corollary to the personal act of a performer making music.³⁰ When a performer takes the stage, they are not only interacting with their instrument and the music written for them, but also with inherited structures of meaning and legitimacy. Additionally, Walshe's acknowledgement of the body in composition is echoed by McClary in musicological study when she says "The legitimation of bodies and emotions in musicological discourse also opens other doors. For the first time, scholars are beginning to write about the experience of the body as it performs music..."³¹ Finally, Walshe's engagement with the body can be viewed as engagement with the hidden expectations and rules of classical music performance and composition, tying these ideas to the thoughts of Jo Freeman when she says "The rules of how decisions are made are known only to a few and awareness of power is curtailed by those who know the rules..."³² These unspoken rules include the emphasis upon a score, the division of composer and performer, and the prioritization of absolute music.³³ Walshe's attention to the body draws the audience's attention to the present context that shapes

³⁰ Hanisch, "The Personal is Political."

³¹ McClary, "Retrospect," xvii.

³² Freeman, "Tyranny," 232.

³³ Nettl, *Heartland Excursions*, 15.

their experience of the music.

Beyond her acknowledgement of the body in music, Walshe's incorporation of extra-musical materials also rejects the idea of music as explicitly non-representational and challenges ingrained institutional norms. Walshe's, *Historical Documents of the Irish Avant-Garde*, (found at aisteach.org) engages with externally prescribed extra-musical material as compositional elements.³⁴ This website is a fictional history of the Irish avant-garde.³⁵ A variety of musicians and composers are invented for the website including biographies, pictures of the composers, citations of fictional interviews and articles, and music recorded and written by the invented composers.³⁶ The content of the text both satirizes and faithfully produces a tone of avant-garde music-speak.³⁷

This website challenges assumed ideas about what constitutes a musical composition in multiple ways. Walshe, first of all, uses the internet as the venue for the composition, a decision that rejects institutional power in favor of a more egalitarian venue. Secondly, the content of the composition itself is an alternate history that subverts the historical narrative of traditional musical scholarship. Thirdly, she engages with the very culture that she is a part of by invoking the language and affectations that contemporary composers use to legitimize their work. This engagement with extra-musicality shows a keen awareness of the political realities that structure all musical compositions. Walshe's work is easily understood as political music where the personal is the foundation of the political.

³⁴ Jennifer Walshe, *Historical Documents of the Irish Avant-Garde*, found at aisteach.org (accessed November 26, 2018), <http://www.aisteach.org/>.

³⁵ Jennifer Walshe, "Disclaimer," in *Historical Documents of the Irish Avant-Garde*, (accessed November 26, 2018), http://www.aisteach.org/?page_id=306.

³⁶ Ibid., multiple pages.

³⁷ Ibid.

Of course, Walshe does not operate solely within her music. Institutional relationships and private relationships are, as explained earlier, a part of every musician's life. Walshe's public relationships include a doctoral degree from Northwestern University, a faculty position at Brunel University in London, and a position as a course instructor at Darmstadt.³⁸ It is not possible to understand Walshe's private relationships without speaking to her directly, but her affiliation with a variety of organizations imply a political orientation. Walshe's upcoming seminar in composition and performance with David Helbich is affiliated with the Performing Arts Forum.³⁹ The Performing Arts Forum is clear and transparent in its political and social activism, providing a Google Drive link containing a variety of resources on institutionalized racism, feminist theory, and harmful group dynamics.⁴⁰ Awareness of these affiliations allows the listener of Walshe's music to better understand the culture of and meaning of her work. This added information increases the significance of the work and it requires the audience member to accept or reject the political implications of the work up front.

Conversely, Walshe's affiliation with Darmstadt identifies her with one of the most famous institutions of new music legitimacy in the contemporary composition world. Throughout its history, Darmstadt has been viewed as both a place of solace against institutional norms and an instigator of those norms.⁴¹ The dual nature of powerful institutions such as Darmstadt, certainly does not escape the attention of composers. Helmut Lachenmann wrote an

³⁸ Jennifer Walshe, "Jennifer Walshe Biography," Jennifer Walshe's Website, <http://milker.org/jenniferwalshebiography/> and "Courses," Darmstadt Website, <http://internationales-musikinstitut.de/en/ferienkurse/kurse/>.

³⁹ "Courses," Darmstadt Website.

⁴⁰ "Home Page," Performing Arts Forum Website, (accessed November 26, 2018), <http://www.pa-f.net/>.

⁴¹ Helmut Lachenmann, "Composing in the Shadow of Darmstadt," *Contemporary Music Review* 23, no. 3-4 (2004), 43-53.

article titled “Composing in the Shadow of Darmstadt,” where he said “All of us—are more or less consciously—parricidal children of Darmstadt.”⁴² The necessity of institutional affiliation is a double-edged sword and Walshe’s professional affiliations illustrate the way in which all composers must navigate professional relationships in an ethical way, both publicly and privately. It further illustrates how affiliations influence the type of audience that the music reaches.

The final element of Walshe’s work related to the model of political significance is her impact upon the audience. A YouTube video of the overture for *Nabucco* by Giuseppe Verdi has over 215,000 views.⁴³ The Score Follower/Incipitsify videos of Jennifer Walshe’s music on YouTube generally have between 2,500 and 3,500 views.⁴⁴ In terms of political influence upon the audience, the work of Verdi with all of its social, political, and cultural implications seems to be, far more influential than the work of Walshe. However, though Walshe’s work is generally included in new music circles, her incorporation of additional media has also led to showings of her works in gallery settings, such as the Museum of Arts and Design in New York and the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston.⁴⁵ This illustrates how Walshe’s challenging of certain institutional structures within new music has made her music relevant to another culture where the work is politically meaningful. Though her music is less known within the culture in which she works, academic/classical music, her work is seen as more legitimate within a different

⁴² Ibid. 43.

⁴³ “Giuseppe Verdi – Nabucco – Overture,” YouTube video, 7:28, posted by Fledermaus1990, October 23, 2011, (accessed November 26, 2018), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LLRBPZs-zBg>.

⁴⁴ “Score Follower/Incipitsify/Mediated Scores Jennifer Walshe Playlist,” YouTube, (accessed November 26, 2018), <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLpJMYtmnUL-F0IU09X2YQ3h0GT5D9rCKI>.

⁴⁵ Jennifer Walshe, “Biography.”

setting and culture than Verdi's would be.

CONCLUSION

The political realities that shape the production of music, the careers of composers and musicians, and the perception of that music in the minds of audience members are found in the lives of every composer and are dealt with in a variety of ways. The way an individual composer addresses the structures that shape their music is both personal and shaped by the culture, the historical realities of their situation, their country, cultural identity, and many other factors. To hold Giuseppe Verdi and Jennifer Walshe to the same standards in terms of political opinions is shortsighted, but regardless of time, place, and history, certain constants apply in the ways that human beings interact with each other and how these interactions lead to the production and interpretation of music. Whether Verdi or any other composer of his time was aware of the way in which these dynamics interact, is not necessarily important for composers of contemporary composition, but a knowledge of these dynamics in contemporary composition is crucial. Inherited ideas of legitimacy and meaning continue to shape our understanding of music today. These ideas are not objective realities, but have been shaped through history by the interactions between the music itself, institutional networks, and the audience who consumes the music. Our current institutions and perspectives are shaped by these historical events and must be recognized as such if we are to be fully conscious of the function of contemporary music. These beliefs, concepts, and ideas are not static, but are constantly being shaped through the music we write, the relationships we cultivate, and by those who evaluate our music.

Awareness of these relationships holds several implications for the field of contemporary music. As composers we can write music that acknowledges and engages with externally prescribed meanings and symbols. Awareness of what a concert hall communicates, of what

concert etiquette communicates to an unfamiliar audience member, or of what the decision to write for flute as opposed to electric guitar means are important compositional decisions. This is not to say that composers should or should not write for these instruments and venues, but they should be aware that the decision to do this symbolizes something to an audience member and it symbolizes something to an institution. The music that composers write can not only challenge audience members, but can challenge institutional assumptions as well.

In the area of professional relationships, composers can also be aware of power dynamics. Being aware of the tendency for institutions to preselect a type of person who conforms to the values and cultural identity of that institution is crucial in forming institutional structures that encourage equality and creativity. The financial cost and cultural presuppositions of certain opportunities prioritize a type of person with a specific economic and cultural background and this has profoundly damaging effects on both the music and the society itself. Each member of a given institution has power within that institution. In contemporary composition, the career path generally follows a hierarchy to progressively more power. Faculty members, adjuncts, graduate students, undergraduate students, all have some power, but it is not equal. Each person should acknowledge the power that they have and be transparent about how they exercise it. Power at all levels has the ability to influence the music that is written, the audience that perceives it, and the perceived legitimacy of their fellow composers. When necessary this power can be combined to act collectively.

This discussion focuses on the symbolism and meaning found in music, but the appeal of musical experience is not based solely in concrete communication, but in the ambiguity and freedom for exploration that music offers to the listener. However, allowing audience members to make their own associations and providing them with possibilities for experience is not the

same thing as refusing to acknowledge that there is a political dimension and function to all music. It is incumbent upon composers to acknowledge and consider this dimension. The navigation of this question is as much a part of the composition as any other element. These choices are made privately, but they have a public impact.

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