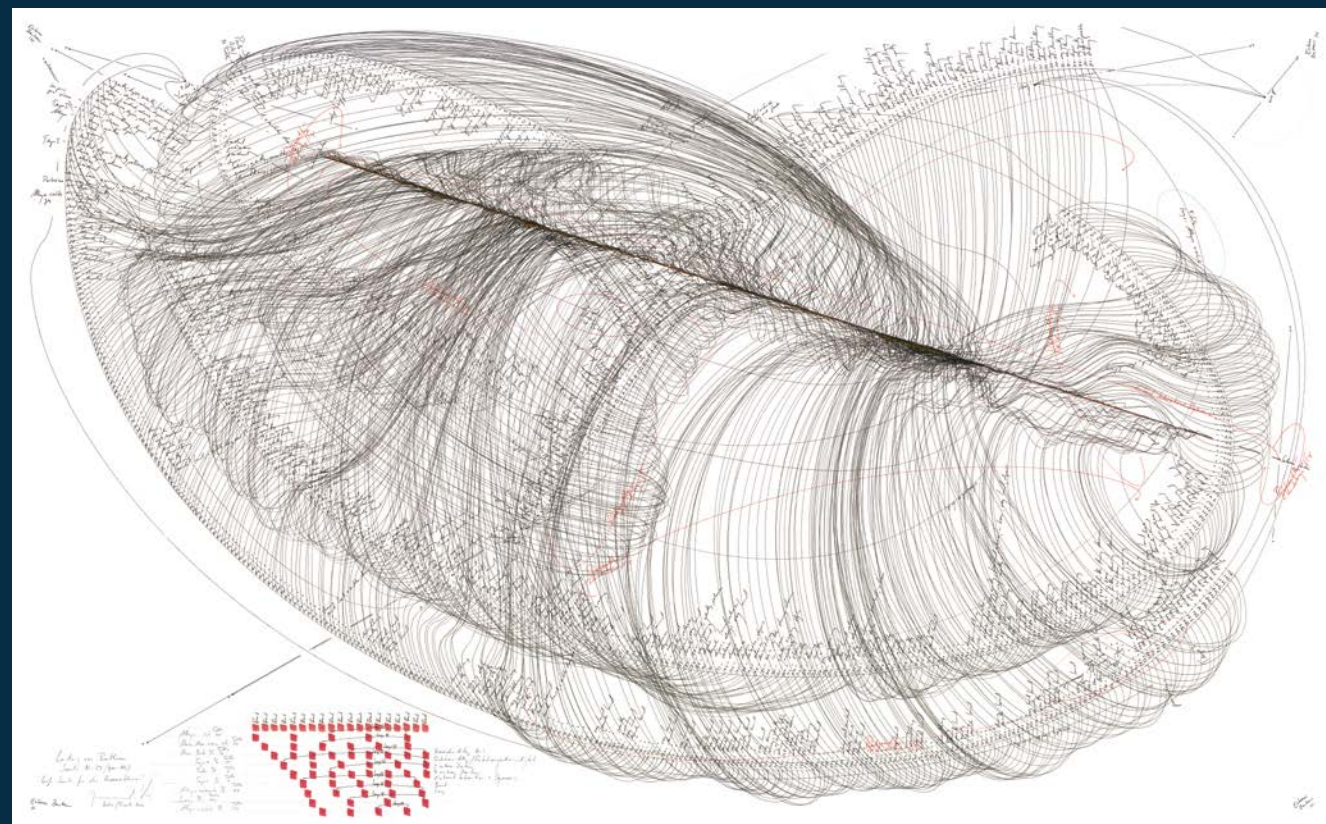


Iconosonic Beethoven



Culture, with all its historic connotations, inevitably intrudes upon our perception as a normative force. It sets standards, teaches us how to see a thing and what it is supposed to mean. It shapes all future perceptions and it influences how we view past experiences. Though cultural history can potentially expand our horizons, over the course of time it also entrenches us within the standards it imposes upon us – it becomes a prison for our perception.

As an antidote we have invented art, which in its turn becomes part of our cultural history. Consequently, art is also in constant danger of being consumed by that history. Art questions the perceptive norms of its time, extends them, turns them upside down - at least that is what I expect from art.

Beethoven has been consumed by cultural history and has been spat out again, fighting back against this misappropriation. Sometimes he - or rather his music - succeeds, but sometimes it doesn't. The machinery of cultural history (or rather the culture industry, to use Adorno's apt term) has turned Beethoven's sound-worlds into set pieces that can only imprint themselves upon our perception in a grossly simplified manner - devoid of the works' context, without differentiation and above all without the ramifications of Beethoven's fresh struggle with the very substance of music that every piece represents.

These are the set pieces that I refer to as iconosonics. I use the term to signify musical figures, structures, gestures, timbres that have come to represent aspects of our world, areas within our emotional life, across almost all stylistic borders. Storms, suffering, pain and grief, joy, rejoicing, the twittering of birds: all these phenomena are represented by the same or similar set pieces in the works of Vivaldi, R. Strauss and of course Beethoven. They have even retained their validity into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We have no difficulty imagining the sound of thunder, but we are also able to imagine the sound of a lightning flash - the very flash of light itself - because composers have projected this flash into the acoustic plain and there it has become entrenched. Iconosonics influence not only our understanding of sound phenomena, they also impact upon our acoustic imagination.

As entrenched perceptive *topoi*, we are no longer able to hear (perceive) their actual qualities, but rather react to them by assigning them pre-learned meanings. This entrenchment of perceptive categories acts as a block to HEARING in an absolute sense. It sets in motion reactions and emotions in accordance with old patterns.

In my compositions I reverse the path briefly outlined above - the path that leads to acquired, ingrained forms of perception, reception and comprehension. I attempt to shift the listener from a mode of pre-determined reaction to that of actual HEARING. And this other way of hearing can perhaps allow a different way of experiencing, a new sensibility, even a hitherto unknown emotion to unfold.

I do not want to depict the world, instead I work *with* - or rather *away from* - entrenched modes of depiction. Such a re-forming of elements and acoustic structures rather than merely working with them may lead us to where we can begin to HEAR in an all-embracing sense, where we can experience the polyvalence, the multidimensionality of every phenomenon, every context, every structure. This also triggers our understanding of these

phenomena and structures, where the phenomenon and its perception can free themselves from entrenched imprinting while at the same time retaining the imprints' shadows that allow us to experience the phenomena as our own. This method may lead to a place where we can undergo experience in the light of new perceptual categories, where we may learn to experience our own selves in a different way, to experience other selves as possibilities within us ... and probably much else besides.

Artistic acquisition begins by changing the context in which these iconosonics are perceived. When that which is pre-existent, foreign to us - though it may define us - is placed within a context unique to a specific work, it thereby loses its pre-determined significance without being itself manifestly altered - though of course its former meaning still resonates, producing the necessary frictional energy I mention above. This is the case with all acoustic phenomena: the bowed sound of the violin, any interval, any noise - and the complex gestures of iconosonics. No phenomenon exists which is not in some way pre-defined: from our perspective there only exists that which comes to us from outside - that which is foreign to us. Through the conditioning of our perception, as part of our growing up, our learning, we feel as if it is 'in us'. Placed within a new context, we make phenomena our own in the sense of a consciously experienced perception of outward occurrences. And in a first step as a composer I make these externally defined objects my own.

Composing is thus an act of re-forming these pre-existent phenomena and equally pre-fixed contexts that have conditioned my - and in a broader sense *our* - perception. Such work as an act of transformation tears the fixed phenomenon from the chains that the history of our perception has laid upon it, revealing its specific qualities, concealed nuances, other possibilities and levels of meaning. We can experience the familiar, that which defines us, in all the dimensions and possibilities that its collective use has driven out of it.

In extreme cases I can try to present such iconosonics, phenomena created by other composers that have become narrowed in their frame of reference over time, in such a way that the context of the works from which they are taken is lost and they are experienced merely as signs, emblematic representations of parts of the world or sensations.

This takes place through a process of simplification, constriction and a trivialising 'pruning' of the music into a simple, appellative, collectively effective signal - for instance with phrases from the music of Ludwig van Beethoven.

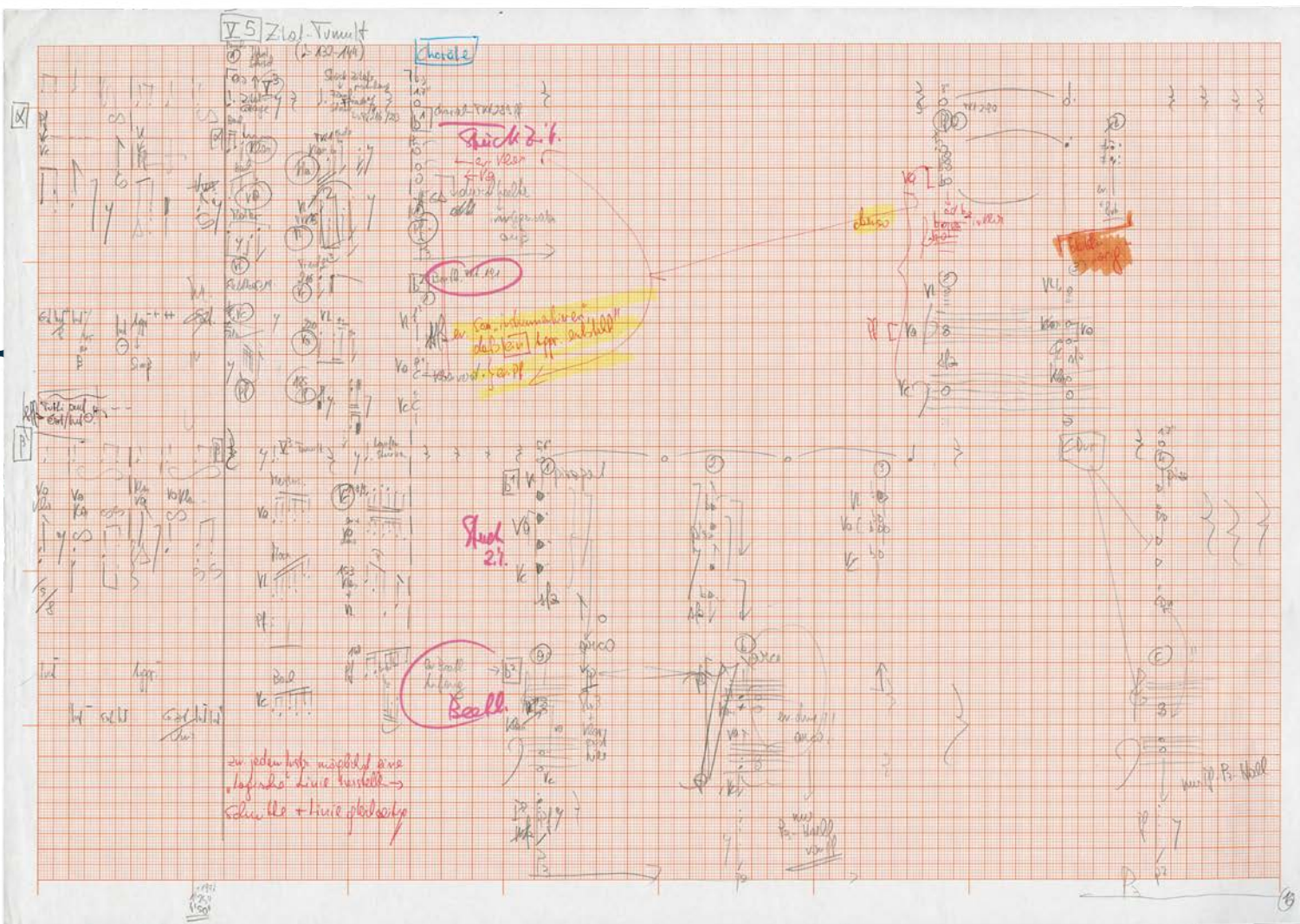
Thus I make fragments of Beethoven's *oeuvre* my own - in various works, and in a particularly prominent manner in *Figure - Iconosonics I*.

In the face of the greatness of the incredible music and the endless variety of experimental approaches that this composer brought into the world, it may perhaps appear inappropriate to regard

The image shows a handwritten page from a spiral-bound notebook, densely packed with musical notation, mathematical formulas, and descriptive text. The page is titled "V(5) Vielfalt der Zitate 3" at the top. It contains several distinct sections:

- Top Left:** A box containing "Zitat-Gruppe n.V." and "beispiel: Vielfalt-Zitate". Below it, another box says "Stück-Zitate auf die Themenfelder besogel".
- Top Right:** A box with "Stück-Zitate auf die Themenfelder besogel" and a red note: "als Minimum-Variante → Vorklärung des 17. Zitat - Schluss von Choral → Form-Links-Eindruck - 'habe mich' - froh haben Pp".
- Middle Left:** A section titled "Zitate + Choräle - Kodieren" with sub-sections for "Zitat-Gruppe", "Stück-Zitate", "Stück-Zitate + Choräle", and "Freund-Zitate Choräle". It includes mathematical notations like $8 + 94 \Rightarrow 22! = 12/13$ and $6! + 18!$.
- Middle Right:** A section titled "Zitate + Ariensol." with a diagram showing "aufgeteilt auf $\alpha + \beta$ ". It includes notes like "Vkl 27 + ff - 78" and "2! - Schumann 1" and "3! - Schumann Ende" and "283 - 289".
- Bottom Left:** A section titled "Hoplus-Nomen" with a diagram showing a sequence of notes: $a^1x, a^2x, a^3x, b^1x, b^2x, b^3x$. It includes notes like "Hoplus-Nomen" and "Hoplus-Nomen".
- Bottom Right:** A section titled "Hoplus-Nomen" with a diagram showing a sequence of notes: $a^1x, a^2x, a^3x, b^1x, b^2x, b^3x$. It includes notes like "Hoplus-Nomen" and "Hoplus-Nomen".

The page is heavily annotated with red and blue ink, including arrows, circles, and boxes. There are also several mathematical formulas and musical notations scattered throughout.



fragments of Beethoven's works as iconosonics, as signals for certain feelings or as acoustic depictions of certain worldly phenomena, and to turn these into 'set pieces' of our perceptual history, of our normalized way of thinking. However, Beethoven's music has been trivialized by our society, reduced to a pre-determined level of significance and experience: it has been turned into a banal substitute for European unity, to a cut-and-dried depiction of fate – a decorative copy of an experience of 'nature'. We are supposed to experience all these things in such and such a way – in this banal form – ideally all at once: such has been the training of our perceptual history.

Beethoven's music has itself been made into a 'figure'.

My work tries to allow those aspects of the music that have hitherto not in themselves been apparent to come to the fore. It seeks to expound upon the possibilities that are now open to us in the changed circumstances prevalent two hundred years after Beethoven's birth: those ways of understanding that he could not even guess at but that now offer themselves to us. Of course, I apply this same process to all the other objects upon which I set myself to work. Beethoven is just one of many iconosonics.

This process of appropriation is essentially different from a mere 'quoting' of the music of Beethoven, or anyone else. The specific contexts in

which these Beethoven iconosonics appear as something new and different – as, for instance, in *Figure – Iconosonics I* – represent the first step in the work process. The fragments of Beethoven's music appear as 'maxima' – as isolated qualities in which, to varying degrees, other building blocks are embedded.

On a certain level, the end of the third movement of the String Quartet, op. 132 ('Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenden an die Gottheit, in der lydischen Tonart') that is woven or rather worked into *Figure – Iconosonics I* represents my music's closest approach to tonality, to the modes of listening and understanding inherent in the work's formal organization: an approach to the colours and types of feeling that such modes of listening can be deliberately made to trigger.

This approach is both criticism and deviation from those labelled or entrenched ways of experiencing music. Tonality is no longer the only possible harmonic world (a world that Beethoven thoroughly shook up). It stands in contrast to other worlds, and at the edges of these worlds arise energies that can change these worlds: when fire and water meet there is a hiss, steam rises, and wet ashes are all that is left – and none of these phenomena can be experienced when fire and water are merely juxtaposed.

Modes of articulation and instrumental playing techniques are contextualized as alterities that deviate from the musical shapes surrounding them and refer to something else.

The sharply accentuated *tenuto* that begins at the same time forms a musical figure that synthesizes disparate elements: the sharp cutting accents and the quiet prolongation of the sound. This element of synthesis is developed further in *Figure – Iconosonics I* and pursued to other extremes.

The abandonment of polyphonic techniques is reworked to become an intermediary step towards 'absolute unison'.

Dynamic contrast becomes a level of dynamic flexibility in which the crude contrasts are differentiated in various degrees throughout the course of the work.

On other levels the Beethoven fragment within the context of the work is assimilated, throwing its particular light on the work as a whole. As such it cannot be separated from the corpus of the work.

Clearly the fragment from Beethoven's quartet remains what it is, but at the same time is has been transformed to become to an integral part of my quintet. It is simultaneously 'just Beethoven' as well as becoming my own unique material and part of my compositional world.

This two-faced nature of the work (though there are probably many more facets to the music than this) makes it possible for us to hear that which is familiar in a different way, and opens up the possibility of experiencing that which is unknown in the light of that which is familiar.

This adaptation of foreign material as a working hypothesis and central artistic premise occurs on all levels with all objects, structures and techniques and is taken to extremes in the adaptation of fragments of 'foreign' musics.

In the case of Beethoven, however, this is done with specific reference to a composer who is for me perhaps the most central composer of all: the composer who reinvents his *Instrumentarium* for each new work – building a different piano in each sonata – the composer who introduced *Empfindung* as an adaptable musical category into music.

Not the obliteration of feelings (this occurs automatically), but a re-working, a re-forming of our feelings: this is central to his music. We hear ourselves anew in this music. And to allow us to hear this apparently familiar music renewed, with new energies, meanings and qualities: this is the goal of the notated compositional thread of my work. In this respect the intrusion of Beethoven into the piece *Figure – Iconosonics I* and my attempt to appropriate this music is a form of homage that reverently yet confidently pays its respects to the composer who has made such a way of thinking, such a form of artistic activity possible in the first place.

