ORPHEUS MANIFESTOS

“Ungeschickt lässt grüßen”

Arabella Pare

O/I
Orpheus Instituut
Advanced studies and research in music

To mark the thirtieth anniversary of Orpheus Instituut, this series of manifestos reimagines knowledge through music as an essential form of understanding. The eight statements, written by the institute's principal investigators with rigour, humour, and artistic verve, situate musical knowing in the spaces between music-making and reflection. They trace the entanglements between performers and technologies, and the confrontation between archived fragments and virtual entities. Musical understanding here emerges as a makers' knowledge, built upon recursive feedback between minds, bodies, interfaces, and sound. What artistic research in music generates remains multifaceted, provisional, and alive: it can always be produced differently.

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. . . und wie grauenhaft
ist uns das Ganze . . .
. . . and how dreadful
the whole is to us . . . [1]

1 Thomas Bernhard, *Alte Meister* (1985, 41).

"Ungeschickt lässt grüßen":[2] Fragments of Arbitrary Knowledges

Arabella Pare

I. BEING—NON-BEING

When we ask "what is it?" we interrogate an entity, a perception, an experience: a manifestation of ontological concreteness. The question is directed towards an *it*, and this *it* is endowed with degrees of presence and with perceptibility. Negative ontologies may reframe the question by asking what a thing is not, but the attention remains upon the substantialness of the *it*, relying upon a binary division of existence into "something" and "nothing."

Defined neither by the solid existence of the *is* nor by the negation of the *is not*, the fragment is marked by the simultaneity of presence and absence, of existence and projected potentiality. The fragment is the peculiar case of a thing composed of both "existent" and "absent" parts—present material and projected absence held together as a single object.

2 These words come from Hannah Arendt's essay on Walter Benjamin: "Die Mutter hätte es ihm verraten. 'Ungeschickt lässt grüßen,' hatte sie wie Millionen anderer Mütter immer gesagt, wenn sich eine der unzähligen kleinen Katastrophen, welche die Kindheit durchziehen, ereignet hatte." The phrase is nearly untranslatable: literally it means "greetings from the awkward"; Arendt explains that it is the sort of thing that a child's mother says when one of the "uncountable small catastrophes that permeate childhood have occurred" (Arendt 2021, 47).

Fragments therefore confront us with a question of a different order. From the concreteness of the objectified *it* and its defining nature, they invoke an inherent dynamism. Fragments are movements towards a horizon of anticipation. Half concrete and inherently ephemeral, these liminal spaces are engendered by the fragmentary as an aesthetic construct evoked by dynamic observation.

II. INCOMPLETION—PROJECTION

In its original archaeological sense, a fragment is something that was once complete and is now broken. Something has happened for this fragment to exist. We know the fragment by its incompletion: it is a fragment because the reference of its totality is absent. It is a reduction, and it is also the trace of a process, of the passage of time or of external accident or destructive physical interaction with material. The *is* of the fragment records not only a current state of being, but the enactments and affects that produced it. The question it provokes is no longer "what is it?" but "how?" and further, "how did . . . ?" or "how could . . . ?" These questions express a shift from a focus on the fixed ontological nature of the fragment-as-object to the perception of the processes that produced it and the potential for further interventions evoked by this realisation of the presence of a dynamic entity.

The essential nature of the archaeological fragment is therefore no longer encompassed by "what is it?" or even "what is it not?" We must recognise the trajectory of its existence. Yet this incompletion is perceptual: the fragment exists *as* fragment only through the persistence of a lost totality. If we could not anticipate or project something more, some striving towards wholeness, the defining function of absence would not exist for us at all. To recognise a fragment is to perceive the liminal existence of all its constituent parts.

What, then, does it mean to perceive nothingness? Can we conceive of non-existence in any terms other than those of absence? The fragment presents an absence in the space where presence is *possible*. Where nothingness remains persistently vague, marked by the obscurity of its very non-existence, the absence of the fragment is a *concrete absence*. It is not that everything is missing, but that some specific almost-but-not-quite-attainable substance is quite definitely not entirely present. The tension between *could be* and *is not* is the defining moment of the archaeological fragment of incompletion.

III. POTENTIAL—LIMINALITY

Through the recognition of a fragment we acknowledge not only the present, the *is* of an ontological determination, but also the *was*, the *will*, the *could*, the *never will*, and the *never was*. In essence, a fragment presents a continuum spanning the ontological spectrum between *is* and *is not*, and from there reaches towards realms of possibility and exploration.

This simultaneity confronts us with a question: do the different existences belong to a single order, or to several? Ontological pluralism seems unavoidable; some aspects of a fragment exist more strongly, and in a more defined fashion, than others.

We register the absent parts only through the strength of our expectation that there ought to be a presence: "here there should be a head." The fragment is not presented to us as a deficit in the object; it is *constituted in the act of observation*. Beyond the trace-of-process of the archaeological fragment, there is an instability arising within the act of observation itself.

What this observation anticipates is the *almost*. The *almost* of the fragment is neither wholly other than its material, for were it so we could not anticipate it at all, nor entirely predictable in a singular form from

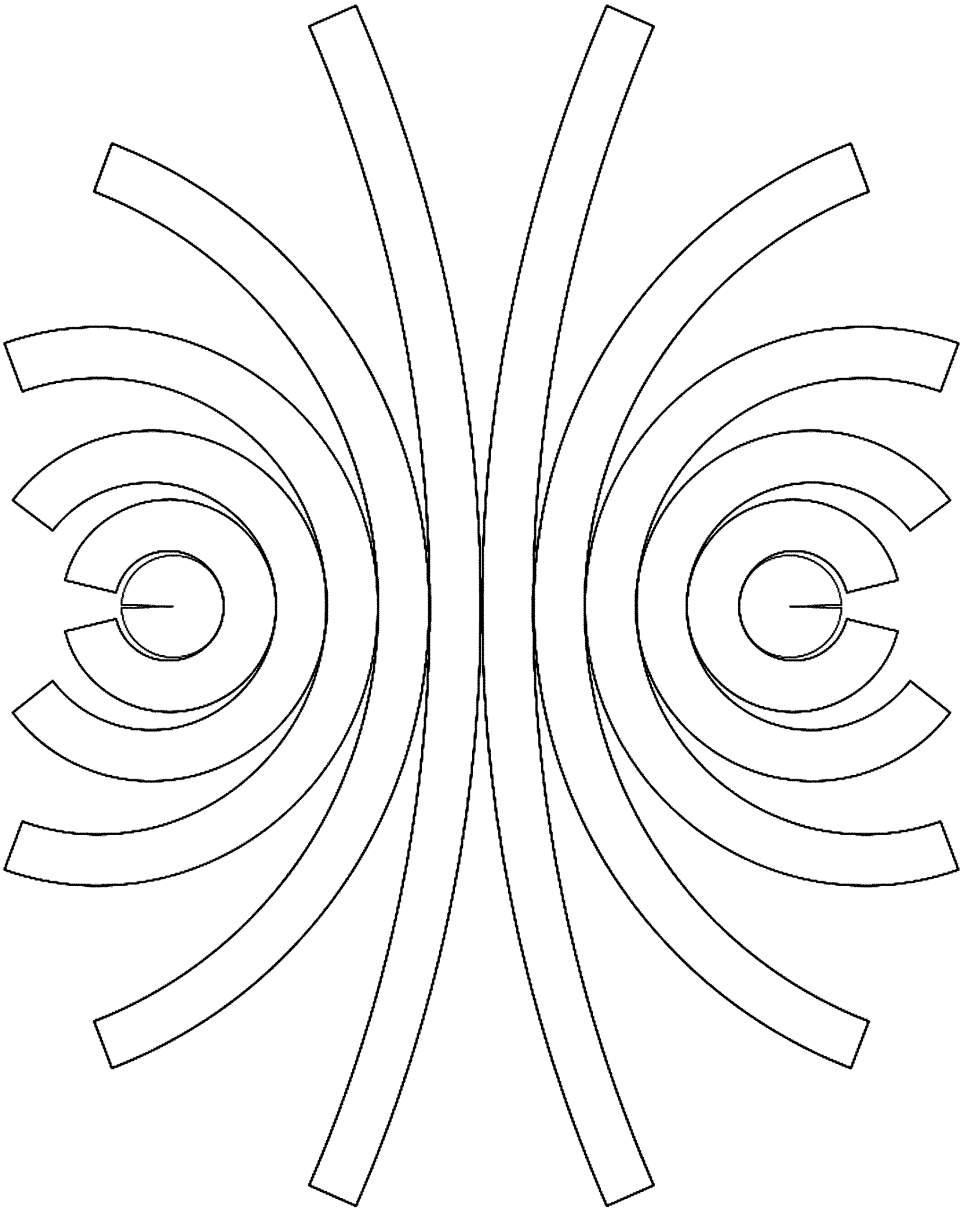
that material, as then the fragment would no longer be fragmentary. Its ontological tension arises from the generative capacity of the fragment material, which acts as a springboard for the projection of possibilities. Without concretisation these *almosts* remain ephemeral: clear enough to be missed, not clear enough to be unambiguously realised.

Turned on its head, the same observation yields its opposite. The fragment may be defined not by absence at all, but by material sufficiently strong to project potential existences *beyond* the boundaries of its physical presence at the ontological threshold. The simultaneity of presence and absence remains foundational, but it may now be read as a kind of emphatic over-existence, an existence that expands beyond its tangible and variable materiality to encompass an expansive formal openness.

The simultaneity of presence and absence reveals two faces of one dialectic: the fragment as *absence-through-anticipation* and the fragment as *presence-through-openness*, the divergence between concrete material presence and observationally generated formal expectation, respectively. With this, we may leave *incompletion* and *deficit* behind. The primary characteristics of the fragment are illuminated neither by presence nor by absence, but by dynamism, openness, and instability. We look not to the *is* of stable material nor to the *is not* of a conceived deficit, but to the edges, the extrapolations, the liminal spaces defined by the tension between what is, what is not, and what might be.

Fragments are entities that generate complex relationships with totality. The fragment-object is thus itself expansive, drawing together different orders of existence through relationships that are experientially grounded; and that unity requires the active, constitutive presence of an observer.

Through this expansion, fragmentation accesses a new dimension of experience. Totality itself is a matter of reference and perspective: what appears closed in two dimensions may in fact contain an invitation to



You may cut this image from the paper, apply adhesive to the ends of each strip, and stick the ends together to produce a fragmented sphere.

Figure 1. A flattened sphere. Illustration by Lucas Vieira (from https://1ucasvb.tumblr.com/post/150092108573/can-you-flatten-a-sphere-the-answer-is-no-you), generously released in the public domain (https://1ucasvb.tumblr.com/about).

open a third. The totality of a flattened image becomes a matter of observational position and individual intervention in the material, as is demonstrated by figure 1, which is an approximate two-dimensional rendering of a mathematical impossibility—that of flattening a sphere. Neither "complete" nor "incomplete," it presents a choice. Were the shape to be cut from the paper, the semantic sense of the text would be fractured while creating an awkward object that expands into a third dimension, undermining the conventional physical engagement with a bound text, which is opened to access its contents and then closed when not being read. Not only is the text fractured, but closing the covers of this text would crumple the sculptural dimension of the expanded sphere.

IV. ACCIDENT—TRANSFORMATION

In engaging with fragments, observers direct their attention not only to the perceptual surfaces of the material but also to their relational interactions with projected totalities. This interventionist observation is based on expectation and anticipation, generating observational instability about the boundaries of fragmentary material. The aspect of the *ungeschickt*, or the unexpected and the accidental, is salient, as every fragmentary boundary is arbitrary until the act of observation brings it into contact with a projected expansion. The fragment defies any reductive principle of unity:

> Mit konsequenzlogischen Mitteln trachtet sie, anstelle des Einheitsprinzips und der Allherrschaft des übergeordneten Begriffs die Idee dessen zu rücken, was außerhalb des Banns solcher Einheit wäre. (Adorno 1966, 8)[3]

3 "It attempts by means of logical consistency to replace the unity principle, and the paramountcy of the supraordinated concept, with the idea of what would be outside the sway of such unity" (Adorno 1973, xx, translation adjusted).

Depending thus on the perceptual evocation of the observer, the fragment eludes its own unambiguous concretisation. There may be *a* completion; there is very unlikely to be *the* completion. This observer is neither an idealised individual issuing elitist aesthetic judgement nor an anonymous collective asserting from a consensus.

"Ungeschickt lässt grüßen!" A glass, once a "what is it?" object, lies shattered on the floor, its shards implicitly retaining the traces of a function they no longer fulfil alongside the potential for new interactions and their material, social, and physical consequences: the swept-up shards, the memory of the performative process of glassblowing, are no longer tethered to a physical souvenir. All this is *eine Auslegungssache*[4] of the fragments. It is at once a glass and not a glass: it *was* a glass, it *could be* a glass, it *is* a broken glass.

What does this have to do with music?

V. KNOWLEDGES—MUSIC

What we have said of the fragment's being must also be said of its knowing. One concession still appears open to anyone who would preserve a single knowledge. Let it be granted, such a reader might say, that no individual encounter with a fragment exhausts it; let it be granted that each observation constitutes only one configuration of presence, absence, and projection. It does not yet follow that knowledge is plural. For one might hold that to know the fragment completely is to know the entire field of its possible configurations. The totality expelled from the object would then return, intact, as the totality of its possibilities. Finally, a single adequate knowledge would be preserved at the level

4 The sense of this pun is fragmented across two languages: *Auslegung* means "layout" (perhaps for display, as it literally consists of "out" and "laying," *legen*) but also "interpretation."

of the whole. This is the last refuge of the *Einheitsprinzip*,[5] and it must be refused as firmly as the first, for the field of configurations does not close.

Fragments extend beyond their own horizons of expectation. In this sense, they are echoed in the dimensionality and positionality of musical experience, which presents similar difficulties in establishing any valid limitations. The *Einheitsprinzip*, in which a singular and correct experience is prioritised, cannot capture the multiplicities and unpredictable nature of sound shaped over time. The pluralities of fragments and of musical experience do not close, in the first place, because their possible configurations are not a determinate set awaiting enumeration. What is neither fully determinate nor fully absent cannot be counted, listed, or bounded; the possibilities of a fragment are tendencies of a material under specific conditions of observation-interpretation-intervention, and a tendency admits no final enumeration. The parallels to musical experience arise through the reliance on intervention and interpretation through observation to produce a singular and unrepeatable event, adding to an ever-expanding constellation of potentialities.

The deeper objection is that the survey itself, the purported knowledge of all fragmentary configurations, would be one more act of observation. The fragment is constituted in observation, its recognition-into-existence requires the active and constitutive presence of an observer; this holds no less for any imagined totality of its possibilities than for any single configuration of them. In any given musical experience, the significance and coherence of the event is distributed between object, sound, evocation, and observation-interpretation-intervention. The fragment is a symbolic extraction of the way we perceive music. For

5 The unity principle, through which differences and divergences are subsumed and reduced into interchangeable elements. Divergence between "knowledges" in their specificity would, under this principle of unity, become irrelevant due to the assumed interchangeability or irrelevance of the deviations from an all-encompassing and normative knowledge.

both, the following is valid: whoever would assemble a catalogue of all the possible configurations does not thereby step outside observation into a view from everywhere and nowhere. They themselves perform one further configuration, situated like every other, conditioned by the attention, the expectation, and the historical and material position from which they look.

Observation—interpretation—intervention

The totalising knowledge that was to stand above the configurations of fragments and musical experiences is therefore *within* them, a member of the set it claimed to survey. There is no fixed point at which observation observes the whole of observation; the attempt recedes before itself without end, like a hall of mirrors. The observer cannot exit the condition of observership in order to observe it, no more than an eye can appear within its own field of vision. A listener, striving to listen to an externalised and objective listening, a sketch of a hand drawing itself, or *Vom Beobachten des Beobachters der Beobachter* (*On the Observing of the Observer of the Observers*) . . .[6]

Nor is the field of fragment configurations closed in time. Like music, the fragment is taken up again in each new present; every new act of observation, with other instruments, other histories, other ears, constitutes it otherwise, and so brings into being interpretation configurations that were not previously encountered. The set of fragment-music possibilities does not merely resist survey from within; it acquires constituents with the passage of time. There is no culminating moment at which the fragment is finally and conclusively configured, no present after which no further present will reconfigure it. What is always

6 Wir grüßen auch Escher und Dürrenmatt! / Greetings also to Escher and Dürrenmatt! The reflexivity of self-generating or self-propagating chains of creation and observation demonstrates the inextricable nature of observation from the contexts and objects that enclose and occupy it.

. . . ich kann mich einer Erinnerung erinnern, eine Erwartung erwarten, eine Phantasie phantasieren . . . I can remember a memory, anticipate an anticipation, imagine [or fantasise] a fantasy[7]

7 Edith Stein, *Zum Problem der Einfühlung* (1917, 19).

expanding cannot be the object of a single knowledge without expanding the concreteness of the term to absurdity: knowledge as everything actually and potentially knowable, everywhere and nowhere, without temporal boundaries.

The totality of a fragment's configurations is itself a fragment, just as a totality of musical realisations is inconceivable. The meta level reproduces the object level; the whole we reached for in order to ground a single knowledge proves to be one more entity constituted in observation—plural, unstable, and unclosed. There is no level at which the fragment resolves into a totality. Totality is what the fragmentary, at every level, withholds. This is not an assertion of a deficit—the fragmentary supersedes restrictive totalities, always open and constantly expanding.

And so a plurality of knowledges, rather than a singular and restrictive unified knowledge, is asserted by necessity. There is no single adequate knowledge of the fragment, not because our knowing falls short of a whole it cannot attain, but because there is no conceivable whole for it to fall short of. To call the situated knowings *partial* would be to measure them once more against an absent totality, and so to relapse into the very logic of deficit as definition (see section III). Instead, we have *knowledges*: situated configurations of presence, absence, and projection, each less-than and more-than complete in its own occurrence, none the illusion of a unified and total knowledge that stands everywhere and nowhere. Knowledge in the singular presupposed a totality; with the dispersal of totality, knowledges are what endure.

Music once more.

It is in musical practice that this ceases to be a proposition about fragments in general and becomes a description of lived experience and dynamic action. Any score, any musical inscription, is a fragment in the strict sense developed here: a configuration of marks or information

strong enough to project a sounding totality it cannot encompass. Musical experience is constructed, through observation and an interpretational-interventionist perception that does not merely receive a shape but participates in creating one: through retention and protention, the concretised reminiscence of what has sounded and the anticipatory grasp towards what is to come, the selecting of fragments and their highly individual curation into collages of substance. Performance, listening, rehearsal, analysis, and curation do not transmit a knowledge held complete elsewhere and conveyed more or less faithfully; they are processes through which musical experience and musical substance are constituted, each time, as one configuration of manifold possibilities. What musical practice makes impossible to conceal, and what other encounters with fragments may let us forget, is that there was never a finished object behind the performance waiting to be reproduced. This is not a novel observation;[8] however, the fragmentary character described here is not a property of musical materials. It expands beyond the associations of material, as the fragmentary is invoked by interpretational and interventionist observation, and it therefore belongs intrinsically to the moment of musical experience. No apparatus of exposure is required. The constitutive roles of performer and listener are here almost indistinguishable, although their physical activities diverge. Whenever and wherever perception intervenes in the material and expands that material beyond itself, the fragmentary is present; the most faithful interpretation constitutes such an example as thoroughly as the most radical one. The sense-making of sound over time is a curatorial and interventionist practice. The plurality of knowledges is not stored in the work awaiting release; it is enacted wherever music is made sense of in time, on either side of the stage.

The past in music cannot be known; it is persistently remade.

8 See Goehr (1992); Schwab and Assis (2016); Assis (2018, 2019).

What holds for the illusion of the work is also valid for the canon that assembles the illusory portraits of non-existent works. A canon is a single knowledge that has forgotten it was ever a configuration, so that the neglected, the marginalised, and the unregarded appear as deficient approximations of the masterwork rather than as knowings otherwise constituted, short-sightedly measured against an imagined whole, an idealised unity of beauty-transcendence-genius-profundity that never was.

To perform is to reconfigure ruins. To listen is to create from ruins.

Through structured attention we gather fragments, shards of sound, of gesture, of association and attachment, and create from them a line, a frame, a narrative; or we resist the teleology of aesthetic experience and flow, memoryless, from one resonance to the next.

VI. CODA. INVOCATION(S): FROM SCHLEGEL'S HEDGEHOG TO ARENDT-BENJAMIN'S CLUMSINESS

In Friedrich Schlegel the fragment is intended, "complete in itself like a hedgehog"[9] and therefore autonomous, freed from allegiance to any totalities—and perhaps even spikily protecting its fragmentary self against the interventionist intrusions of a smoothened "whole." In Walter Benjamin it is accidental, the remainder of a whole that clumsiness and catastrophe have broken. The fragment we have followed belongs to neither, defined not by how it was made or unmade but by how it is observed.

9 My translation; "Ein Fragment muß gleich einem kleinen Kunstwerke von der umgebenden Welt ganz abgesondert und in sich selbst vollendet sein wie ein Igel" (Schlegel [1798] 1960, 230).

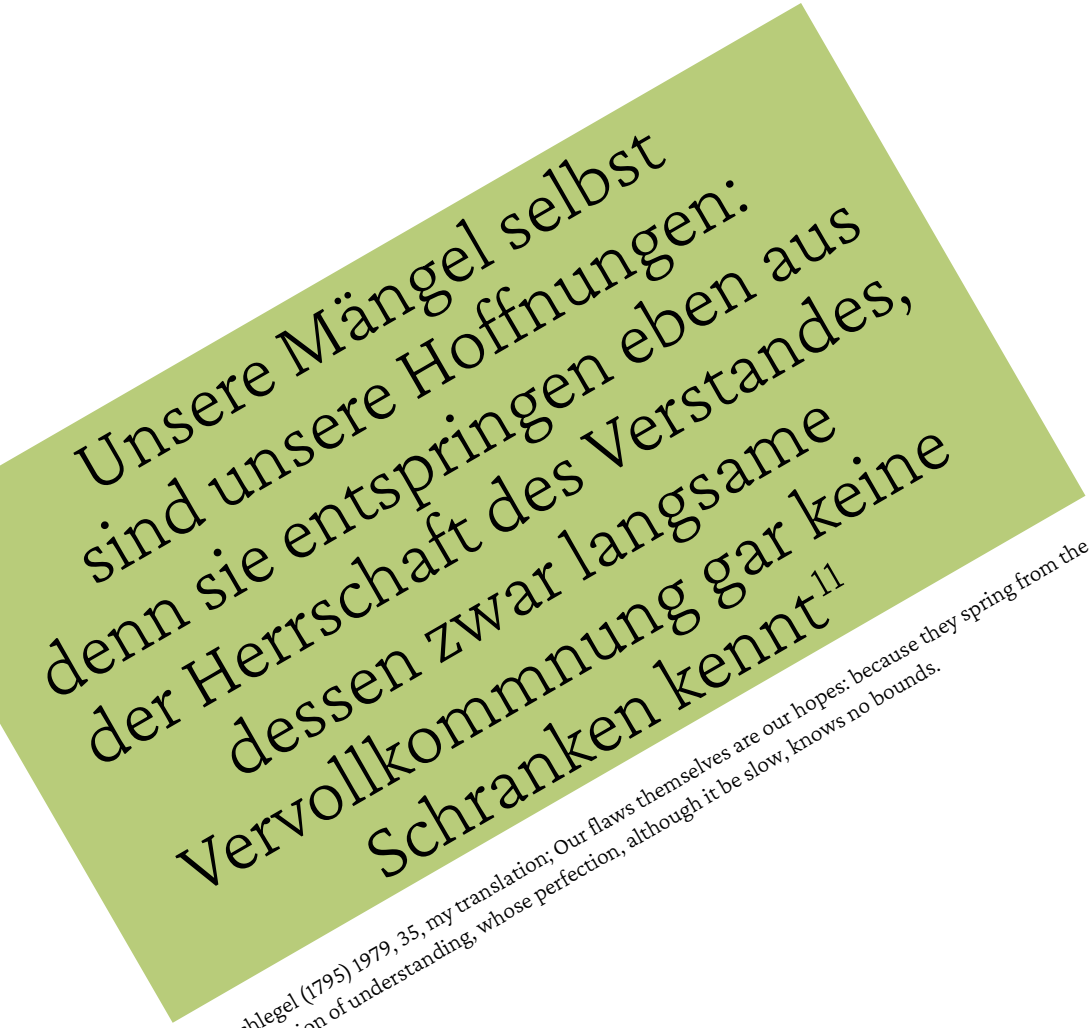
After Benjamin's angel of history, we are flying relentlessly backwards, through a field of shattered and fractured fragments of the past. The whirlwind of progress determines which of these offer sufficient resistance and friction to be caught and held. What looks like reliable contact with the past is the vain effort of shipwrecked mariners to seize a few water-soaked and fundamentally altered pieces of coherence from infinite potential elements—fragments.

The essential nature of the musical moment is the incalculable, the unexpected, the incomprehensible. Structure in music arises not from the material but from the priority of order conferred on it by attention, and from the social and aesthetic coincidences of consensus that offer a framework for translation and fixity: an affinity for the accidental, the unexpected, and the apparently unnecessary that Hannah Arendt found in Walter Benjamin. The unnecessary, often marginalised by observational framing, is the extraneous detail, the note that argues with the phrase it inhabits; it is everything a perfected order would remove. Here the arbitrary becomes audible: the trace of a hand that could have—and might have preferred to have—done otherwise, the moment at which the material emancipates itself and the subjective accident of "once" supersedes the universal "always." The awkward, the imperfect, the *ungeschickt* (clumsy) is inviting. Its non-unified liminalities leave space for attention and intervention to enter; the flaw is the opening through which the observer is admitted into the work. We may never catch the intact thing, only the piece with the broken edge; and the broken edge is what the hand can hold.

Polemically, the appropriate strategy is to pause without conclusion: to let the reader gather the *bunte Scherben* (Kaléko)[10] . . .

Fragments: ~~a manifesto~~ manifesting.

10 "Colourful shards," referring to Mascha Kaléko's "Blasse Tage" (1956, 48).



11 Schlegel (1795) 1979, 35, my translation; Our flaws themselves are our hopes: because they spring from the dominion of understanding, whose perfection, although it be slow, knows no bounds.

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Fragments transcend the fixities of existence and non-existence, evoking both present material and projected absence. The "incompletion" of a fragment is more perceptual than material; it is the strength of our expectation that constitutes the fragment in the act of observation. Through the recognition of a fragment we access not only the present, the *is* of an ontological determination, but also the *was*, the *will*, the *could*, the *never will*, the *never was*. Every musical experience is fragmentary in this sense. The negation of a singular totality means that there can be no single Knowledge, only knowledges: experientially situated, remade with each new present, expanding to embrace that which a canon has excluded as deficient, and both more than and less than complete. Ungeschickt lässt grüßen. The past in music cannot be known; it is continuously remade.

Arabella Pare is a pianist and artist researcher. She leads the research cluster Fragment: Accordances—Enactments at Orpheus Instituut.

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