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Towards an Absent Music

Sound Installation "After Auschwitz"

ABSTRACT   Susan Philipsz's *Study for Strings* (2012) is a 24-track sound installation originally set up at the end of a platform at the main train station in Kassel (Germany). The installation's sonic material is drawn from a string orchestra composition of the same name by the Jewish-Czech composer Pavel Haas, written in 1943 while he was interned at Theresienstadt and shortly before his execution. For her installation, Philipsz recorded only the viola and cello parts from Haas's score, allocated a pitch from each instrument to its own speaker, and played the sounds back on loop. According to the artist, the installation's "silences" (the parts from Haas's score that she did not record) allude to the absence of those murdered in the camps. Departing from these comments, this paper argues that *Study for Strings* articulates silence as more than an element of aural experience; it is also an effect of the work's technological, spatial, and architectural remediation of Haas's musical material. The argument first draws on Juliane Rebentisch's proposition that sound installation is distinct from music in its *spatialization* of sonic material. The work's "absent music"— its silence—resides not only in the missing string parts but also in the way in which the retained musical parts are spatially remediated. This argument is framed by turning to ongoing discourses on how silence functions in Adornian "After Auschwitz" cultural practice.   KEYWORDS   Susan Philipsz, sound installation, Holocaust, space, silence

"*Das Sehen an sich hat seine Geschichte*" ("Seeing itself has its history"), argued the influential art historian Heinrich Wölfflin just over a century ago.[1] So too, I will argue here, does listening. In this paper I analyze a recent sound installation that thematizes the historicity of a particular mode of listening: the experience of silence. My analysis situates the work's construction of silence with a broader interrogative field, tracing its implications for understanding the ethical and political valences of sound and its modes of technological mediation in contemporary artistic practice.

Study for Strings is a 24-channel sound installation by Berlin-based Scottish artist Susan Philipsz, produced for the 2012 edition of the global art quinquennale, documenta. It was installed at the main train station in Kassel, Germany, the city that has been the home of documenta since its founding in 1953. The 24 speakers are scattered around the end of one of the station's platforms, where the busy station's noises fade into an ambient din. Sparse, isolated tones from prerecorded string instrument tracks migrate around the speakers, maintaining an aleatory dialectic with the station's ambient sounds.

Philipsz's installation is based on a work of the same name by the Czech-Jewish composer Pavel Haas, written in 1943 while he was interned at the Theresienstadt (Terezín) concentration camp and shortly before his execution at Auschwitz the following year. Haas's *Study for Strings* features driving polyrhythmic *ostinati* and melodies based on Hebraic and

FIGURE 1. *Study for Strings*, 2012. Installation at Kassel Hauptbahnhof, documenta 13, 2012. Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery.

FIGURE 2. *Study for Strings*, 2012. Installation at Kassel Hauptbahnhof, documenta 13, 2012. Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery.

Moravian folk song, mostly carried by the violins. For her installation, Philipsz recorded only the viola and cello parts from Haas's score, allocated a pitch from each instrument to its own speaker, and played the sounds back on loop. Most of Haas's songlike melodic material is thereby absented from Philipsz's work, and the spatial distribution of the remaining material renders the score's characteristic rhythms discontinuous and fragmented.

In the discourses around *Study for Strings*, these transformations have often been articulated in terms of silence. For example, curator Barbara London suggests that the work figures silence through the absence of parts of Haas's score in Philipsz's installation: "Whereas the original score was written for twenty-four instruments [*sic*], in the performance orchestrated by Philipsz, there are just two, a cello and a viola, playing their intermittent parts in a work now haunted by silences."[2] London goes on to write, "The silences resound with absent music and conjure memories of the dead."[3] The term *silence* here refers principally to the musical material from Haas's score that is "missing" from Philipsz's installation. But London's invocations of haunting, memory, and absence may also suggest a more intricate dialectic between the "silences" and the sounds heard in the installation. If *Study for Strings* engages in the production of silence, it does so not simply by the cessation of sound; rather, it produces silence through a complex and layered remediation of sonic—or, more specifically, musical—material. Moreover, if silence is central to the ethical and political stakes of the piece, then further analysis is required to unpack how silence, in its historicity, factors into the ethical and political valences of the work's charged thematics.

This paper studies the production of silence in *Study for Strings* by folding together two distinct strands of post–World War II aesthetics: first, how sound installation and avant-garde music in the postwar period interpellated forms of listenership distinct to those of earlier cultural production, notably music; and second, how the humanitarian catastrophe of the Holocaust—the main theme of *Study for Strings*—brought into question art's existing techniques of representation and sense-making. Silence has been a salient trope in both of these strands of aesthetic thought and practice, in ways I will detail in due course. But the form silence takes in *Study for Strings*—that of London's "absent music"—incorporates the historicity of silence into its artistic techniques and structures, such that silence becomes a matter not just of sonic experience, but also and more saliently of spatiality and history, of memory and mediation, and ultimately of ethics and politics.

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Pavel Haas was born in 1899 in Brno, the capital of Moravia, to a Czech-Jewish father and Russian mother. After being educated in German schools in Brno, he enrolled at the city's State Conservatory, where he studied under the composer Leoš Janáček. While Haas's compositional aesthetic initially tended toward German Romanticism, his teacher's profound influence led him to change his approach entirely; he developed an interest in folk song and, later, Hebraic music, and he incorporated their formal and melodic characteristics into his own compositions. Following his studies, Haas produced music for a large number of film and theater productions, as well as several concert pieces.

He had become recognized as one of Janáček's most promising alumni by the time the Nazis invaded his homeland.[4]

In 1941 the Nazis sent Haas to the Theresienstadt concentration camp. A large proportion of Czech-Jewish artists and intellectuals were initially deported there, and the musicians among them contributed to the camp's animated cultural life. Though he arrived in poor health and was prone to depressive episodes, Haas eventually wrote several works for the camp's concert programming.

Study for Strings was written in 1943 for the camp's string orchestra. It received performances on 1 and 13 September 1944, both directed by Karel Ančerl. The work's original score is lost, but Ančerl recovered the orchestral parts (except for the missing bass part) from Theresienstadt after the war. The conductor reconstructed the score from the parts with the assistance of Haas's friend Lubomir Peduzzi, although he did not perform it again.[5] The work, roughly ten minutes in length, is rhythmically complex: in its opening movement a driving, insistent eighth-note figure in 6/8, carried by the 'celli and violas, supports a B-Dorian violin melody in parallel 3/4 meter. The rest of the piece features bold and spirited melodic material incorporating Moravian and synagogal figures, with time signature and tempo changes abounding throughout.[6] Footage of the work's first performance was included in the mendacious Nazi propaganda film *Der Führer schenkt den Juden eine Stadt* (also known simply as *Theresienstadt*), which was produced to demonstrate the camps' humane, even stimulating, living conditions. *Study for Strings* was to be Haas's last composition. Just days after the filming of *Theresienstadt* he was put on a train to Auschwitz, along with many other Theresienstadt inmates. He was executed by the Nazis on 17 October 1944.[7]

Philipsz discovered Haas's work during a period of research for her documenta commission: She learned that during the Nazi era Kassel—a medium-sized city in the center of Germany—had been a major departure point for trains transporting Jewish people to Theresienstadt.[8] To construct *Study for Strings*, Philipsz had a violist and a cellist each record their respective parts from Haas's score; but rather than playing their part as written from beginning to end, each performer played it through 12 times, each time playing only one pitch class when it occurred in the part. For example, for the first recording the cellist would go through her part playing only pitch class C; then, for the next recording, she would go through the part again playing only pitch class F, and so on until all 12 pitch classes had been covered. Both the cellist and the violist submitted their parts to this recording process. Each of the 24 recordings made between the two musicians was allocated a separate channel in the sound installation.[9] "In theory," Philipsz states, "all the notes should be heard in the right order when all twenty-four channels are replayed simultaneously".[10]

Philipsz's treatment of Haas's composition radically altered its aesthetic character in several ways: It removed most of the lyrical and melodic material from the original score; it reduced the sonic amplitude of the string orchestra to just two musicians; and it disarticulated the work's pitch material from its musical unfolding by recording each pitch class separately and scattering the recordings around the work's architectural site. Through these techniques, Philipsz produces something akin to what Stanley Cavell has

called "music discomposed";[11] or, to use Philipsz's own terms, *Study for Strings* effects a "dismantl[ing]" of Haas's composition.[12] *Study for Strings* is not the only work in Philipsz's oeuvre that "dismantles" earlier musical works: *A Single Voice* (2017) and *Night and Fog* (2015) perform similar operations on their source material, with the latter—based on Austrian-Jewish composer Hanns Eisler's soundtrack to Alain Resnais's eponymous film—also intervening in the issue of Holocaust history and memory. In this paper I focus on *Study for Strings* to allow for a more extended theoretical engagement with how Philipsz uses sound and music to transact between space and memory, specifically through the production of silence. In what way does Philipsz's discomposition, or dismantling, act to invoke the cultural memory of the Holocaust? What is the role of the silence, or "absent music," that is produced in this way? What might *Study for Strings* suggest about the significance of silence as an aesthetic conduit of cultural memory? And what is at stake, ethically and politically, in Philipsz's discompositional remediation of Haas's work?

If *Study for Strings* engages in the production of silence, it does so not simply by the cessation of sound; rather, it produces silence through a complex and layered remediation of sonic—or, more specifically, musical—material. Moreover, if silence is central to the ethical and political stakes of the piece, then further analysis is required to unpack how silence, in its historicity, factors into the ethical and political valences of the work's charged thematics, as well as its processes of musical "dismantling." The first step in addressing these issues will be to delineate how Philipsz's remediation of Haas's score factors into the longer history of sound installation's relationship to music.

THEORY OF SOUND INSTALLATION

Since its origins in the late 1950s, sound installation has presented several theoretical and practical problems for both artists and art theorists. Much of the discourse around sound installation has been concerned with emphasizing its difference from what would seem to be its most immediate cultural forebear, music. Generally speaking, the basis for making this distinction has been sound installation's facility for foregrounding the *spatial* dimension of sound. Music, by contrast, is said to comprise sonic structures that are apprehended primarily according to the way they unfold through time.[13] As such, sound installation as an artistic medium is positioned both with reference to musical form and in categorical distinction to it.

Juliane Rebentisch's book *Aesthetics of Installation Art* offers a theoretically rigorous version of this argument, based largely on Theodor Adorno's extensive writings on music. Rebentisch recounts that, for Adorno, music is first and foremost a time-based art form. This is because music's meaning or sense resides in the way successive sonic events mutually implicate each other. "In music," Adorno writes, "nothing has the right to follow something else unless it has been determined by what precedes it or conversely, unless it reveals *ex post facto* that what has preceded it was, in reality, its own precondition".[14] It is important to note that Adorno's discussion revolves around a particular paradigm of musical practice: the listener's reception of *written* music as first composed and then conveyed to a listener by a performer. This is significant for two reasons. First,

Adorno is primarily interested in the specific forms of musical organization made possible through notation. The written score is a necessary precondition of what Adorno calls "highly organized" music—that is, music in which "nothing has the right to follow something else" unless it participates in the unfolding of a meaningful musical construction.[15] Second, the written score necessitates the mediating factor of *interpretation* to deliver a musical performance. The musical meaning elicited through performance is imparted to the listener, whose ear, writes Rebentisch, "dwells precisely not [. . .] on every 'now' of the musical event but, as it were, listens through this now to hear the 'central thread' of the musical process".[16] Thus, musical meaning is articulated by the musician and reconstructed by the listener according to the capacity of the written score to organize sonic events in time.

But, as Rebentisch recounts, such structural relations between musical score, performance, and listening were undermined in certain post-1945 musical practices—much to Adorno's consternation. Such musical practices—Rebentisch lists those of Karlheinz Stockhausen, Pierre Boulez, and John Cage—disconnected musical events from their processual disclosure of properly "musical" meaning.[17] They did so by introducing into music a tendency away from temporal unfolding (according to the model outlined above) and towards *spatialization*. Music's spatialization spirits away the temporal integration that conditions the mutual determination of musical events; as a result, "musical" meaning, as Adorno conceives it, evaporates. Music's becoming-spatial thus implies the dissolution of traditional modes of performance and reception, and by extension of the temporal transactions through which musical meaning is conveyed. For Adorno, this has two important consequences. First, by being separated from the temporal structures of musical meaning, spatialized music devolves music into an aggregation of "mere sound material."[18] Second, music's spatialization distances music from its specific medial conditions—that is, the conditions that make music *music*: Adorno writes that the "overall static complexion" exhibited in such work "makes it incompatible with the medium of time to which as music it inevitably belongs."[19] Elsewhere, Adorno refers disdainfully to this trend as music's "pseudomorphosis towards painting."[20] But for Rebentisch, it marks the onset of music's "intermedial approximation to the principles of the spatial arts" more generally—a tendency it shares, in the postwar historical moment, with the related time-based arts of literature, film, and theater.[21]

Putting aside Adorno's general disdain for such tendencies in postwar avant-garde music, Rebentisch extends this line of thought to characterize the art form that marks an extreme point in music's drift toward spatialization—sound installation. According to Rebentisch, in sound installation the spatialization of sonic material reaches such an extreme that it seems to break with music entirely: She writes that with regard to sound installation "it would be impossible and probably indeed misleading to speak of *music* at all."[22] This is primarily due to the criterion of spatiality: whereas music consists primarily in the unfolding of *temporal* structures, sound installations, it is argued, are *exclusively* spatial: "In sound installation, there is usually no musical construction that could be 'composed along while listening' because there is neither a composition nor a performance nor even the reproduction of one: there is only sound in space."[23] Although these remarks

work to categorically separate sound installation from music, Rebentisch's line of argument as a whole preserves a distinctly ambivalent relationship between the two practices. On the one hand, sound installation emerged directly from certain postwar musical practices, particularly their various techniques of spatializing musical events. On the other hand, by taking this tendency to an extreme, sound installation registers a qualitative break from music as such.

While this ambivalence may be a precondition of sound installation practices in general, *Study for Strings* poses something of an anomaly to this theoretical framework: It is a sound installation in which spatiality is effectuated precisely *through* its remediated iteration of written musical material. This ambivalence can be unpacked by analyzing how *Study for Strings* spatializes its musical material. As described above, music exhibits a tendency toward spatialization when the dynamic of mutual implication between its successive events breaks down. This happens in several ways in *Study for Strings*. First, the process of making the recordings prohibits the violist and cellist from relaying any "central thread" or meaning immanent to Haas's score. When, say, the violist plays through her part, she plays only the notes belonging to one particular pitch class. In so doing, the pitches she plays are disarticulated from the musical events that occur before and after them—disarticulated, therefore, from the music's unfolding through time, and hence from the possibility of conveying "musical meaning." Secondly, since whether or not a note is to be played in a given recording is determined solely by the criterion of acoustic frequency (its pitch class), a note's significance for its role in the installation derives not from its *musical* meaning (its place in a sequence of events), but solely from its *sonic* characteristics. This, it will be recalled, was one key feature of music's becoming spatial: its devolution into "mere sound material." A third degree of spatialization in *Study for Strings* is in the distribution of the recorded sounds between the installation's 24 speakers at the train station. As related above, one speaker is allocated to the recording of one pitch class by one of the two musicians. As a result, the sounds come from up to 24 different points in space, even though only two musicians and two parts of Haas's score are heard. This distribution of sonic material across the installation's physical site removes the music still further from the paradigmatic situation of musical performance and reception by spatially separating the musician from any determinable point of audition.

In these aspects, *Study for Strings* clearly departs from the Adornian paradigm of music interpretation and listenership conveyed above. The musicians are not co-present with the auditors, but recorded and played on loop; the musical meaning of Haas's score as it unfolds in time is deconstructed into its acoustic—hence implicitly spatial—properties; and the sounds recorded by the two musicians are pointillized around the installation's site through the distribution of speakers, largely undermining the possibility of even accidental temporal continuity between musical events. But whereas, for Rebentisch, this extreme spatialization of sonic events seems to qualitatively break sound installation off from music, *Study for Strings*, by contrast, emphatically ties itself to the musical composition that it seems, equally emphatically, to "dismantle." In so doing, Philipsz's work can be understood as thematizing and dramatizing the morphological tension between music and sound installation. In what follows, I will frame the effects of this dramatized tension

through a discussion of the work's ethical and political impetus—that is, its engagement with issues of Holocaust representation and remembrance. What effects do these ethically charged thematics have on the way in which the morphological tension between music and sound installation is navigated? Or put otherwise: How might this tension be understood not merely as a theoretical or practical issue, but as an active component of the work's response to its subject matter? To address these questions, it will first be necessary to discuss the acute ethical problems faced by artistic practices that broach the issue of Holocaust representation.

ART "AFTER AUSCHWITZ": NEGATIVE PRESENTATION AND APPROXIMATING SILENCE

Passing into the field of post-Holocaust aesthetic thought inevitably necessitates circling back to Adorno. Indeed, no study of "post-Holocaust art" can proceed without reference to his famous—and famously misquoted—claim: "To write poetry [*Lyrik*] after Auschwitz is barbaric".[24] The diverse ways in which Adorno's writings, and this proposition in particular, have contoured debates on post-Holocaust cultural theory are too numerous to effectively summarize here. Instead, I will focus on one important aspect of Adorno's thinking on post-Holocaust aesthetics: the aesthetic modality of "negative presentation" and its manifestation as a qualified form of silence. Following this discussion, I will explore the implications of Adorno's arguments for *Study for Strings*, focusing on the role that the morphological tension between music and sound installation, as analyzed in the previous section, might play in the work's mediation of Holocaust thematics.

Why, first of all, is it "barbaric" to write poetry after Auschwitz? Adorno first made this claim in his 1951 essay "Cultural Criticism and Society," where it was preceded by the sentence: "Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism."[25] Thus, if Auschwitz is the paradigmatic (and metonymic) figuration of the "final stage" of this dialectic, it is because it marks the moment at which culture and barbarism have become indiscernible the one from the other.[26] As Adorno scholar Gene Ray writes, the event of the Holocaust is evidence that "culture's failure to free humanity from barbarism and prevent such catastrophic violence is now irrefragable. In the final stage of this dialectic, culture's 'right to exist at all' is in question."[27]

"Poetry" in Adorno's formulation may be understood as emblematic of cultural practices that take their "right to exist" as a given. However, as Ray observes, it is significant that Adorno specifically consigns post-Holocaust *lyric* poetry (*Lyrik* in Adorno's German) to the sphere of the barbaric. Lyric poetry is not a synecdoche of a *dehistoricized* concept of culture. Rather, it indexes cultural practices predicated on pre-World War II bourgeois culture and its attendant presuppositions of autonomous subjective experience. Ray writes: "Auschwitz has demonstrated that this [bourgeois concept of] subjectivity is marked for systemic extermination. Thus to continue to produce art and philosophy in the old forms and according to the old conventions is to be in denial of what happened and goes on happening."[28] In order for culture to go on—as ultimately for Adorno it

must—previously established artistic paradigms have to be replaced by those that can in some way register the now-tendentious question of their "right to exist at all."

These assertions pertain to the conditions of cultural production in general after Auschwitz, and it is important to distinguish this from artistic endeavors that explicitly broach the subject of the Holocaust itself. In brief, the latter requires the theorization of what Ray calls "an 'after-Auschwitz' ethic of representation."[29] The notion of "negative presentation" is central to such an ethic in Adorno's work. The term *negative presentation* is drawn from Immanuel Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime," where it describes the imagination's capacity to register the existence of something that, because of its overwhelming scale, nonetheless defies its ability to represent it in positive terms.[30] For Adorno, the concept of negative presentation resounds with Kant's experience of the catastrophe that in many ways defined his own time: the earthquake that devastated Lisbon in 1755. Adorno alludes to this in the section of *Negative Dialectics* entitled "After Auschwitz," where he writes: "[In] the earthquake of Lisbon [. . .] the visible disaster of the first nature was insignificant in comparison with the second, social one, which defies human imagination as it distills a real hell from human evil."[31] Similarly, the "social catastrophe" of the Holocaust can be presented only negatively for Adorno. This is because any attempt to imaginatively conjure sense or reason from the Holocaust would be an act of epistemic violence toward its victims: "After Auschwitz, our feelings [. . .] balk at squeezing any kind of sense, however bleached, out of the victims' fate."[32]

Where does the criterion of negative presentation leave artistic practice after Auschwitz? For Adorno, Samuel Beckett's 1957 play *Endgame* is the exemplary "after-Auschwitz" work.[33] In his extensive and complex discourse on the play in his essay "Trying to Understand *Endgame*"—which I will not attempt to summarize in full here—Adorno argues that negative presentation is manifested as a particular form of *silence*. *Endgame* is not *literally* a silent play. Rather, for Adorno silence functions as something like a cipher of the play's spoken dialogues. He describes *Endgame*'s "conglomeration of insolent phrases, pseudo-logical connections, and galvanized words" as "[t]he second language of those falling silent"; it is a language whose "words resound like merely makeshift ones because silence is not yet entirely successful, like voices accompanying and disturbing it."[34] These "makeshift words" are the efflorescence of the silence that is not simply the absence of speech, but the unspeakable "name of the disaster"—the name, in the final instance, of the Holocaust:

> The violence of the unspeakable is mimicked by the timidity to mention it. Beckett keeps it nebulous. One can only speak euphemistically about what is incommensurate with all experience, just as one speaks in Germany of the murder of the Jews.[35]

As outlined above, the aesthetic registration of that which is "incommensurate with all experience" can happen only through negative presentation, since it is by definition that which "defies human imagination." But, as Michael Rothberg observes, if silence is to be understood as a vehicle for negative presentation, it is essential that it be understood *not* as a definitive cessation of sound or speech—that is, not as literal or absolute silence: "'Not even silence gets us out of the circle' of culture and barbarism after Auschwitz [. . .]

Such a negative aesthetic of silence, [Adorno] argues, would only be functionally moti-vated by the desire 'to rationalize' its own predestined failure."[36] Instead, "Trying to Understand *Endgame*" demonstrates that "Adorno values the *proximity* of art to silence. This proximity is not an abdication but an articulation of suffering."[37] Thus, according to Adorno, the defining aesthetic problem of post-Holocaust art is not how to *attain* silence, but how to *approximate* it.

Likewise, the silence produced through Philipsz's remediation of Haas's score might be better understood as an *approximated* silence. This claim requires qualifying invocations of the term "silence" in earlier commentaries on *Study for Strings*. In most commentaries "silence" refers to the missing parts of Haas's score—the parts Philipsz did not record. But the work also approximates silence, in the sense Adorno identifies it in *Endgame*, through the spatialization of the musical material that Philipsz included in *Study for Strings*. To briefly recapitulate: In the previous section I suggested that *Study for Strings* brings Haas's music toward a condition of spatiality through the ways in which the recordings were made (recording each pitch class separately), and through the way they are distributed around the installation's physical site. Spatiality is brought to the fore in this process by separating the notes from the temporal integration specific to properly "musical" expe-rience: that which makes it possible for the listener to reconstruct the way successive musical events mutually determine each other. In this process, I argued, the notes' capacity to carry "musical" meaning (in Adorno's sense) begins to diminish. What was "musical" material becomes, in Rebentisch's phrase, "mere sound material." Thus, the recorded sounds are not just two parts isolated from Haas's score. Through their reloca-tion to sound installation, musical sounds have become separated from the possibility of musical meaning (that is, the unfolding of successive, mutually determining musical events). Put otherwise: The techniques Philipsz uses to spatialize the musical material separate the material from its context in a musical score. It thus also becomes separated from the temporal conditions through which its specifically *musical* meaning can emerge. And yet, through their explicit reference to Haas's score, the sounds heard remain tied to their original musical context at the same time as they depart from it. *The sounds heard in* Study for Strings *can thus be understood as musical material that has lost its capacity to musically mean.*

According to Adorno, *any* music that undergoes a pseudomorphosis toward spatiality jeopardizes its ability to carry musical meaning. But *Study for Strings* is more complex: As a sound installation, it enacts this loss of musical meaning; but insofar as it is explicitly based on musical material, it also *thematizes* this loss of musical meaning. It does so, I suggest, by dramatizing the process of spatialization—that is, by dramatizing the mor-phological distance between music and sound installation. As such, the "silences" in *Study for Strings* are not only the gaps that appear between the sounds heard. They are also, to use London's words, "absent music": musical tones that have become separated from the conditions that allow them to carry musical meaning. In other words, the sound installa-tion's sonic material effects silence, in the form of "absent music," through the becoming-spatial of its musical material. Here, sound and silence do not stand opposed: instead, they mutually implicate each other through the immanence of spatiality to their organization.

Thus, in *Study for Strings* silence is not simply present in the absence of sound; it is approximated *in* sound *through* music's spatialization—that is to say, through the music's morphological movement toward sound installation.

By separating music from sound through the interpolation of spatiality, *Study for Strings* inhibits the possibility of generating the subject-formations that correspond to "traditional" musical interpretation or listenership, as outlined by Adorno and Rebentisch. This interposes a qualitative difference between the implied listener of Haas's *Study for Strings* and that of Philipsz's installation. As described above, for Adorno the written musical score demands that the meaning of its successive events be conveyed through interpretive musical performance and synchronously reconstructed by the listener. But the sounds that Philipsz's listener hears are separated from any such musical context: There is no interpretation, only the sounding of discrete pitch classes; and consequently there is no musical meaning for the listener to reconstruct. The listener is therefore presented with musical sounds severed from the conditions necessary for musical meaning to emerge from them—sounds, that is, that approximate silence in the form of absent music.

What are the repercussions of this analysis for the way *Study for Strings* engages the ethical problematic of Holocaust remembrance? The production of absent *musical* meaning in *Study for Strings* might be understood analogously to *Endgame*'s "second language of those falling silent." For Adorno, Beckett's spoken dialogues comprise so many negative presentations of the silent, unspeakable "name of the disaster." If Haas's score indexes the composer's captivity, suffering, and eventual murder at the hands of the Nazis, perhaps the "silence" of its absent music in *Study for Strings* corresponds to the silence of the Holocaust's unspeakability. As such, the spatialization of musical material acts as a form of negative presentation: Its dissolution of musical meaning allegorizes the ethical injunction levied on postwar aesthetics to attempt to derive meaning or sense from the Holocaust. However, this does not entirely avoid another important ethical problem implicit in all artistic practices that directly address the Holocaust: the risk of aestheticizing genocide. Many reviewers of *Study for Strings* have registered the work's affective potency in laudatory terms. To select just one: Gregory Volk, writing for *Art in America*, describes the "music" of *Study for Strings* as "elegiac, mournful, and riveting [. . .] incredibly sad, but also lovely and hopeful: pure, stubborn loveliness in opposition to total evil and mayhem."[38] But from Adorno's perspective, even the possibility of such an empathetic response is evidence of a tacit allegiance between art and genocide. In "Commitment" he writes:

> The so-called artistic representation of the sheer physical pain of people beaten to the ground by rifle-butts contains, however remotely, the power to elicit enjoyment out of it. [. . .] When genocide becomes part of the cultural heritage in the themes of committed literature, it becomes easier to continue to play along with the culture which gave birth to murder.[39]

For Adorno, there is thus a "risk" of aesthetic pleasure inherent in artistic production *tout court*, however horrifying its representational content may be. Rothberg describes this

concisely: "The problem of pleasure is intrinsic to the non-synchronicity of representation—in retrospect, it seems, any historical situation can be mobilized for the enjoyment of the spectator who consumes history at a spatial and temporal distance."[40]

In its capacity to elicit responses like Volk's, *Study for Strings* thus treads on a pernicious and seemingly ineluctable problem: that to evoke the Holocaust through *any* artistic means always carries the possibility of coupling catastrophe with aesthetic pleasure. To "approximate silence," with whatever degree of subtlety or sincerity, is therefore no guarantee of an "ethical" artistic presentation of genocide. Far from attempting to resolve the irresolvable problematic of Holocaust representation, perhaps *Study for Strings* may be best understood as affirming the ongoing urgency of posing that problematic anew, especially in response to the changing historical conditions of contemporary artistic practice. But above all, Philipsz's work shows how contemporary theoretical problems around music, sound, and their intermediations need not be restricted to the depoliticized vacuums of certain analytic tendencies. Rather, *Study for Strings* shows how giving aesthetic form to medial relations between newer and more traditional art forms (sonic or otherwise) can amplify ongoing aesthetic debates with profound ethical and political consequence. ■

NOTES

1. Heinrich Wölfflin, *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1915), 11.
2. Barbara London, "Soundings: From the 1960s to the Present," in *Soundings: A Contemporary Score*, ed. Barbara London (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2013), 9.
3. Ibid., 13.
4. Joža Karas, *Music in Terezín 1941–1945* (New York: Beaufort Books, 1985), 76–79.
5. Ibid., 84.
6. Details of the work's stylistic characteristics, including its relation to Moravian folk song, are given in an introduction to the work by Peduzzi (the introduction is unpaginated). See Pavel Haas, *Studie pro Smyčcový Orchestr/Studie für Streichorchester/"Studie" for String Orchestra*, completed and revised by Lubomír Peduzzi (Berlin: Bote & Bock, 1991).
7. Karas, *Music in Terezín,* 81.
8. Art21, Susan Philipsz in "Berlin," https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s9/susan-philipsz-in-berlin-segment/. Accessed December 10, 2018.
9. Philipsz describes the process of making *Study for Strings* in the catalogue accompanying the work's exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in 2013: Susan Philipsz, in *Soundings: A Contemporary Score*, ed. Barbara London (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2013), 64.
10. Ibid., 21.
11. Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002 [1958]).
12. Imelda Barnard, interview with Susan Philipsz, *Apollo*, October 30, 2017, 36.
13. Gascia Ouzounian's dissertation, "Sound Art and Spatial Practices: Situating Sound Installation Art Since 1958," one of the few extended studies of the history of sound installation, demonstrates that this has been a recurrent theme in discourses around the subject since its inception (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2008).
14. Theodor W. Adorno, "Vers une Musique Informelle," in *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1992 [1963]), 297.
15. Theodor W. Adorno, "On Some Relationships Between Music and Painting," trans. Susan Gillespie, *The Musical Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (1995 [1965]): 70.

16. Juliane Rebentisch, *Aesthetics of Installation Art*, trans. Daniel Hendrickson and Gerrit Jackson (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012 [2003]), 70.
17. Ibid., 197.
18. Ibid., 199.
19. Adorno, "Vers une Musique Informelle" (1992), 310.
20. Adorno, "On Some Relationships Between Music and Painting" (1995), 67.
21. Rebentisch, *Aesthetics of Installation Art* (2012 [2003]), 145.
22. Ibid., 211. Emphasis in original.
23. Ibid.
24. Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997 [1967]), 34.
25. Ibid.
26. This intuition was concisely expressed by Adorno's friend Walter Benjamin, who wrote in Nazi-occupied France in 1940: "There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 4 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 392).
27. Gene Ray, "Conditioning Adorno," *Third Text* 18, no. 4 (2004): 224.
28. Ibid., 225.
29. Ibid., 4.4.
30. Kant situates negative presentation in his analysis as follows: "There need be no anxiety that the feeling of the sublime will lose anything through such an abstract presentation, which becomes entirely negative in regard to the sensible; for the imagination, although it certainly finds nothing beyond the sensible to which it can attach itself, nevertheless feels itself to be unbounded precisely because of this elimination of the limits of sensibility; and that separation is thus a presentation of the infinite, which for that very reason can never be anything other than a merely negative presentation, which nevertheless expands the soul" (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000 [1790]), 156.
31. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: *Continuum,* 2007 [1966]), 361. My emphasis.
32. Ibid.
33. As Ray writes: "After 1962, Beckett's *Endgame* becomes Adorno's exemplar of an art that successfully negotiates culture's 'after-Auschwitz' aporia" (Gene Ray, "Reading the Lisbon Earthquake: Adorno, Lyotard, and the Contemporary Sublime," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 55 (2006): 226).
34. Theodor W. Adorno, "Trying to Understand *Endgame*," trans. Michael T. Jones, *New German Critique* 26 (1982) [1961]: 137–38.
35. Ibid., 123.
36. Michael Rothberg, "After Adorno: Culture in the Wake of Catastrophe, *New German Critique* 72 (1997): 68–69.
37. Ibid., 69.
38. Gregory Volk, "Art on the Tracks at documenta," *Art in America*, https://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/news/documenta-hauptbahnhof/. Accessed December 10, 2018.
39. Theodor W. Adorno, "Commitment," *New Left Review* 87 (1974): 85.
40. Rothberg, "After Adorno," 63.