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# Otto M. Zykan's Peculiar Speech: Music and the Question of its Reenactment

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## Abstract

The article treats phenomena involved in the vocal interpretation of a composer's own works, taking the example of the Vienna artist Otto M. Zykan (1935–2006) and making reference to the performance artist Marina Abramović, who is several generations younger. What I am interested in is (a) aesthetic implications, (b) challenges for performance practice (such as the relation between notation and variant readings), and (c) challenges for subsequent attempts at interpretation and reception.



# Two preliminary remarks

1. [1] On the terminology:
  - Performances differ in my usage from other forms of presentation or staging in the way in which they are elaborated in a highly personal style both visually and acoustically. This is documented in many cases in multimedia form, which may be seen among other things as an attempt to counteract, or at least conserve, the ephemeral character of one's own artistic activity.
  - When I speak of "interpretation," what I mean is exclusively presentations, in this case performances as presentations of musical speech art.<sup>[1]</sup> To explore other processes of adapting/assimilating music and its meanings, such as verbal commentary, I use the term "reception."
  - Furthermore, I propose a distinction between "text" and "texture" in the interest of achieving greater linguistic precision. The former refers primarily to verbally arranged documents, whereas "textures" refers to documents aiming at musical interpretation. Finally, "pre-textures" differ from "textures" in that they require much more arrangement before being performed.
2. An initial version of this text was presented for discussion in 2014 at the conference *performing voice. Vokalität im Fokus angewandter Interpretationsforschung* [Performing voice: Vocality in the focus of applied interpretational research], Hochschule für Musik Basel/Hochschule der Künste Bern, November 27-29, 2014. A second, German version will be published in 2016 in the conference proceedings, ed. Leopold Dick, Anne-May Krüger, and Michael Kunkel.

## 1. Who to Believe?

I, who do not have my work published and allow for no presentation of it at which I am not present, thus producing [presentations] myself, took care very early on to document everything—and to document it in a form in which no other person can reenact it.<sup>[2]</sup>

This remark by Otto M. Zykan during the ZDF television program *Live Kunst* on 12 November 1989 seems to contain a clear statement against all reinterpretation of his own speech art, unless it is done in the composer's presence. In response to the presenter Peter Huemer's ensuing question of whether he therefore wanted to withdraw from the art market, the Vienna artist replied: "To the extent that I can do that without going hungry, of course."<sup>[3]</sup>

Consider in this context a page from Otto M. Zykan's rich artistic estate, included without title or date in the collection *Musik Reden*<sup>[4]</sup> (Figure 1): nine lines, centered and also arranged vertically in the middle of the page, separated from one another by varying line spacings. The initial impression of graphically produced restlessness is enhanced by the use of two different font sizes, one of them dominating lines 1 through 8, the other, smaller one reserved for the last line. Finally, three passages are underlined, two are set in italics, and colons with no subsequent spacing are positioned unexpectedly at the beginning of two lines, rounding off the overall impression of an ambiguous conglomeration of text. The content corresponds to the graphical arrangement: The appellative gesture of the lines seems as if "twisted" into a self-referential rhetorical puzzle picture. This clears the way for intonational variants that point semantically in

different directions and are thus capable of simultaneously raising curiosity and causing confusion as to who should believe or not believe what of whom:

What makes it all the more into an example of linguistic grotesque is that the repeated phrase "Was sich hier artikuliert" ("What is articulating itself here") exhibits an unclear relation to the history of the word "articulate": Lat. "articulus" stood and stands among other things for "part," while Lat. "articulatio" is used in rhetorical contexts to refer to the quality of good organization of speeches.<sup>[5]</sup> So how did Zykan himself articulate this text? One of the reasons I ask myself this question is because the artist, who was born in Vienna in 1935 and died in 2006, was introduced by Lothar Knessl merely as an "Austrian composer and pianist"<sup>[6]</sup> in *New Grove* in 2002: After abandoning his promising, internationally successful career as a pianist in 1970, however, Zykan was primarily known for his language performances and experimental publicity films.

**:GLAUBEN SIE MIR**

***NICHTS WAS SICH HIER ARTIKULIERT!***

**GLAUBEN SIE MIR:**

***NICHTS  
WAS SICH HIER ARTIKULIERT  
GLAUBEN SIE MIR...***

**:HIER ARTIKULIERT SICH WAS:  
NICHTS**

**GLAUBEN SIE MIR?**

**Figure 1: Otto M. Zykan, *Musik Reden. Ein Kompendium uneigennuetziger Ideen* (Graz: Droschl 1999), 1.**

[2] In 1998, a CD of the same name as the previous year's book including the page mentioned above appeared on the alternative label Extraplatte: *ZYKAN MUSIK REDEN* ("Zykan Music Speeches").<sup>[7]</sup> As with the book, the work *Glauben* is at the start but has now been given a title: This 22-second interpretation by Zykan himself is on track 8 of the CD, embedded seamlessly between the works *Wiener Elegie* (track 7) and *Soundtrack* (track 9). Zykan's reading or speech art is rather subdued at this point: Following an overlapping sequence marked by echoes and string sounds with the words "sie" ("you"), "mir" ("me"), and "nichts" ("nothing") lasting just over four seconds,<sup>[8]</sup> the text is spoken in a relaxed tempo: Starting with the word "nichts," Zykan accentuates, keeping an economical intonation and using breaks and changes in tempo and volume, the words "nichts" ("nothing") and "glauben" ("believe") in particular. The vocal articulation corresponds only partially to the text formatting, leading the listener to reflect on the fundamental question of how Zykan understood the relation between notation and

interpretation—all the more so because this text, which is at the same time texture, has already been interpreted three times before track 8 on the CD: *Glauben* (track 1, 0:38), *Sie* (track 4, 0:17), and *Mir* (track 6, 0:21) may be described as offset, electroacoustically produced, resounding variations on the first four words—*Glauben Sie Mir Nichts* (= "Do not believe me anything"). The process chosen here of reordering pre-textures and combining them with other works—the connection is made not only acoustically but also optically on the CD's track list (Figure 2)—is incidentally also a good example of Zykan's decades-long practice of continual, kaleidoscopic work on his own work, an artistic strategy that signals a dynamic concept of work and may also be observed in comparable form in Pierre Boulez, Adriana Hölszky, Wolfgang Rihm, Beat Furrer, Bernhard Lang, and more than a few others.



**Figure 2: Otto M. Zykan, *ZYKAN MUSIK REDEN*, Extraplatte EX 365-2, 1998, CD, back cover.**

However, I am less interested here in discussing comparisons of compositional processes of prolifération<sup>[9]</sup> made elsewhere. Rather, in the following I would like to address the implications that need to be borne in mind when someone wishes to perform a vocal work that has already been interpreted by its author. This question is worth several considerations and is particularly highly charged in the case of vocal artists whose work contains cross-genre performance characteristics. It is conspicuous how seldom one comes across the idea of alternative interpretations in this scene, and how often the artist's own performance concept remains the only one to be realized. Examples to consider in this connection include the American artist Laurie Anderson (\*1947) and her multimedia projects, marked essentially by so-called voice filters; or Martyn Jacques (\*1959), the mastermind of dark cabaret, and his trio "The Tiger Lillies," who refers to himself as the "Criminal Castrato,"<sup>[10]</sup> a multi-layered role that has to my knowledge

not yet to be assumed by anyone else. But performances of this kind are not just a contemporary phenomenon, as becomes evident when one thinks back on "Laurel and Hardy": The comedians Stan Laurel (1890-1960) and Oliver Hardy (1892-1957), who appeared together in 106 films, began in 1926 to develop an optically and acoustically singular acting concept whose characteristics can be listed and described. Since the appearance of the duo's last film, 1951's *Atoll K*, however, no other actors have produced an even remotely convincing replication of the concept without creating something different than the original "Laurel and Hardy." The 156 episodes of the American TV cartoon version<sup>[11]</sup> produced by Larry Harmon in cooperation with Hanna-Barbera Productions, broadcast starting in 1966, and the comic books also associated with the name of Larry Harmon (published in German by the Bildschriften publishing house starting in 1964) leave the impression that a change in media is the most feasible way for persons other than the creator to keep unique concepts in performance history alive or to breathe new life into them. Incidentally, neither the cartoons nor the comics were to enjoy longstanding popularity: Harmon's TV cartoon series is today, as far as I can see, hardly remembered anymore at all, while the comic book ceased publication in 1975; the moderate collector's prices<sup>[12]</sup> suggest that the legendary reputation of Laurel and Hardy still derives primarily from the original films.

[3] Is this really different in the case of Otto M. Zykan? I will consider this question in the following using an example from the Vienna performance artist's core repertoire, but first I would like to call to mind a comparable case.

## 2. Redoing and preserving

An artist's realization of his or her own artistic vocal and visual concepts is marked by characteristic features that merit consideration both in the case of subsequent interpretational arrangements without the author and in contributions to reception history that make reference to them.

To take an example: Between 9 and 15 November 2005 a series of performances by Marina Abramović, born in Belgrade in 1946, was held in the Frank Lloyd White Rotunda at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. Titled *Seven Easy Pieces*, the series consisted of a reenactment of a famous example from performance history each day starting at 5 p.m., including Bruce Nauman's *Body Pressure* (1974) on the first day, Valie Export's *Action Pants: Genital Panic* (1969) on the third day, and Joseph Beuys's *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965) on the fifth day. The series concluded with reinterpretations of two of the artist's own performances—*Lips of Thomas* (1975) and the new work *Entering the Other Side* (2005). This set an example in several respects, as may be seen not least in verbal comments. Those responsible for the series at the Guggenheim Museum and Abramović herself were evidently conscious of how remarkable this seven-part project was: In the Guggenheim Museum's official announcement, it was described as an experiment on "the possibility of redoing and preserving an art form that is, by nature, ephemeral."<sup>[13]</sup> Three days after the performance series, on 18 November 2005, Abramović gave a lecture in which she reflected on this unusual undertaking.<sup>[14]</sup>

The press reaction to *Seven Easy Pieces* was ambivalent: In the *Theatre Journal*, Theresa Smalec follows the interpretation suggested by the Guggenheim Museum that Abramović's intention was to proceed much in the manner of a musician reading a score. The critic begins by suggesting that she sees "myriad complexities"<sup>[15]</sup> in such an undertaking. Smalec then attempts to explain



where she sees these difficulties as being located and how Abramović overcomes them by listing the differences between the original performance of *Seedbed* (1972) by Vito Acconci and its reinterpretation by Abramović on the second evening in New York. She illustrates these observations, such as changes to the room arrangement, by juxtaposing photographs of the first version and the second version performed within the context of *Seven Easy Pieces*. (Such comparisons are still at least partially possible today thanks to a documentary by Babette Mangolte and a book with photographs by Attilio Maranzano.<sup>[16]</sup> If I am not mistaken, both received exclusive permission for the projects from Abramović or were commissioned by her to do them, a fact that is worthy of note.) Smalec recognizes Acconci's original performance in Abramović's recreation of it in spite of all the differences, begins thus by speaking with regard to the latter of a "rendition," and seems to be orienting her analysis to the title *Seven Easy Pieces* in characterizing the reinterpretation in her conclusion as "at once simple and densely ironic." In this way, the critic follows an interpretation already suggested by others, for instance by Roberta Smith in the *New York Times*. Since performance is "postwar art's most ephemeral genre," Smith sees the project as consisting of "not-so-easy pieces,"<sup>[17]</sup> contrary to what the title suggests. She thus rates Abramović's reinterpretations as successful, and on top of that, they showed

that old performance artworks need not die in the vapors of distant myth. While they can never be completely recreated, they can be pulled into the present, stripped of some of their mysteries and returned to living art.<sup>[18]</sup>

Abramović, who has lived in New York since 2005, stated in an interview with Karen Rosenberg<sup>[19]</sup> that she was relieved to have now completed this project after 12 years of planning, particularly as it involved a great deal of responsibility.<sup>[20]</sup> While she does not explicitly identify the nature of this responsibility in the published version of the interview, the following remark gives us an impression of what she might have been referring to:

I never saw them and I'd never repeated anyone else's piece, so the responsibility to do it right was enormous.

Thus, Abramović associated her performance of *Early Easy Pieces*—at least at the time of this interview in the fall of 2005—with the demand for a "repetition"<sup>[21]</sup> of the pieces. This is surprising when one considers that she openly admitted in the same breath to not having herself experienced any of the historical performances she had chosen. According to Abramović's own statement, filling this gap involved taking on the role of an archaeologist in search of the for the most part scanty remnants of the pieces' transmission history.

In view of the aforementioned demand to base the reinterpretation of a historical performance on these remnants, in fact possibly even to repeat them in an extreme case, I see a need for differentiation, and at least a distinction between the

1. assertoric demand that a performance artist must necessarily satisfy, or must have satisfied, his or her so-called own artistic intentions in realizing a performance; and
2. the optative demand that it is (at all) possible for another person to satisfy the so-called artistic intentions of his or her predecessor in reenacting earlier performances.

[4] This involves at least the following challenges: First of all, it usually proves difficult to empirically reconstruct artistic intentions without overlooking the fact that they are generally

quite processual in nature. What makes this reconstruction even more difficult in the case of many examples of performance is the lack of documents with a similar texture, which, after all, may be considered as an expression of artistic intentions. Furthermore, the arrangement of performance ideas and concepts should in my mind be considered in more than a few cases as highly situation-dependent. Among other things, this raises the question as to whether the external copy of a performance, for instance in other spatial contexts, can, should, or even must appear adequate. It is perhaps due to the tensions hinted at here that Roberta Smith describes Abramović's *Seven Easy Pieces* as "spine-tingling"<sup>[22]</sup> in the *New York Times*. But let us return to Zykan.

### 3. Zykan's Polemische Arie

The radio journalist and musicologist Irene Suchy, Otto M. Zykan's last partner and his estate trustee, periodically initiates and presents dramaturgically polished concerts. Such an "Evening for Otto M. Zykan" was held on 12 September 2014 at the Tirol new music festival *Klangspuren*. What transpired on this evening was not dissimilar to the event format of so-called salon concerts, with which Zykan and others created an alternative to the standardized concert format in the late 1960s, for instance at the "Museum des 20. Jahrhunderts" in Vienna.<sup>[23]</sup> Introduced and framed by Suchy's engaging *conférence*, the Hugo Wolf Quartett and the well-known song and opera baritone Wolfgang Holzmair interpreted several of Zykan's works, including the *Polemische Arie* ("Polemical aria") as part of the *Zyklus für Streichquartett und teilhabenden Komponisten* ("Cycle for string quartet with participating composer").

Zykan's *Polemische Arie* makes reference to a passage from Willi Reich's 1968 Schoenberg monograph. Reich claims that Schoenberg—with reference to his Method of Composing with Twelve Tones which are Related Only with One Another—remarked to his student Josef Rufer in summer 1921 in Traunkirchen:

I have discovered something through which the predominance of German music will be secured for the next hundred years.<sup>[24]</sup>

These not particularly modest-sounding words were subsequently taken up by supporters and opponents of Schoenberg alike. As in Reich's later book, this utterance was cited uncritically as early as 1959 by Josef Rufer in his monograph *Das Werk Arnold Schönbergs* ("The work of Arnold Schoenberg").<sup>[25]</sup> The composer, conductor, and music writer Alois Melichar (1896–1976), on the other hand, attacked the remark quoted by Reich in 1960 as a sign of "national arrogance".<sup>[26]</sup> Melichar's view was later contradicted by authors like Constantin Floros and Eike Feß,<sup>[27]</sup> one of the arguments being that the quotation should not be seen as untypical for this time (and also for the time before Schoenberg); besides, they argued, there is an irony inherent in the words that can be understood with reference to the language games and thought patterns common at the time. How did Schoenberg himself want this sentence to be understood? Philological attempts at confirming the authenticity of the sentence and its interpretation have thus far failed.

Copies of the opposing books by Reich and Melichar are both included in Zykan's estate, although it is unknown when he added them to his library.<sup>[28]</sup> At any rate, the relevant passages are marked in pencil in both—a rarity in Zykan's reading practice, as Zykan preferred excerpts and lists of keywords to annotations of passages.<sup>[29]</sup> He thus found the sentence attributed to

Schoenberg particularly interesting. This is also reflected in a review Zykan wrote for the periodical *Neue Musikzeitung* in winter 1968/69. The review is titled "Willi: Reich mir die Hand, mein Schönberg" ("Willi: Hold out your hand to me, my Schoenberg")<sup>[30]</sup> (Figure 3): a – typical of Zykan – play on the name "Reich" alluding to the Don Giovanni's line "Là ci darem la mano", and at the same time an ironical distortion of the title of the nostalgic Mozart film *Reich mir die Hand, mein Leben* (English title: *Mozart*) starring Oskar Werner as Wolfgang A. Mozart (director: Karl Hartl, Austria 1955), which may be seen as a lucrative example of memory repression in post-war Austria.<sup>[31]</sup> The ambiguous reference fits the style of the sharp-tongued review; for example, Zykan criticizes Reich's biography as "out-of-focus photography" ("unscharfe Fotografie") in the form of "superficial analyses of works" ("oberflächlicher Werkanalysen").<sup>[32]</sup>



**Figure 3: Otto M. Zykan, "Willi: Reich mir die Hand, mein Schönberg," in *Neue Musikzeitung* 27, no. 12 (December 1968/January 1969): 13.**

[5] A word on the context: Zykan himself had explored works by Schoenberg since his time as a piano student under Richard Hauser,<sup>[33]</sup> included them repeatedly in his concert programs,<sup>[34]</sup> and attained legendary status with the first recording<sup>[35]</sup> of all of Schoenberg's previously published piano works. He held Schoenberg's pre-dodecaphonic atonal works in special regard.<sup>[36]</sup> On the other hand, he was critical of all signs of evangelistic self-promotion marked by a rhetoric of superiority.

This critical distance, usually articulated in a highly variable, biting ironic tone, was not reserved for Schoenberg alone but also extended to the remarks and actions of persons who showed a sense of identity aimed at dominance. The stage work *Singers Nähmaschine ist die beste* ("Singer's sewing machine is the best") (1966)<sup>[37]</sup> or an absurd letter published in the Vienna daily newspaper *Der Standard* on the lyrics and music of the Austrian national anthem (Figure 4) are just two examples among many that illustrate Zykan's lifelong active opposition to hegemony and subservience. It thus does not come as a surprise that the sentence attributed to Schoenberg attracted his attention. The (in any case misleading) statement served for Zykan as an occasion to compose a work that he compositionally recontextualized several times after its



# Drum singe, wem Gesang gegeben

*Gestern hat ein Komponist an dieser Stelle dafür plädiert, den Text der Bundeshymne zu streichen und ihre Wirkung künftighin ganz der „bewegenden“ Sprache der Musik anzuvertrauen.*

*Ein Kollege vom Fach hält just die Melodei – Mozart hin oder her – für reformbedürftig.*

## KOMMENTAR DER ANDEREN

Otto M. Zykan\*

Ich schicke voraus, dass ich den Text der Hymne weder kann, noch vor habe, Veränderungen an ihm zur Kenntnis zu nehmen. Will nur mein Erstaunen bekunden, dass eine hitzige Debatte über ein Thema entstehen kann, das meines Erachtens keines ist.

Ist es provokant, zu vermuten, dass Staatshymnen längst obsolet sind? Und nicht nur, weil kaum jemand mehr singt! (Eine vergleichende Beobachtung, die wohl jeder meiner Generation – 1935 – bestätigen wird, wenn er an seine Jugendjahre zurückdenkt. Ob es die Omnipräsenz des Walkman, die flächendeckende Schallhorizonte, die hohen

Aufsingen zusammenfindet? Halblaut bis ganz leise, wenn nicht gar stumm, verziehen sie ihre Lippen, mühsam verbergend, dass sie auch von der ersten Strophe nur die erste Verszeile kennen – selbst bei Fußball-Länderspielen, die ja

**Otto M. Zykan:**  
„Wenn schon eine Staatshymne, dann bitte keine, die mit einer absteigenden Tonfolge beginnt!“

Foto: Urban



immerhin noch ein bisschen was von einer Schlacht haben (vgl. „Schlachtenbummler“). Ich glaube mich z. B. an einen Auftritt der deutschen Nationalmannschaft zu erinnern, bei dem einzig Assamoah, ein Spieler schwarzafrikanischer Herkunft, mitgesungen hat...

Ich bin aber natürlich der Meinung, wenn wir wieder einmal in den Krieg ziehen sollten, dass da die Töchter mithalten müssen! (Ich bin übrigens für „gegen die Ungarn“, die mir immer so auf die Nerven gegangen sind, weil sie doch besser Fußball gespielt haben, seinerzeit mit Puskas und Hidekuti). Wichtig wäre aber dann, die Musik

zu verändern! Unsere, die von Mozart sein soll (der auch für alles herhalten muss), geht nämlich gleich in eine absteigende Tonfolge, was dieses elende Lamento zur Folge hat, in das unsere Hymnensänger üblicherweise verfallen.

Weshalb auch zu fürchten ist, dass bei dieser Melodei die Kampfkraft unserer Truppen/innen erlahmt, noch ehe das Stück zu Ende ist. Man vergleiche sie nur etwa mit den Hymnen der Deutschen, Russen oder Franzosen, die allesamt frohgemut mit einer aufsteigenden Tonfolge beginnen. Das hat seinen Grund! Glauben Sie mir! Ich versteh was davon!

Könnte es im Übrigen sein, dass man bei zuständiger Stelle noch nicht weiß, dass wir in siebeneinhalb Minuten – soll sein in acht – um die Erde fliegen können? Und dass der Planet, der unsere Heimat ist, inzwischen kleiner und überschaubarer ist, als für die Mozart-Zeitgenossen St. Pölten oder gar Salzburg?

\*Otto M. Zykan, Komponist und Autor, lebt in Wien.

**Figure 4: Otto M. Zykan, letter to the editor "Drum singe, wem Gesang gegeben!" ("So sing if you be blessed with song") in *Der Standard* (September 30, 2005): 35.**

The history of the composition and textual transmission of the *Polemische Arie* and its interpretation by the composer can only be hinted at here. The earliest notation included in his estate is marked with the date "1968," which supports the assumption that he was initially motivated to compose the work when reading Reich's biography for the review, which appeared in the same year. One of numerous unexplained philological details is that of Zykan's modifications to the text, although it should be noted that Melichar and Reich had already changed the formulation of the quotation. In Rufer's somewhat uneven diction, it had appeared as follows in 1959:

It must have been at the time the prelude [op. 25,1] was composed that Schoenberg told me on a walk in Traunkirchen that he had found something today that would secure the predominance of German music for the next hundred years.<sup>[38]</sup>

This was then transformed as follows:

Melichar 1960 / Reich 1968:

"I have discovered something through which the dominance of German music will be secured for the next hundred years."

("Ich habe eine Entdeckung gemacht, durch die welche die Vorherrschaft der deutschen Musik für die nächsten hundert Jahre gesichert ist.")

[6] These changes could be interpreted as a clever attempt to evade copyright laws—to my knowledge, Zykan never obtained permission from the heirs to Schoenberg's estate to quote these words and use them in a work of art. What makes this unlikely, however, is that the sentence already appears in modified form in the review.

Zykan 1968:

"I have **invented** something **that will secure** the dominance of German music for the next **100 years.**"

("Ich habe eine **Erfindung** gemacht, **die** die Vorherrschaft der deutschen Musik für die nächsten **100 Jahre sicherstellt.**")

## 4. Again: Who to believe?

The *Polemische Arie* premiered on 26 June 1969 at the Musikforum Ossiach, an alternative festival initiated by Friedrich Gulda.<sup>[40]</sup> The link with *Inkubation* ("incubation") remained temporary, no isolated case in Zykan's compositional and performance practice: by 1989 at the latest, he had rearranged the texture and instead linked it with a *Kinderreim* ("nursery rhyme"), and in 2000 he integrated it into the *Zyklus für Streichquartett und teilhabenden Komponisten* ("Cycle for string quartet with participating composer"—the work that was, as mentioned above, performed by the Hugo Wolf Quartett and Wolfgang Holzmaier in 2014. Here is a list of the most important versions:

### Version history of the *Polemische Arie*

#### 1 *[Inkubation und Polemische Arie* ("[Incubation and] polemical aria") (1968)

Solo voice

Premiere: **29 June 1969**, Ossiach (Musikforum)

2 pages (handwritten)

Zykan Archiv Suchy, Ordnungseinheit 21

#### 2 *Polemische Arie (über einen Schönbergausspruch)* ("Polemical aria [on a remark by Schoenberg]") (1969)

Solo voice and choir

Premiere: **7 November 1969**, Vienna (Salon Concerts in 20er Haus)

13 pages (handwritten, including copies of the 2-page version 1)

Zykan Archiv Suchy, Ordnungseinheit 21

#### 3 *Polemische Arie [und Kinderreim]* ("Polemical aria [and nursery rhyme]") (1989)

Solo voice, choir, and instrumental ensemble

Premiere: **12 September 1989**, Berlin (Berliner Festwochen)

Part of *Bilder einer Ausstellung* ("Pictures at an exhibition") as well as the 6<sup>th</sup> part of the choral opera *Wahr ist, daß der Tiger frißt* ("The truth is that the tiger devours")

11 pages [computer composition]/mentioned in the 110-page score of *Wahr ist, daß der Tiger frißt* on p. 59 without notation]

Zykan Archiv Suchy, Ordnungseinheit 21

#### 4 *Zyklus für Streichquartett und teilhabenden Komponisten* ("Cycle for string quartet with participating composer") (2000)

Solo voice, choir, and instrumental ensemble  
Premiere: **23 September 2000**, Schwaz (Klangspuren)  
25 pages [computer transcription]  
*Zykan Archiv Suchy*, Ordnungseinheit 57/218

The textures were originally handwritten and later transcribed on Zykan's home computer. What stands out initially in comparison to the texture of the *Polemische Arie* is that both have relatively few annotations concerning singing and language. The lengthiest one is the explanation of the symbols for the choral voices in the handwritten version for solo voice and vocal ensemble for the Berlin performance with the RIAS Kammerchor during the 1989 Berliner Festwochen. The preceding solo part, on the other hand, only includes a note on the high tempo: "quarter = 120". This and other indications suggest that Zykan simply did not consider any version other than that of his own performance of this part at this time.

In the later, undated texture created with notation software, he might have changed his mind on this point, as there are at least three explanations of symbols at the end of page 2 (Figure 5).

**Beschreibung: Die vertikalen Striche zeigen den Grundpuls, der gleich bleibt**  
**7 = Achtelpause**  
**die horizontalen Striche sind Bindebögen**

**Figure 5: Explanation of symbols in the composed texture, p. 2**

[7] It is only possible to provide a rough outline of Zykan's performances of the *Polemische Arie* in this context. I refer here to two documents:

1. the ZDF television recording of the *Polemische Arie* at the Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna (12 November 1989),<sup>[41]</sup>
2. the radio production of version 3 (as part of *Bilder einer Ausstellung*) with the RIAS Kammerchor, conducted by Marcus Creed, in the chamber music hall of the Berliner Philharmonie (20 September 1998).<sup>[42]</sup>

As an introduction to his interpretation at the Museum of Applied Arts, Zykan explains Schoenberg's remark, shifting his posture within a small radius and looking at the audience (Figure 6).<sup>[43]</sup>



**Figure 6: Otto M. Zykan, *Polemische Arie* at the Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna, in *Live Kunst*, aired November 12, 1989, on ZDF.**

This differs from the posture (Video) Zykan assumes after taking a breath at the beginning of an excerpt from the 2nd part of the *Polemische Arie*: choosing a conventional body language for making a speech or presentation, Zykan raises his chin somewhat; his erect upper body remains comparatively rigid, as do his arms and hands, which touch each other at the fingertips. The exceedingly harsh, even jagged articulation of his occasionally wide-open mouth is thus complemented by jerky, brief head movements to both sides as well as forward and backwards. After a brief pause to take a breath (1:25 = four eighth rests in the middle of line 22 on the score produced with the computer), he launches into a surging second part. The first part was already marked by miniature outbursts in the form of extreme plosive sounds and corresponding short-windedness. Accelerating the already terrific tempo, the second part of this performance suggests a further increase in agitation, particularly with regard to body language. The jagged movements now (starting at 1:36) increasingly include the arms, which Zykan jerks around in the manner of a conductor before finally, in the course of the concluding reference to "Vorherrschaft" and "Heilherrschaft," sticking them out in a pose reminiscent of Hitler's greeting gesture.

Here is a comparison of the notation for the *Polemische Arie* in Zykan's own interpretation from September 1989 and the interpretation by Holzmaier in September 2014 mentioned above, taking the introductory movement as an example:



The image shows two musical staves for the introductory movement of the *Polemische Arie*. The top staff is for Holzmaier (2014), marked with a tempo of ca. 66 and a *Sprechgesang* style. The bottom staff is for Zykan (1989), marked with a tempo of ca. 60 and a *Senza misura* style. Both staves include dynamic markings such as *f*, *accel.*, *rit.*, *Meno mosso*, and *sf*. The lyrics are: "Ich ha-be ei-ne Er-fin-dung ge-macht, die die Vor-herr-schaft der deut-schen Mu-sik für die nächs-ten ein-hun-dert Jah-re si-cher-stellt!"

**Figure 7: Introductory movement of the *Polemische Arie* in the interpretations of Otto M. Zykan (12 September 1989) and Wolfgang Holzmaier (12 September 2014).  
Notation: Alexander Engler**

[8] The clear differences in articulation and tempo already apparent here, where no texture is available, continue to increase in the following. They become particularly evident in the transcription of the last line (Figure 8): Zykan intensifies his speech art among other things by creating a virtuous balance between the breakneck tempo and the still clear articulation of the constantly changing pitch. Holzmaier, on the other hand, sticks in the main—with a music stand before him, his body language reminiscent of a singer delivering a subdued rendition of a song, unlike Zykan, who performs from memory—to the Sprechgesang-like declamatory style he began with: briefly reducing the tempo just before the end, as if making sure the concluding passage had the proper effect for a finale, Holzmaier models his stream of speech toward the end with a staccato-like arrangement of details in a narrow vocal range—with one exception (on the last "der"). This interpretation can admittedly only be regarded as a misreading if we rate Zykan's performance as the standard against which it should be judged, and thus perhaps even as the "actual" work. This of course raises fundamental issues concerning the so-called essence of an artistic work. The important thing to note in this context is that both interpretations ignore the textures of the *Polemische Arie* (in different ways), particularly in a rhythmic sense.

The image shows three musical staves for the last line of the *Polemische Arie*. The top staff is for Holzmaier (2014), marked with a tempo of ca. 88-90. The middle staff is for Zykan (1989), marked with a tempo of ca. 288. The bottom staff is for Zykan (1989) with a tempo of ca. 300. The lyrics are: "Mu sik di di Ue schaft Mu der de deu schf t t". The bottom staff also includes a rhythmic notation for the lyrics.



**Figure 8: Final line of the *Polemische Arie* in the interpretations of Otto M. Zykan (12 September 1989) and Wolfgang Holzmain (12 September 2014).  
Notation: Alexander Engler**

The question raised at the beginning of this paper on the possibilities and limits of reinterpreting vocal performances is at the same time a question of whether the aim is to create the same, a similar, or a different effect. Becoming the object of critical comparisons and thus meeting with rejection or indifference no doubt places the performer at an increased risk, particularly in the case of those who achieve the status of a unique example due to the richness of their personal style and, like in the case of Zykan, have a memorable aura due to their virtuous or even eccentric speech art. Confronting this risk by attempting to merely copy a performance seems no less doomed to failure than adapting other stage genres to the performance. Both of these approaches to reinterpretation by a performer other than the original artist inevitably run the risk of being regarded as harmless or as the product of a misunderstanding.

These are by no means "easy pieces," and Zykan makes them even more difficult when one considers his repeated criticism of superiority rhetoric and his belief that art is "per se a political statement".<sup>[44]</sup> So who to believe? This question is of course important to bear in mind not just in the case of reinterpretations but also in reflecting on how performance artists interpret and explain their own performances, as long as they are not mere repetitions in the sense of affirmative redosings.

## References

1. For an explanation of the term, cf. Martina Haase, "Definition und Gegenstand von Sprechkunst," in *Einführung in die Sprechwissenschaft. Phonetik, Rhetorik, Sprechkunst [...]*, ed. Ines Bose, Ursula Hirschfeld, Baldur Neuber, and Eberhard Stock (Tübingen: Narr Verlag, 2013), 177. ↑
2. "Ich, der ich mich nicht verlegen lasse, und keine Aufführung erlaube, ohne dass ich dabei bin, also [Aufführungen] selbst produziere, war sehr früh [...] schon bemüht, alles zu dokumentieren – und zwar in einer Form zu dokumentieren, dass niemand anderer [...] es nachspielen kann." Otto M. Zykan, interview by Peter Huemer, *Live Kunst*, aired November 12, 1989, on ZDF, 4:14-4:30, accessed February

- 12, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=khl7lhqMPac>. ↑
3. "Soweit ich das kann und dabei nicht verhungere: natürlich." Ibid., 4:31-4:35. ↑
  4. Otto M. Zykan, *Musik Reden. Ein Kompendium uneigennütziger Ideen und Beobachtungen* (Vienna, Graz: Droschl, 1999), unpaginated, 22. ↑
  5. In a similar way, the term is used in medicine to refer to a joint. Cf. the article "artikulieren" in Friedrich Kluge, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* [...], 22<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1989), 42. ↑
  6. *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. "Otto M. Zykan." ↑
  7. Otto M. Zykan, *Zykan Musik Reden*, Extraplatte EX 365-2, 1998, CD. ↑
  8. Due to their short length, these tracks are almost fully available on amazon, accessed February 12, 2016:  
*Glauben*: <https://mp31.phononet.de/amazon/652/613/ZEXOYLABGC...>  
*Sie*: <https://mp31.phononet.de/amazon/652/613/ZEXOYLABGC...>  
*Mir*: <https://mp31.phononet.de/amazon/652/613/ZEXOYLABGC...>  
*Nichts*: <https://mp31.phononet.de/amazon/652/613/ZEXOYLABGC...> ↑
  9. Cf. Wolfgang Gratzner, "Arbeit am musikalischen Werk," in *Arbeit am musikalischen Werk. Zur Dynamik künstlerischen Handelns*, klang-reden. Schriften zur Musikalischen Rezeptions- und Interpretationsgeschichte 9, ed. Wolfgang Gratzner and Otto Neumaier (Freiburg: Rombach, 2013), 9-14. ↑
  10. Martyn Jacques, self-attribution at his 53<sup>rd</sup> birthday, Twitter post, May 22, 2012, renewed on May 23, 2012, accessed February 12, 2016, <https://twitter.com/thetigerlillies>. ↑
  11. Cf. the entries "Larry Harmon's Laurel and Hardy," in *Grand Comic Database*, accessed February 12, 2016, <http://www.comics.org>. ↑
  12. Cf. "Dick und Doof," *Comic Guide*, accessed February 12, 2016, <http://www.comicguide.de/php/detail.php?id=966&fil....> ↑
  13. Cf. "Marina Abramović. Seven Easy Pieces November 9-15, 9 PM to 12 AM," in *Guggenheim Museum – Exhibitions*, accessed February 12, 2016, <http://pastexhibitions.guggenheim.org/abramovic/>. ↑
  14. Later comments by the artist may be found in a talk she gave in Bologna on January 28, 2011. Cf. the almost 34 minutes of video recordings, accessed February 12, 2016, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGEuxzRK\\_bg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGEuxzRK_bg), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZ-iceNaS38>, and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d9eSfqBdKIM>. ↑
  15. Theresa Smalec, "Seedbad," in *Theatre Journal* 58, no. 2 (May 2006): 337-340, accessed February 12, 2016, <http://www.dx.doi.org/10.1353/tj.2006.0135>. Smalec cites a Guggenheim Museum broadcast stating that Abramović aimed at interpreting other artists' performances as "one would a musical score and documenting their realization," quoted in *ibid.* ↑
  16. Marina Abramović, *Seven Easy Pieces*, DVD-ROM (San Francisco: Microcinema International, 2010); Marina Abramović, *7 easy pieces. Marina Abramovic* (Milano: Charta, 2007). ↑
  17. Roberta Smith, "Turning Back the Clock to the Days of Crotchless Pants and a Deceased Rabbit," *New York Times*, November 17, 2005, accessed February 12, 2016, <http://nyti.ms/1jvvmST>. ↑
  18. *Ibid.* ↑
  19. Karen Rosenberg, "Provocateur: Marina Abramovic," *New York Art*, December 12, 2005, accessed February 12, 2016, <http://nymag.com/nymetro/arts/art/15228/>. ↑
  20. "I never saw them and I'd never repeated anyone else's piece, so the responsibility to do it right was

enormous," *ibid.* ↑

21. *Ibid.* ↑
22. Smith, "Turning Back." ↑
23. Cf. Irene Suchy, *Otto M. Zykan. Materialien zu Leben und Werk. Mit zahlreichen Fotografien und Dokumenten* (Vienna: Edition Ausblick, 2009), 66-67. I would like to thank Dr. Irene Suchy for granting me uncomplicated access to the holdings of her *Zykan Archiv Suchy* (Vienna). ↑
24. "Ich habe eine Entdeckung gemacht, durch welche die Vorherrschaft der deutschen Musik für die nächsten hundert Jahre gesichert ist." Willi Reich, *Schönberg oder der konservative Revolutionär* (Vienna: Verlag Fritz Molden, 1968), 173. ↑
25. Josef Rufer, *Das Werk Arnold Schönbergs* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1959), 26. ↑
26. "nationale Überheblichkeit". Alois Melichar, *Schönberg und die Folgen. Eine notwendige kulturpolitische Auseinandersetzung* (Vienna: Eduard Wancura Verlag, 1960), 108. ↑
27. Constantin Floros, "Die Wiener Schule und das Problem der deutschen Musik," in *Die Wiener Schule und das Hakenkreuz*, ed. Otto Kolleritsch, Studien zur Wertungsforschung 22 (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1990) 35-50; Eike Feß, Introduction to Arnold Schoenberg's *Suite for Piano* op. 25, accessed February 12, 2016, <http://www.schoenberg.at/index.php/en/joomla-licen....> ↑
28. One work by Josef Rufer, *Die Komposition mit zwölf Tönen*, Stimmen des XX. Jahrhunderts 2 (Berlin and Wunsiedel: Hesse 1952), is included in Zykan's estate. Zykan noted on page 1, among other things, "Darmstadt[,] am 6. Juni 1955." Schoenberg's incriminating statement is not mentioned there. ↑
29. Cf. excerpts in the *Zykan Archiv Suchy*. ↑
30. Otto M. Zykan, "Willi: Reich mir die Hand, mein Schönberg. Es gibt eine vollständige Biographie des Zwölftonkomponisten," in *Neue Musikzeitung* 27, no. 12 (December 1968/January 1969): 13. ↑
31. Cf. Cornelia Szabò-Knotik, "Mozart im Kino. Eine methodologische und rezeptionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum Thema Kunstmusik und Film" (habilitation thesis, University of Graz, 1996). ↑
32. Zykan, "Willi", 13. ↑
33. Cf. Zykan's report in the ORF radio show *Otto M. Zykans Lange Nacht der Musik* aired April 29, 2005, on OE1, according to which Hauser had been pressurized into having students play Schoenberg's music by the Schoenberg student, music theorist, and IGNM official Erwin Ratz. ↑
34. The locations of the performances include London, Graz, and particularly renowned concert halls in Vienna. For example, Zykan played works by Schoenberg at Vienna's Palais Palffy (May 13, 1960; c.f. Suchy, *Otto M. Zykan*, 56), at the Vienna Musikverein (February 5, 1962), and at the Vienna Konzerthaus in the year in which the recording was made (October 21, 1969). Cf. Suchy, *Otto M. Zykan*, 61 and 68. ↑
35. Otto M. Zykan, *Schönberg Klavierwerk*, Amadeo AVRS 6459, 1969, LP, also published as Otto M. Zykan, *Schoenberg. Oeuvre pour piano integrale*, Erato STU 70570, undated, LP. ↑
36. *Otto M. Zykans Lange Nacht der Musik*. ↑
37. Cf. Elisabeth Bögl, "Genoveva und die schlingernde Singer Nähmaschine. Musik-Text-Verhältnis in Otto M. Zykans beiden Singer-Opern" (PhD diss., University of Salzburg, 2010), chap. IV. ↑
38. "Es dürfte zum Zeitpunkt der Komposition des Präludiums [op. 25,1] gewesen sein, als mir Schönberg auf einem Spaziergang in Traunkirchen sagte, heute habe er etwas gefunden, das der deutschen Musik die Vorherrschaft für die nächsten hundert Jahre sichere." Rufer, *Das Werk Arnold Schönbergs*, 26. ↑
39. Zykan's English introduction, titled "Incubation & Choreographie & Polemische Arie" (*Zykan Archiv Suchy*, Ordnungseinheit 21), also formulates it as "I have made an invention, which secures the predominance of German music for the next hundred years." ↑

40. Cf. Suchy, *Otto M. Zykan*, 136. ↑
41. *Live Kunst*, 0:22-1:46, accessed February 12, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=khl7lhqMPac>, and the dating by Irene Suchy, "Das Werden der Staatsoperette in Originaldokumenten – Rekonstruktion eines Prozesses," in *Staatsoperetten. Kunstverstörungen. Das kulturelle Klima der 1970er Jahre*, ed. Evelyne Polt-Heinzl, (Vienna: Zirkular, 2009), 81. ↑
42. Cf. the performance information on the website of the RIAS Kammerchor, accessed February 12, 2016, <http://www.rias-kammerchor.de/content/ueber-uns/ge...> ↑
43. *Live Kunst*, 0:22-0:52: "You are about to hear an excerpt from a piece written in 1968, in which language is organized musically. It is based on an unfortunate remark made by a famous, world-famous Austrian composer, and he made it at the beginning of the turn of the century [sic]: The remark: 'I have invented something that will secure the predominance of German music for the next 100 years.'" ("Sie hören einen kurzen Ausschnitt aus einem Stück aus dem Jahr 1968—da ist Sprache musikalisch organisiert. Es hat einen [...] unglücklichen Ausspruch eines berühmten, weltberühmten österreichischen Komponisten zur Grundlage, den er zu Beginn der Jahrhundertwende [sic] ausgesprochen hat: Der Ausspruch: ‚Ich habe eine Erfindung gemacht, die die Vorherrschaft der Deutschen Musik für die nächsten 100 Jahre sicherstellt.‘") ↑
44. "Politische Kunst, glaube ich, kann es nicht geben, weil Kunst an sich eine politische Äußerung ist." Zykan in the ZDF television program *Live Kunst*, quoted in: *Unser Währing. Vierteljahresschrift des Museumsvereins Währing* 46, no. 2 (2011): 14; the issue was published on the occasion of the exhibition *Die Welt des Otto M. Zykan – Ein Alphabet*, curated by Marc Greber and Irene Suchy (Bezirksmuseum Währing, April 29 - May 25, 2011); also in <http://www.irenesuchy.org/joomlfile/Musik%20und%2...>, accessed February 12, 2016. ↑