

Substance and Content in Music Today

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Edited by Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf,
Frank Cox, and Wolfram Schurig

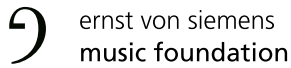
Volume 9

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Translations from German: Wieland Hoban

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Foreword

In this volume, twelve composers from Germany, Austria, the USA, and Canada present their views on the *Gehalt* of their music.

It is always easy to describe and explain music on a music-intrinsic (*inner-musikalisch*) level. Music-intrinsic concepts are technical and are derived from a vocabulary that has been formed throughout the history of musical theory and compositional training. But as soon as one inquires into that which transcends the technical level, difficulties arise—and they arise out of the nature of the subject itself. To begin with, music is without concept and possesses no explicit reference to the world that we can determine with concepts. Of course we can describe music poetically or metaphorically, but this approach either appears to impose arbitrarily on the realm of production or it belongs to reception history. In this volume, as is the case for the entire series, the focus is on production: the aim is for composers to write about their own work.

What are the not-merely-technical aspects of music? This question has raised its head recently with a certain historical timeliness, not only because a broad consensus has arisen that purely technical explanations of music are missing out on something essential, but also because contemporary composition is interested in issues that are not merely technical.

What word, however, will suffice for these “not only technical” aspects? The editors and translators searched intensively for an solution. The starting point was the German word *Gehalt*, which in German aesthetic philosophy plays an eminent role. This is not merely the “content”—because the content of music is its sound—but rather that spiritual dimension that integrates these sounds, and hence the relationship between these sounds, such that a meaning emerges that is not merely music-intrinsic. In this context, concepts such as *Gehalt*, *Inhalt*¹, poetic idea, meaning, and intention form a constellation.

The primary difficult lies in the translation of the German concept of *Gehalt* into English. “Content” is used in many standard translations, but “content” in fact lies closer to *Inhalt*.² “Import” has been employed³, a term that has the advantage of covering a wide range of meanings that might arise in interaction with the artwork. However, it has the disadvantage of not clearly indicating that these meanings are inherent in the artwork rather than merely suggested

1 *Inhalt* also traditionally refers to the subjects and scenes portrayed in program music.

2 The translation of Theodor Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory* by Christian Lenhardt (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984) in general uses “content,” but occasionally “substance.” Various authors have suggested “content” be used as a translation of *Gehalt* and “contents” for *Inhalt*, but this distinction is difficult to maintain in practice.

3 See, for example, Lambert Zuidervaart, *Adorno’s Aesthetic theory: The Redemption of Illusion* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991).

by it.⁴ “Substance” meets this latter condition, but unfortunately is easily confused with the much-contested philosophical concept of substance (German *Substanz*).

The solution chosen by the editors was to include both concepts in the title of the book and to leave it to the authors and translator to find the most effective translation, providing the German term intended where this was necessary for clarification. For most of the contributions, “substance” was used; Steven Kazuo Takasugi chose the term “content,” and Frank Cox, in light of Herder’s influence on Hegel’s aesthetics, chose “expressive substance.”

A theoretical text by Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf presenting the problematics of musical substance will precede the essays by composers focused on their own music.

The publication of this book would not have been possible without the generous support of the Ernst von Siemens Music Foundation, whom we thank for remaining faithful over many years. As with all books in this series, translations from German were provided by Wieland Hoban.

The Editors

Freiburg, June 2014

4 See the article “Gehalt” in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 1974) pp. 140-146.