On the limits and possibilities of dialogue between poetry and music: the collaborative work of Clemens Gadenstätter and Lisa Spalt

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In the volume *Blueprints for No-Man's Land* I published an initial study of the collaborative work between the Austrian composer, Clemens Gadenstätter, and the Austrian poet, Lisa Spalt.[1] Lisa Spalt and Clemens Gadenstätter's collaboration began in 1996, when Gadenstätter composed a piece called 'Variationen und alte Themen' for four instruments, to which Spalt provided a text that was a reworking of dictionary entries.[2] The next work, 'ballade I', for voice and piano, was composed in tandem in 1997. More recently, in 2003, they worked together on the production of 'Tal para qual', for guitar and speaking performer, who should be the same person. In October 2005, the premiere of a further collaboration commissioned by SWR, 'powered by emphasis. ballade 2,3 and 4', a piece for chorus, and orchestra took place at the *Donaueschinger Tagen für Neue Musik*.

My initial study focused on 'ballade I', which is just under twenty-five minutes long, but was based on an investigation of the limits of an analysis of 'ballade I' from one disciplinary perspective. By training a literary scholar, I approached 'ballade I' through its textual form. While any interpretative approach has its limitations, mine was nevertheless specifically limited and deliberately exclusive. The limitations of reading a text that had been constructed not only in collaboration with a composer but also concurrently with a musical score are self-evident. The piece had also been specifically composed to be performed, and that aspect was also excluded from my initial analysis. The acute awareness that my approach neither *directly* nor *definitively* addressed the aesthetic object of its consideration was counteracted by the fact that my literary analysis of the textual part enabled me to establish an initial hypothesis about 'ballade I', which might then be tested in the more extended analysis of the piece as a whole that follows.

The title itself ('ballade I') provokes expectations of a particular, traditional form – the ballad, a narrative poem in stanzas, combining three key elements; a narrative poem with lyrical elements framed within a dialogue. The length of Spalt's text (almost three hundred lines broken up into stanzas of varying lengths) reinforces the impression that we are dealing with a narrative poem. To summarise that narrative is not straightforward, however, in the sense that the text does not have a narrator, nor does it have a clearly defined 'voice'. There is progression, however, as the text moves from the location of a voice in space, through counting rhymes and naming games, followed by the voice's

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[1]   Simon Ward, '"Connecting" Literature and Music: On the Collaborative Work of Clemens Gadenstätter and Lisa Spalt and Its Interpretation', *Blueprints for No-Man's Land. Connections in Contemporary Austrian Culture*, ed. Janet Stewart and Simon Ward (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), pp.209-28.

[2]   The use of such 'found' linguistic material awakens associations with earlier Viennese collaborations, a point I discussed in my earlier essay. See *ibid*., pp.216-7.

search for a partner in dialogue. What gives the piece its narrative logic are the voice's continual and increasingly complex attempts to find, and define, a voice.

While there is a narrative logic to the text, there is also a poetic logic, as is witnessed in the opening section of the poem, where the text moves back and forth between a series of sounds – rum / raum / drin / in, – employing both alliteration and rhyme. Importantly, however, such poetic devices do not merely 'illustrate' the meaning; rather, any hierarchical relationship between sound and meaning is undercut by the fact one must derive the 'ideas' of the text from the logic out of the phonetic qualities of the words. As the text specifically undermines a hierarchical relationship between the meaning and the musicality of the language, it is not difficult to illustrate the limitations of a 'straightforwardly' literary reading of the work as a whole. There are frequent indications as to the style of delivery: for example, '[duktus: anekdote, witz]', or '[ebenso: sehr rhythmisch; stimme nach oben; "mein" immer betont]'. In the final sequence of variations, the text makes extensive use of different typographical forms, including italics to indicate emphasis, the double-spacing of letters to indicate the elongation of words, individual apostrophes, and other forms of notation to denote lengths of pause. This is a text that has been written to be performed; its acoustic qualities are an integral part of its composition, and therefore any analysis should attempt to take that into account. For example, in the final sequence of variations, the word 'ton' occurs on six occasions. The first two times, it is emphasised, the third not, the fourth, and fifth times emphasised and elongated within the same stanza, while the sixth occasion is within the text's final line. In other words, the audience's perception of this word (and others) is being heightened and diminished quite deliberately.

My initial reading of the textual part of 'ballade I' elucidated a number of related ideas in terms of its content and form. The narrative is concerned with dialogues between the Self and forms of the Other, and with the relationship between the voice and the body in space; in formal terms, it demonstrates the instability of its semantic elements (for example, in the different meanings of 'wie', or the physical and metaphorical meanings of 'herz'). Structurally, there is a back-and-forth between phonetic and semantic elements, and in concrete form there is the way in which a dialogue is staged and then placed in question through the typesetting of the lines. What connects these semantic and semiotic elements are a cluster of ideas: connection, communication, dialogue 'back-and-forth'. If we are to move forward, and indeed away from the limitations of my initial literary analysis of 'ballade I', then it is through an investigation of the implications of these ideas for the dialogue between the arts of music and literature.

The Theory of Dialogue Between Literature and Music

Gadenstätter and Spalt's self-reflective considerations seek to map out the co-ordinates of the dialogue of their artistic production. This they have done on a number of occasions, in particular in an essay published in the Austrian journal *Ton* in 1997 on the production of 'ballade I',[3] and in *TAG DAY schreibspiel*, a dialogue published in 2000.[4] *TAG DAY* is a

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3   Clemens Gadenstätter and Lisa Spalt, 'Umschläge & Kippen: zu "ballade I"', *ton* (1997), pp.42–7.

dense, meandering series of reflections on the nature of art and perception, presented in a manner that similarly makes it difficult to read *quickly*.

> denn die kunst ist ein raum, in dem der verstoss gegen die logik, das fehlermachen im gängigen system, system ist. in dem die augen nicht davor zugemacht werden müssen, dass eine paradoxe aussage oftmals genauer ausdrücken kann, was für uns sache ist, viel genauer als eine, die schon durch unseren korrekturraster gelaufen ist und die sache fälscherlicherweise als eine auflösbare darstellt, als eine, die, wäre sie eine solche, von uns nicht zur sprache gebracht werden müsste. klar. **zusammenhänge, die sich auf einen punkt bringen lassen, sind keine. und aussagen, über solche zusammenhänge, die sich auf einen punkt bringen lassen, sind auch keine aussagen über diese. kein einziges element unserer existenz ist so wenig komplex, dass es sich auf eine einzige aussage zurückführen liesse. jede aussage verknüpft unterschiedlichste elemente auf vielschichtige weisen miteinander. ich meine, diese verknüpfungen sind irgendwo jedenfalls spiegelungen unserer wahrnehmung von den dingen und von uns selbst im medium der 'sprache', wobei diese gleichzeitig selbst wieder objekt der wahrnehmung und damit der spiegelung ist. jeder versuch, eine aussage als eine umfassende darzustellen, ist daher so etwas wie mord an der existenz der dinge, der phänomene und an uns selbst, wenn wirs nochmal getrennt voneinander anführen wollen.** (*TD*:5; bold typeface in the original)

The formal renunciation of capital letters, the rejection of paragraph breaks in favour of blocks of text, and the refusal to name the speakers (only after a few pages is it clear that the bold typeface denotes the voice of the composer) formally complement the content of that discussion, which highlights the limitations of language as a medium for 'objectively', 'totally' representing any element of existence, a 'Sprachskepsis' that has a long (Austrian) artistic and philosophical tradition. *TAG DAY* is conceived as a dialogue, elaborating on these opening remarks – its form also foregrounds the process of dialogue as a way of debating problems – and would seem already to challenge any attempt to reduce the complexity of what it seeks to express: it is associative, making connections ('Verknüpfungen'), rather than accepting any particular given context ('Zusammenhang') as the limit for its discussion. It is important to note that Gadenstätter and Spalt's engagement with philosophical positions and critical theory is self-consciously non-systematic; rather than constructing systems, they are always in search of the point where the system can be brought to collapse. As the epigraph to *TAG DAY* puts it: 'nichts stimmt hier wenigstens prinzipiell… oder alle anklänge an bestehende philosophische systeme sind unterlaufen und willkommen' (*TD*:4). As is already evident in the irritation experienced in reading this long epigraph, the disruption of expectations is one of the central aesthetic strategies outlined in *TAG DAY*. It is a method that works in literary terms by making unexpected but not random connections. This sense of disruption and irritation was one of the major responses of my initial literary analysis of 'ballade I'; these are part of Spalt's strategy in setting up expectations in her audience which are then not met. For example, in 'ballade I' Spalt uses 'herz' to refer alternately to its physical form or its metaphorical potential, seeking to examine the assumptions inherent in existing material, and aims to resynthesise these in a controlled fashion. Such control is important, given that, in the first instance, a productive confusion, and not chaos, is what is intended. Both Gadenstätter and Spalt place considerable emphasis on the fact that their recipient's expectations are to be (mis-) directed in a controlled fashion:

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4   Clemens Gadenstätter and Lisa Spalt, *TAG DAY schreibspiel* (Graz, Vienna: edition *gegen*sätze, 2000). Hereafter cited in the text as *TD*.

> dieser vorgang [of composition – SW] ist dann einer, der nicht beliebige, unendliche offenheit erzeugt, sondern aus verschiedenen bedeutungen zum beispiel eines satzes mehrere (nicht ungezählte) möglichkeiten für sinnzusammenhänge isolieren kann. (*TD*:47)

As I illustrated in my initial study, the reader's, or listener's, experience is regulated to a certain extent through a variety of strategies in the textual part of 'ballade I', and in particular, in the serial variations that conclude the piece, which combine the textual elements in ways that test their semantic potential to breaking-point.

Prior to its publication, *TAG DAY* had been referred to as 'ballade 2', but, as an aesthetic object, it bears little formal similarity to 'ballade 1', other than being the outcome (and the representation of the process) of a dialogue. Perhaps even more important than the disruption of conventional patterns is the commitment to the idea of dialogue which the two artists share:

> das ganze hier soll ein denkspiel werden, ein im schreiben entstehendes gespräch. und damit ist sehr wohl ein aufenthalt in einem zwangfreien raum gemeint, dem prinzipiell keine grenzen gesetzt sind, der prinzipiell für jede art von spielerischem umgang mit prinzipiell allem eingerichtet wird von uns, indem wir uns das niederschreiben all dessen, was er beinhaltet, erlauben. **und wir erlauben uns, auch die gegebenen grenzen unseres denkens durch eben dieses spiel in frage zu stellen zu versuchen, denn das ist in meinen augen der sinn von denken und spielen und kunst und leben: grenzen markieren, sie als solche erkennen, und das dahinterliegende zu berühren versuchen: uns. ich denke, das dahinter sind wir selbst.** (*TD*:5)

This might be considered a paradoxical statement: on the one hand, imagining a conversation in a space which has no borders; on the other, asserting that the purpose of such thought processes would be the marking and recognition of borders, only in order to try and transcend them. It depends, however, on the status accorded to borders. The transgression or transcendence of borders can only take place once the borders themselves have been recognised. Dialogue enables the interrogation of borders.

If 'ballade I' is conceived as a dialogue, then perhaps the best way to analyse it is through examining how the idea of dialogue is investigated throughout the piece as a whole. If there is no single 'disciplinary-specific' approach which can read 'ballade I', then one possibility is to consider an approach which engages with the aesthetic object on its own terms.

On some level, all works of art, through their being in the world, engage in a dialogue with their recipient, but in this particular work, it is raised to the level of method to investigate the qualities of the particular dialogue, but without giving up the idea that the poet and composer are also investigating the qualities of dialogue *per se*. The following analysis of a work written through dialogue will test how far the motif of 'dialogue', of attempts at communication 'back and forth', destabilises the borders between object and reader, origin and supplement, questioning established hierarchies. On the one hand, it is a very specific experiment – a word I use advisedly. In *TAG DAY* they argue that 'kunst dürfte (dürfte) schon grundlagenforschung sein müssen' (*TD*: 3), and while it is clearly not an experiment as it might be understood in the exact natural sciences, nevertheless they do investigate quite specific ways in which the two art forms of music and language might communicate with each other. There is a specific control of

possibilities: they set the parameters of each moment of potential dialogue, and then test precisely those parameters.

If 'ballade I' is an experiment, then it could be argued that the parameters of its results are also set. Philosophically, the artists have a fundamentally sceptical position regarding communication: there is a fundamental need to communicate, and a fundamental impossibility of knowing whether, or what - if anything - has been communicated. Those philosophical givens do not constitute the 'meaning' of 'ballade I', I would argue. Rather they form the parameters within which the experiment takes place – although there may be a typical 'Sprachskepsis' paradox, in that 'ballade I' may be communicating the fact that whether communication works is unknowable, but if that is successfully communicated then it would actually disprove itself.

The Practice of Artistic Dialogue

If there is a 'original' dialogue in 'ballade I', it is that which took place between the composer and the writer. When Gadenstätter and Spalt wrote, in *Ton* in 1997, about the process of collaboration which they 'invented for themselves' for the composition of 'ballade I', they claimed they had no consciously preconceived or traditional notions of collaboration. The first principle was that 'Text hier weder vertont werden sollte noch wollte' (*Ton*: 42), which seems to undermine the potentially hierarchical relationship between music and text. In the traditional form of the Schubert song cycle, the principle is one of 'vertonen': in other words, the text is the 'original', which is then set to music which seeks to illustrate the mood of the poem, something which Gadenstätter would reject, as, on his terms, music can only refer to itself, not to the external world – which, of course, means that the idea of music engaging in any kind of dialogue appears in a sceptical light.

While the actual dialogue through which 'ballade I' was composed is no longer accessible, there are nevertheless certain questions that can be posed of this dialogic collaboration. If, as they argued, it was not a case of setting words to music, nor simply a case of insisting on the autonomy of the two media, then must the principle of productive dialogue be to investigate the limits of that autonomy through the staging of a dialogue between them?

In a series of reflections on the relationship between music and language, Gadenstätter argues that:

> Musik als eine Sprache verstehen, heißt, ihre Elemente als bedeutungstragende Zeichen aufzufassen. Kommunizierbare Bedeutung jedoch entsteht nur durch Verabredung.
> Grundsätzlich betrachte ich alle Elemente, die konstitutiv sind für die europäische Musik, als Zeichen.[5]

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5   Clemens Gadenstätter, 'Drei Skizzen zum Verhältnis zwischen Musik und Sprache', *Words. Voices. Almanach Wien Modern 1997. Essays, Analysen, Werkeinführungen und Biographien zum einzigartigen fünfwöchigen Neue-Musik-Festival in Wien* (Vienna: Universal, 1997), pp.55–9, here p.57.

Gadenstätter's understanding of music as a system of signs, a system which extends from the most basic musical figures all the way to the significatory function of the idea of 'European music' within Western society, means that that he has committed himself to operating *within* a signifying system.

It is this conceptual step which makes the dialogue between Gadenstätter and Spalt possible, for it could be argued that both their artistic methods are fundamentally concerned with how sign systems operate (in their respective media, and in the wider world). Their dialogue is based, fundamentally, on a commonality of method, but as we will see the limits of such a form of dialogue are investigated in the piece.

We have to be clear, however, as to how many potential dialogues there are in 'ballade I', beyond those which I have suggested in terms of its textual content and form. There are also potential dialogues within the piano score itself, a dialogue between the systems of music and language, between the musical part of the text and the piano score; potentially also a dialogue between the performers of the score: the vocalist and the pianist.

The remainder of this essay is predicated on an acceptance of Gadenstätter's understanding of music as a system of signs. It is also predicated on a reading of the musical score as a similar sign system; it is a selective reading that investigates the ways in which the idea of dialogue is investigated in both formal and thematic terms in the piece. The opening bar introduces the idea of dialogue within the music itself. The score is printed with the text above the vocal stave, and the piano staves below:

Fig.1: 'Ballade I', bar 1

Gadenstätter wrote, in 1997, that there is no such thing as straightforward repetition in the piece; repeated musical forms and structures are 'aus einem bestimmten Blickwinkel heraus "neu aufgeladen". Bekanntes befindet sich dadurch im schizoiden Zustand zwischen "alt" und "anders"' (*Ton*:46). Here, as a kind of overture to the piece as a whole, we have the ostensible repetition of the same note, but the first note is played *mp* (mezzopiano), the second *ff* (fortissimo), the first with the left hand, the second with the right hand; the first is a demisemi quaver, the second a semiquaver. The notes are to be understood not as the same, but in relationship to one another. In addition, between the two Es a very low, combined C and D is played, but these are notes that do not actually sound, but are sustained in the background, to the end of the bar, anticipating the use of the pedal that marks the piece. The E in parentheses moving downwards towards the C and D indicates already a kind of back-and-forth which is one of the piece's major formal structures.

The Music of Language

Bars 13 and 14 from the initial section of 'ballade I' illustrate how the principle of the dialogue back and forth is the defining method of the opening of the piece.
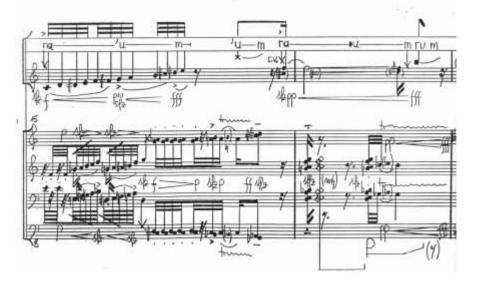

Fig.2: 'ballade I', bars 13-14

It is clear that the musicality of the text is not simply a way of illustrating an idea, but is in direct dialogue with the notes of the piano. In setting the words, there is the use of dipthong to elongate the word 'raum' in the first bar, which also follows a chromatic scale starting from Middle C that mirrors (or is mirrored by?) an ascending scale on the piano. Furthermore, the additional consonant 'm' in the third bar is to be maintained in parallel to the musical notes, which are subject to the sustain pedal. The phonetic back-and-forth ('rum/raum') is mirrored in musical terms in these bars by the musical figure of the trill, in which the pianist moves back and forth between two notes, so the listener cannot concentrate on one note without reference to a second. There is also, however, a dialogue in terms of musical figures between the trill and the scale, a back-and-forth

between progression and oscillation, which operates on the level of 'musical signs' that Gadenstätter identified earlier.

Another example of a possible dialogue between the two levels comes in the musicality of both text and music. The score outlines (at least) four different vocal styles: first, there are those parts which are 'gesungen'; second, there are those which are 'auf Tonhöhen gesprochen', which means the syllable should be sung at a certain note, but that the gesture of speaking should be maintained. The distance between 'singing' and 'speaking' is not static, but noted in the score; the closer the note is marked towards the music, the more 'unnatural' the speaking becomes. Third, there is the use of ordinary speech. Fourth, there are those parts which are 'geschrien', either with or without a specific note: 'Schreien', as a 'Kehlkopftriller' (i.e. a trill in the throat), is to be understood first and foremost as a variant of these vocal performances, and only secondly as having some kind of significance as a gesture. One of the musical figures which is reworked continually is the back-and-forth between two notes, and a significant variation is employed in bars 86 to 93 where an elongated 'en' is followed by an extended 'dann' all in the note F above middle C. At the same time, the piano plays a series of notes moving up gradually from E to F to F sharp to G by bar 92, with the result that, throughout this particular section, there is a back-and-forth between the vocal note and that which is being played by the piano. Again, this is a form of dialogue between voice and piano being carried out on the formal level which, as before, is audibly accessible to the audience.
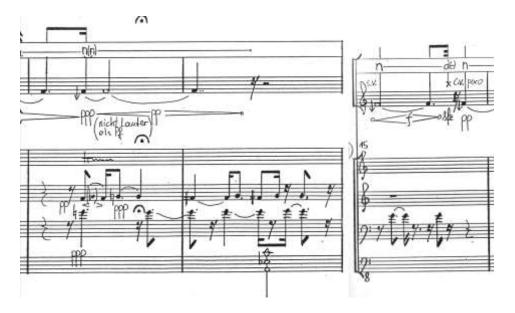

Fig.3: 'ballade I', bars 89-91

The simplicity of the linguistic forms that are used in the first half of 'ballade I' – counting rhymes, naming games – is mirrored in the simplicity of the musical forms which Gadenstätter uses: it could be argued that he chooses them on the basis of their status as signs, as opposed to whether they sound 'aesthetically' successful. The very

stripped-back simplicity of the forms means that it is possible to focus on their precise formal quality and their variation.

Music and Poetry: Measuring Time

One of the problems addressed by Spalt and Gadenstätter in their 1997 essay is that of time. The problem of time is one that Ingeborg Bachmann pointed to in her 1959 essay on 'Musik und Dichtung', 'Zwar sind [Musik und Dichtung] beide Zeitkünste, aber wie verschieden wird in beiden gemessen: ungleich strenger in der Musik, ungleich unbefangener in der Sprache; die Dauer einer Silbe ist noch in den Kennten eines Metrums vage, unbestimmbar.[6] Gadenstätter and Spalt initially address this problem by setting time signatures where there is only music, and not using a time signature where there is only text. This serves to highlight the problem of how to 'control' time when text and music are in direct dialogue, as the piece goes on to reflect. An extended example of the ways in which the two systems – poetic language and musical composition – engage in a dialogue about their systems comes from bars 72 to 83. The semantic elements of the text immediately preceding this passage have circled around 'klopfen' and 'zählen', developing out of the counting rhymes which dominated the first third of the text. One particular form of counting is now highlighted: 'mein messen'. Bars 72 to 83 then investigate the different ways in which measuring operates: on the semantic level, there is a list of different measurements, each one given one bar each: 'meine selbsteinschätzung / meine kragenweite / meine wenigkeit / mein bärenhunger / mein augenmaß / meine güte / mein stündlein / mein etwa / mein nennen / mein platz / meinen / mein'. As is immediately evident, apart from the lack of exactitude involved in these measurements (highlighting the metaphorical ways in which language in [not] quantifying the world), there is a steady reduction in the number of syllables in each phrase, pointing to the way in which poetry measures language. The time signature applied to *both* text and music, is 2/4 for bars 72 to 82; bar 83 ('mein') is then 1/4. However, time signature is only a way of categorising time. A further indication of duration is given above both text and music: a crochet is given the value 63, however followed by the notation '(e poco a poco rit al $\flat$ = 50). In other words, the time measurement of each bar shortens little by little until the final bar of this particular section.

If we consider this passage in terms of the dialogue between the systems 'poetic language' and 'music', then clearly it points to similarities in the value of the syllable to the value of the crotchet. The gradually diminishing duration demonstrates the limitations of the time signature on its own. Gadenstätter does not, however, equate a played note with a syllable, as we see if we look at bars 73 and 74, 'meine kragenweite / meine wenigkeit'. In the first bar, with a phrase with six syllables, he groups the notes and the rests into triplets starting with a rest (whereas in the previous bar the music and text had sounded at the same time). In the second, with five syllables, he groups all of the musical

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6   Ingeborg Bachmann, 'Musik und Dichtung', *Werke*, ed. Christine Koschel, Inge von Weidenbaum, and Clemens Münster, 4 vols (Munich, Zurich: Piper, 1983) IV, *Essays. Reden. Vermischte Schriften*, pp.59–62, here p.59.

phrase into one triplet, even though the initial half of the bar contains the sustained note from the previous bar.

Fig.4: 'ballade I' Bars 73/4

In other words, the relationship between the acoustic quality of the polysyllabic phrases and the musical phrases is not one where the music merely mimics the syllables. Music can measure silence in a way that is simply not available to the speaking voice, which requires a long explanation in the score of how it should perform this part: 'immer "sachlich", ohne Ausdruck; kaum Sprachmelodie, gleichbleibendes Sprechtempo; immer abrupt abbrechen; Die Wortgruppen sollen einander gleichen. Immer auf der 'Eins' beginnen. Pausen werden länger'. This points to the fact that the audience should get a very clear audible impression of the exact measurement of each phrase.

The Language of Music?

The semantic content of the textual part becomes increasingly complex throughout the course of 'ballade I', and one of the pivotal moments is when the 'wie' of the opening section, which established the dialogue between two objects through simile is transformed into an interrogative 'wie' in bar 99, complemented by a reversing of the counting rhyme: 'drei zwo eins, wie fühlt sich mein klopfen an'. Bar 100 is 4/4 of silence, which is the first of a series of non-responses which come from both voice and piano to the question as to how these activities feel; bar 101 repeats the G in left- and right-hand, which, precisely because it precedes the question, suggests that the piano has no response other than to play that G an octave higher. On other occasions which follow, the voice's question is explicitly met with no response, indicated by a full rest in the vocal part, by the notation 'tacet' in the piano part, and by the phrase 'keine Antwort' above the staves.

Up to now, we have focused on the musical qualities of language. We now turn towards the larger philosophical and aesthetic questions of the connections between

language and music, for it is these connections that underpin one of the major possibilities of dialogue, the one, indeed, on which Theodor Adorno focuses in his 'Fragment über Musik und Sprache' from 1955, where he points out that music has structural affinities with language: 'Satz, Halbsatz, Periode, Interpunktion; Frage, Ausruf, Parenthese; Nebensätze finden sich überall, Stimmen heben und senken sich, und in all dem ist der Gestus von Musik der Stimme entlehnt, die redet'.[7] The starting-point of Adorno's essay is that, although music may be 'sprachähnlich', '[ihre] Sprachähnlichkeit weist den Weg ins Innere, doch auch ins Vage. Wer Musik wörtlich als Sprache nimmt, den führt sie irre'. Adorno's essay seeks to locate the transcendental potential of music, and for him it does not lie in its formal structures, which may be similar to the formal structures of language, but rather in the musical 'Inhalt', which is 'die Fülle alles dessen, was der musikalischen Grammatik und Syntax unterliegt'. For Adorno, this 'Inhalt' is 'was in Musik geschieht': for that reason, you cannot understand music in the same way that you understand language; rather, you can only interpret music by playing it. The key difference between music and language is that 'Musik zielt auf eine intentionslose Sprache', even if it is 'allenthalben […] von Intentionen durchsetzt'. It is this direction, which Adorno accords to music, that ensures its utopian potential: instead of trying, at 'Einzelmomente', 'symbolish etwas aus[zu]drücken', music should be trying to move away from the intentionality of language. Adorno's utopian music is one that is directed towards the negation of intention (even if such a state is not achievable).[8]

In that sense, Adorno is not interested in a dialogue between music and language. His essay is about what music can do that language cannot, something which Bachmann echoed more critically when she wrote: 'Den geistigen Ansprüchen der Musik scheint also die Sprache, den technischen der Stimme nicht gewachsen zu sein'.[9] Language in Adorno's essay is primarily understood as 'meinende Sprache',[10] the expression of intentions, and it is a system of 'Zeichen', something that, according to Adorno, music is not, whereas, as we have seen, Gadenstätter starts from the assumption that music is, indeed, a system of signs. In their 1997 essay, Gadenstätter and Spalt argued that 'die Ebene, in der Kommunikation und Austausch zwischen Musik und Sprache stattfinden konnten, mußte dort gefunden werden, wo sich Musik und Sprache zu einer Aussage ergänzen' (*Ton*:46). But what would this single 'Aussage' be?

The Performance of Dialogue

The demand for a response, and the lack of a response, becomes one of the defining ideas of the second half of 'ballade I'. The voice becomes increasingly, desperately impatient in its series of questions, switching between these and a rhythmical, lyrical phrase, which undergoes a series of variations from its initial form, 'wie dir das herz nicht klopfen will, ruh du und schweige es schweigt selbst auch still' (bars 102-104) The musical response is

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7   Theodor W. Adorno, 'Fragment über Musik und Sprache', *Sprache, Musik, Dichtung*, ed. Jakob Knaus (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1973), pp.71–5, here p.72; first published in *Jahresring*, 1956/57, pp.96–100.
8   Ibid., p.71, p.75, p.73, p.75.
9   Bachmann, 'Musik und Dichtung', p.60.
10   Adorno, 'Fragment über Musik und Sprache', p.72

different on each occasion, on later occasions picking up and reworking the rhythm of the words, although by no means in a straightforward fashion. As one brief comparison, one can look at bars 139-140, where the music is almost in rhythm with the words,

Fig.5: Bars 138-40

Another variation is in bars 163-4, where the piano plays, firstly a trill, then a much slower back-and-forth series of notes in relation to the rhythm of the text, which is marked as triplets.
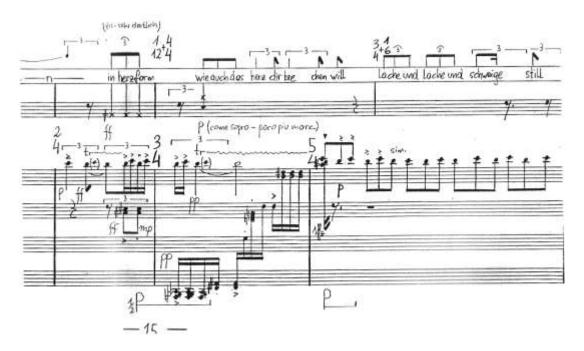

Fig.6: Bars 162-4

Later, in bars 187-91, the music overlaps but then continues afterwards, and could be read as a rhythmic response to the text, where in the bars immediately preceding text and music had been in rhythmic proximity to one another. The interplay of rhythmic repetition and semantic and musical variation either frustrates expectations or refreshes the listener's perception, depending on one's perspective.

The lyrical phrase thus forms an internal dialogue within the textual part, while at the same time there are a number of musical responses going on: on the one hand, there is a dialogue between the questions posed by the voice and the piano's response, on the other, the way in which the musical material responds to the lyrical element of the text.

At the height of the questioning voice's exasperation, it demands: 'wie fühlt sich ein sterbenswörtchen an', to which the piano's response is one repeated demisemiquaver. Now the voice plaintively cries, 'eine spur wenigstens', the last syllable being extended over 6 bars as it descends from F sharp to D. 'Spur' is, of course, 'trace', and it is precisely at this point that 'ballade I' disrupts the expectations of its listeners by having the pianist speak. The fact that he (to date, 'ballade I' has usually been performed by Florian Müller as pianist; there have been a number of male and female vocalists, of whom the most frequent has been Anne-Marie Pammer) enters into a dialogue of sorts is in itself formally significant, but what he has to say is also important:
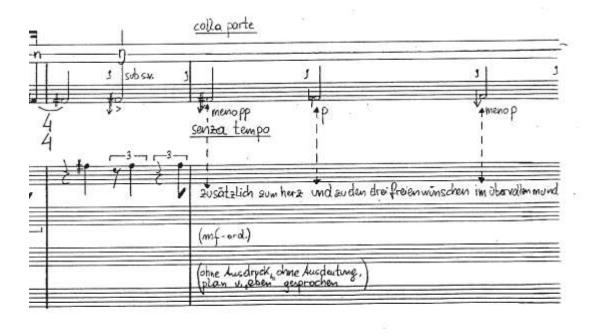

Fig.7: 'ballade 1', bars 202-21

As these bars illustrate, the vocalist is now clearly the 'musical accompaniment' to the speaking pianist; roles have been reversed. On this occasion, the timing of the singer's

notes to the pianist's words has also been marked clearly in the score: it is the shifts from
F sharp to E (and ultimately D, following the earlier pattern) which give poetic shape to
the pianist's unexpressive, evenly spoken words. However, what he says is also
significant. In search of at least the trace of a response, the original tongue is
supplemented – for one tongue was always already in a state of lack – but this tongue is
to be used for ostensibly non-communicative actions: 'schweigen und lallen', which is, of
course, a possible description of what the singer is engaged in at that moment.

   This not only acts as a shock to the audience, but can also function as a reminder that
the notes of the piano score require the mediation of the individual performer in a way
that is analogous to the singer, as well as pointing to the fact that when the 'speaking' of
the instrumentalists takes place in a piece of music, it is, as Gadenstätter puts it, a
'Klangphänomen':

> so sind die Sprechenden zuerst einmal auf völlig andere Weise präsent als durch ihr Instrument. Die
> Einzigartigkeit jeder Stimme verweist direkt auf ein ganz spezielles Individuum, das Bedingung für
> die Realisierung einer Komposition ist und dessen Sprechen nichtsdestotrotz vielfach vermittelt ist
> durch alle anderen Ebenen des Stücks. Die Interpretation des Notentextes wird so gekennzeichnet als
> eine den Text immer neu und individuell deutende Tätigkeit.[11]

With the vocal intervention of the pianist, the role of the performers has been highlighted.
The dialogue between the performer as vocalist and the performer as pianist, a hierarchy
which has now been unsettled, is staged in bars 321-26, where the relationship between
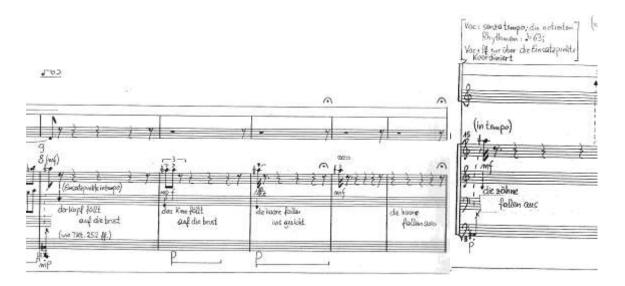music and text is varied with each bar.

Fig.8: Bars 321-26

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[11] Gadenstätter, 'Drei Skizzen', p. 57.

'ballade I' may be a complex network of repetitions and variations, but it is important to establish that these are not simply arbitrary; both Gadenstätter and Spalt place importance on the fact that the possibilities which are opened out by variation are not limitless, but manifold. In other words, there are a certain (large) number of variations of the way in which music and language might interact in a collaborative work, and this composition is one way of testing those possibilities and investigating the effects these have. Yet 'ballade I' is not simply a working-out of those possibilities. There is also a sense of progression in 'ballade I' to match the textual narrative: the interplay between the two performers, and their instruments, becomes more varied and more intricate over the course of the piece; in the final section, the vocalist moves between the various tones of singing and speaking at a startling, virtuosic rate.

The interpretation suggested above, that the pianist's voice, which recurs now for the rest of 'ballade I', is a commentator on the action is plausible, for the two voices are, for the remainder of the poem, very distinctive: the pianist soberly enumerates body parts and their actions ('der kopf kreist / die augen kreisen / die augenbrauen sind hochgezogen'), while the right-hand voice moves between fragments of confused lyrical narrative, and questions concerning the meaning of its actions ('was sagt mein schlagen, mein zählen, mein messen'). The pianist concludes with images of bodily collapse and decay:

> die haare fallen aus
> die zähne fallen aus
> die augen fallen zu
> die augendeckel fallen zu
> der kopf fällt in den nacken

These are followed by the vocalist going through frenetic sets of textual fragments, in the manner of a rap. Out of this confused form of expression emerges the final two bars:
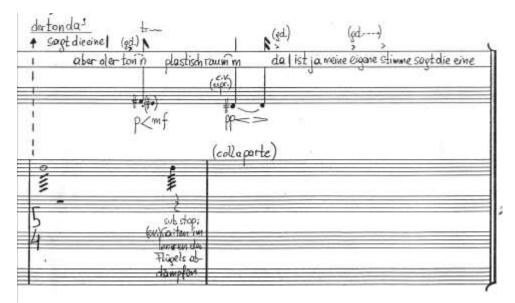

Fig.9: Bars 371-2

This final statement of 'ballade I', with its almost surprised recognition of one's own voice in something 'other' indicates, on the one hand, in its apparent resolution the absence of any clear resolution, while, on the other, illustrating that any coming to self-consciousness is only possible through an awareness of alterity. The assertion of an individual voice is in the form of a quotation ('sagt die eine', a phrase which recurs throughout the text) and is only established through the recognition of an external, musical note (not a 'word' with semantic content) which is also experienced, plastically, in the space around the self.[12]

An Experiment in Dialogue and Its Outcomes

The preceding analysis, while remaining limited to the two sign systems, has hopefully given a sense of the rich texture of 'ballade I', as well as the dialogues that take place between the semantic qualities of their text, and their musical counterpart, not to mention the dialogue between the musical forms of the piano part and those of the vocal part. An emphasis on vocal performance is something for which Bachmann had argued forcefully:

> Es ist Zeit, [der] Stimme wieder Achtung zu erweisen, ihr unsere Worte, unsere Töne zu übertragen […]. Es ist Zeit, sie nicht mehr als Mittel zu begreifen, sondern als Platzhalter für den Zeitpunkt, an dem Dichtung und Musik den Augenblick der Wahrheit miteinander haben.[13]

Bachmann, the poet, summons up a temporal moment of truth which is located, spatially, in the voice, 'I'. The idea of an artistic utopia enacted through vocal performance, as invoked here by Bachmann, reminds us, again, of the limitations of a purely literary analysis of this particular collaboration, which both thematises the presence of the speaking body in space and enacts it through performance.

The dialogue between performance and its reception is clearly central to 'ballade I'. In their theoretical writings, Gadenstätter and Spalt make claims for an art which sets itself self-consciously limited, but possible demands in the way it seeks to affect the recipient's perceptions.

> wenn sich die kunst […] vom geben von handlungsanweisungen, von richtig und falsch abwendet, verliert sie vielleicht einen teil ihres publikums, weil sie zugibt, nur einen ausschnitt der für entscheidungen vorhandenen wahrnehmungszusammenhänge vorzustellen, die dann (und sowieso) ausschnitthaft, weil individuell gebraucht werden müssen. oder. handlungsanweisugen fassen eben schon 'alles' zusammen, während kunst 'in meinen augen' im bewusstsein arbeitet, immer 'nur' möglichst vieldimensionale fluchtlinien durch das subjektiv wahrgenommene anlegen zu können, die die jeder entscheidung zugrundeliegenden wahrnehmungsweisen thematisieren: kunst dürfte (dürfte) schon grundlagenforschung sein müssen…. (*TD*:67)

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[12] For an illuminating investigation of the relationship between subjectivity and vocal performance in the work of another contemporary poet, see Helmut Schmitz, 'Grammatik der Differenz Barbara Köhlers Suche nach einer nichtidentischen Subjektivität', in Bettina Gruber, Heinz-Peter Preußer (eds.), *Weiblichkeit als Politisches Programm* (Tübingen: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005), pp. 167-181. Köhler designates the printed version of *Niemands Frau* as 'im Sinne einer Partitur aufzufassen'.

[13] Bachmann, 'Musik und Dichtung', p.62.

In 'ballade I', Gadenstätter and Spalt test the limits of their own productive enterprises in order to try and learn more about the limits, and possibilities, of composition. They attempt to leave behind the securities of composing in one artistic medium or the other, with all the traditional, conventional certainties that may appear to offer. Ideally, once those possibilities have been opened out, the process cannot help but take them further away from the ostensibly secure territory whose boundaries have now been exploded. There is no going back; this is the radical possibility implicit in the conceptual location where collaboration takes place. In this sense, perhaps, the production of art remains an (aesthetic) model for a possible, utopian form of existence. The connection between artistic production in the no-man's land of collaboration and its reception, in the belief that, by changing the recipient's perception of certain things, the work of art necessarily changes the recipient, remains a precarious one. This is indicated by the parenthesis in the final paragraph of Gadenstätter's essay on the relationship between music and language:

> Auf diese Weise wird Komponieren (und Rezipieren) von Musik zu einer Erfahrung, die nicht nur 'Sprache' zum Erlebnis werden läßt, sondern mir vielmehr die Möglichkeit eröffnet, immer wieder auf verschiedene Weise 'Sprechen' zu lernen, um dieses Lernen darüber hinaus wiederum bewußt, also erlebnishaft, wahrzunehmen.[14]

Nevertheless, my own dialogue with 'ballade I' has been a minor example of what I imagine Gadenstätter means. It has allowed me to recognise my disciplinary perspectives and its limits, and to understand that these are not simply to be recognised as immutable. They are not to be hidden behind, but rather may be crossed, opening out new possibilities for the activity of interpreting an aesthetic object whose specific qualities lie in neither or both of the artistic forms out which it is generated. It is an object that is both the product of dialogue, deliberately seeks to engage its recipient in dialogue, and is a reflection upon the possibilities of dialogue itself. Gadenstätter and Spalt described it as follows in 1997: '"ballade I" ist ein Gehen von zweien, die in der immer paradoxen Situation des sich verständlich machen Wollens und Müssens, des verstehen Wollens und überlebensnotwendigerweise verstehen Müssens genau diese Situation für sich zu klären versuchen.[15]

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14   Gadenstätter, 'Drei Skizzen', p.59.
15   Gadenstätter and Spalt, 'Umschläge und Kippen. Zu 'ballade I', p.47.