

Notation as relation: the score as a transformer

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What happens when creative activities, such as notating and singing, are considered as conglomerates of contact-making activities between participants of creative doings and their “outside world”? What consequences for the understanding of a musical composition arise when it is investigated as a complex trace of such interacting where all interacting components/participants serve as transformers for one another?

This lecture reflects on the relative-transformative affordances of notational traces, particularly in improvisatory contexts between jazz and Western contemporary classical music. It is based on some of the findings of my recently concluded dissertation *Refiguring Composition* (Flick 2025). By exploring the notational specifics of the score *PlanetWoman* in light of specific moments of the iterative cycle of improvisation by Lone Larsen’s vocal ensemble *VoNo* and notation by myself that *PlanetWoman* originates in, the collective dimension of any trace of creating is underlined.

Drawing on Jean-Jacques Nattiez’s tripartitional model (Nattiez 1990), the lecture examines processes of translation-transformation between activities and traces, as well as between activities and their semantic descriptions. In tracing how the dimension of the unforeseen thus necessarily operates in different ways and degrees in all stages of a trace’s existence, a perspective on musical notation is introduced that foregrounds the material, symbolic, and temporal multidimensionality of notational traces—thus also proposing a take on notions of creative practices of composing and improvising beyond dichotomic ascriptions.

References

- Flick, Birgitta (2025). *Refiguring Composition: Artistically Researching the Contact between Composition, Improvisation, and the outside World*. Dissertation, mdw – university of Music and Performing Arts Vienna.
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Nattiez, Jean-Jacques (1990). *Music and Discourse: toward a Semiology of Music*. Trans. by Carolyn Abbate. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.