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An Analysis of Georg Friedrich Haas’s *in vain*

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Abstract

Georg Friedrich Haas composed *in vain* in reaction to political events in his native Austria. The piece is well known for making use of clashing tuning systems and darkness in the concert hall. These two facets of Haas’s writing have been much discussed and written about. The political dimension of *in vain*, however, while it is frequently mentioned by commentators, is rarely explored in depth.

In this paper, I discuss the facets that make up *in vain*, including the piece’s political backbone, from what I consider to be Haas’s defining aesthetic: plurality and inner contradiction. I aim to provide as much background as possible to the reader on each of the secondary topics, including coexisting contradictory interpretations, in order to paint a fuller picture of the piece.

Chapter 1 introduces Haas’s biography, his aesthetics, and *in vain* in the context of his compositional career. In Chapter 2, I discuss tuning systems and Haas’s theories of microtonality. I then explore the two materials that make up *in vain* in Chapter 3 from the perspective of opposition, before exploring darkness and the importance it plays in the work as a transitional driving force in Chapter 4. Lastly, in Chapter 5, I introduce the concept of dialectics as it is used in the piece and show how *in vain*’s political content is embedded within its formal design.
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Introduction

Georg Friedrich Haas composed *in vain* in 2000 in reaction to the formation of a coalition government in Austria that allowed the far-right Freedom Party to come to power. Much has been written about Haas’s usage of different tuning systems within works like *in vain*, as well as about his plunging the concert hall into complete darkness. The piece’s political dimension, on the other hand – specifically the manner in which Haas’s treatment of the musical material can be interpreted politically – remains relatively obscure. In this paper, I aim to fill that gap.

I have chosen to break down my analysis of the piece into several discrete components, none of which dominate in terms of importance. Given the extent to which Haas incorporates contradictions within his discourse, the chapters that follow often juxtapose differing approaches to individual topics. The necessity of understanding a given subject from several simultaneous – and contradictory – angles lies at the core of what I consider to be Haas’s aesthetic. In fact, the only assertion about Haas’s work that I would make unequivocally is that no aspect of it can be explained from a single, unambiguous perspective.

Chapter 1 features an examination of Haas’s life: I describe the composer’s hometown, his childhood, his education, his teaching, his compositional path, as well as what is known of his psychology, including biographical facts that have recently come to light. I do so in order to supply sufficient background on the composer and his work such as to enable readers to establish a general personal context within which to insert *in vain* and its many concepts and ramifications. However, by doing so, I am not explicitly stating that such personal information helps explain Haas’s work or his artistic decisions, and refrain from connecting specific aspects of *in vain*, for example, with what is now know about Haas’s sexuality. I would leave a more extensive study of Haas’s music in relation to
specific personal aspects of his life to others. Chapter 2 discusses tuning systems and the manner in which Haas makes use of several different schools of thought both in his work as a whole and within single compositions – including *in vain*. The chapter also discusses Haas’s theories of microtonality as he presented them in papers written in the early 2000s. In Chapter 3, titled “Opposition,” I analyze the two principal materials found in the piece, with special attention to the dualistic nature of their relationship. Chapter 4 focuses on darkness and features a survey of different ways it has been theorized in the literature. It is followed by close musical analyses of the two sections of *in vain* in which the concert hall’s lights are fully extinguished. Finally, in Chapter 5, I introduce the concept of dialectics as it applies to *in vain*, and use it both to articulate the work’s overall form and to unpack its frequently mentioned but rarely explained political dimension.
Chapter 1
Setting the Stage

1. The Composer

Georg Friedrich Haas was born to a non-musical Protestant family in Graz, Austria, on August 16, 1953. He grew up a few hundreds of kilometers away, however, in Tschagguns, in the Alpine state of Vorarlberg, in the Montafon valley. Generally north-south in orientation and surrounded by tall mountains topped with ski resorts, the valley curves westward at the confluence of the Ill (affluent of the Rhine) and its tributary, the Litz, splitting the valley into what local people call the sunny and the shadow sides, with the southern latter receiving around two hours a day of direct sunlight in the winter months.\(^1\) There on the shadowy left bank of the Ill sits the Catholic village of Tschagguns, with its population of around 2,000 and its power plant, whose transformer emitted “a constant overtone chord.”\(^2\) Haas describes the experience of having been a double minority during his early life in this village, mostly due to his never having properly learned the Allemanic dialect spoken in this westernmost part of Austria, a few mountainous kilometers from the Swiss border.\(^3\)

He describes his childhood as lonely and isolated, as he struggled to communicate with friends and colleagues, but credits these circumstances as in part responsible for his eager embrace of music at a young age as a means of introspection and personal exploration. His second sense of minority was religious, and was followed by an eventual conversion to Catholicism, a “strong religious period,”

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\(^3\) Enright, "The Living Beings of Sound,” 48.
which was relatively short-lived. The subsequent loss of his Christian faith left him feeling incomplete, and ultimately also played an important part in his development as a musician, for Haas speaks of the human desire for transcendence as an important part of our psychological makeup. “We have lost socially accepted ways to live this transcendence, because churches don’t have the same function they had 200 years ago. […] I feel that this empty space is very dangerous,” he said, adding: “Art is one place where you can fill the space.”

He qualifies his piano technique today as rudimentary due to a lack of early formal instruction, his music education having occurred at a later stage than is typical for professional musicians of his standing. His decision, upon reaching university age, to pursue rigorous training as a composer took him back to his native city of Graz, capital of the federal state of Styria, where he studied composition with Gösta Neuwirth and Iván Eröd, piano with Doris Wolf, as well as music teaching at the University of Music and Performing Arts from 1972 to 1979. Further composition studies took him to Vienna in 1981 and 1982, where he worked with Friedrich Cerha at the Hochschule für Musik. He also participated in the Darmstadt summer courses three times, in 1980, 1988, and 1990, before also taking computer music courses at IRCAM, Paris, in 1991.

Haas’s career as a music teacher began quite early, as he joined the faculty of the Hochschule in Graz as an instructor in 1978, before becoming an associate professor in counterpoint, contemporary composition techniques, analysis, and introduction to microtonal music in 1989. In 2003, he was promoted to professor of Composition at the same university before also joining, in 2005, the composition faculty at the Hochschule für Musik in Basel, Switzerland. He held this dual professorship

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5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
until he moved away from Central Europe to New York City on August 16, 2013 (his 60th birthday) to succeed the retiring Tristan Murail as the MacDowell Professor of Music composition at Columbia University. As with his compositional career, Haas’s teaching activities developed slowly at first, with him holding steady but relatively discreet roles into his fifties, at which point success and notoriety quickly proliferated as he was propelled to positions of world-wide influence.

Haas published relatively few pieces until he was in his mid-forties, at which time his opera *Nacht* (premiered at the Bregenz festival in Austria) earned him the Ernst Krenek Prize of the City of Vienna. Commissions and participation at festivals quickly ensued, which resulted in an increased activity and fast development of his musical language. Unlike composers whose most prolific years occur in their late twenties and thirties, most of Haas’s compositional output took place after he succeeded both in synthesizing his many musical interests into his own language, and in earning recognition in Europe as a promising composer. “I know the feeling of being a genius and being the only person who knows it, which is a terrible feeling,” he once said laughing in an interview.

Aside from the frustration of yearning for recognition, Haas describes his life until his move to New York as difficult for reasons he was perhaps not explicitly aware of at the time, but which burdened him and made him deeply unhappy in his relationships (including three failed marriages). He frequently went (or “fled”) to a cottage in the woods to compose, and wrote music “as a form of psychotherapy.” Much of how he interacted with the world around him was weighed down by his own inner conflicts. His relationship with nature, for example, however deeply important to him, was atypical. Growing up, “he experienced the mountains [around Tschagguns] as a menace; he felt closed

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9 Schweitzer, “Varied Pitches to Fill Empty Spaces.”
11 Ibid.
in by the narrow valley where the sun rarely penetrated. Nature for him represented a dark force.”

Haas and his music of this time are frequently described as sombre, his operas often featuring themes of suffering, illness, and death. His 2013 opera *Thomas*, for example, was criticized as coming “dangerously close to a kind of palliative care ward tourism.” Some have viewed Haas’s relationship with music and with the world as a whole (including nature) as a reflection of his inner turmoil and struggle with his sexuality. This all changed around the time when he moved to New York City. In an interview with a former student in 2016, he declared that

for *decades*, I tried to suppress and reject my sexual orientation. I thought of it as immoral. Then I decided to embrace it. I was incredibly lucky to find a partner who is willing to embrace it with me. This weight – I’ve carried it for decades, now suddenly it’s gone. That has caused a very fundamental change in me.

The change he refers to is his entering into a BDSM relationship in which he is the dominant partner with his now-wife Mollena Williams-Haas. Today, he describes being

able to write more than I ever could before. And when I’m writing, I feel more concentrated, at ease, lighter than I used to. I no longer need composition as a form of psychotherapy. Instead it’s become a spiritual act; in exploring the world of sound, I venture into places...other people look for that feeling in religion. I can focus my entire life on music.”

Furthermore, when asked whether he still goes “somewhere ‘off the grid’ to write,” he swiftly responded: “At home! For God’s sake. Back then I needed to flee to some cabin in the woods, and now I can compose at home, with Mollena.”

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16 Woolfe, “A Composer and His Wife: Creativity Through Kink.”

17 Brown, “Decades.”

18 Ibid.
These biographical details, while strongly enriching Haas’s portrait as an individual, nevertheless provide potential pitfalls for any analysis of his work. In an interview with Robert Enright, for example, Haas describes his relationship to nature as inherently personal. “I need Nature in the way other artists might need wine or marijuana or sexual activity, but I would not say that this is important to understand my music.”\(^{19}\) The pertinence of his recent “coming out,” especially to an analysis of a work written over a decade prior, can therefore be put into question. I have chosen to mention this nonetheless and despite the added constraint because I believe it is important to paint a broad portrait of the artist as a preliminary to the more technical analysis that follows below, in order to provide a human and psychological context to it. Whether there is a deep connection between Haas’s sexuality as we know of it today and in vain – or any of his other works – I leave for others to explore. For the purpose of this paper, I will venture the hypothesis, which could be the subject of a longer inquiry, that the generally gloomy characteristic of his early works, including its manifestations through his relationship with religion, his experience of exclusion, and his yearning for acceptance as a composer, may all be understood by some listeners as a reflection of his repressed sexuality.

An article by Haas, titled “Strange Dissonance,” illustrates the cogency of connecting Haas’s work, both as a theorist and as a composer, to his sexuality. In this article, Haas analyzes Schubert’s Erlkönig from a very particular angle. He discusses the original poem at length in order to explain Schubert’s radical take on it, as well as to read into Schubert’s own psychology and biography through his setting of the text. He begins by asserting that “there is strong evidence that the poem is describing the rape of a child – from the perspective of the perpetrator,” backing up this claim with specific passages from the original German text.\(^{20}\) In Schubert’s setting, Haas points out “the harmonic and

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\(^{19}\) Enright, “The Living Beings of Sound,” 48.

melodic parallels between the lines ‘He holds him secure, he holds him warm’ and ‘Erlköning has done me harm.’ [...] Schubert is telling us who the perpetrator is. The secure, warm touch of the father becomes the suffering he inflicts on his son. And the strange dissonance set to the word ‘son’ takes on a new meaning.”

He provides much more evidence and discussion in the article than there is room for mentioning here, but it is important to note that Haas goes yet further, stating that “it seems probable that Schubert used this song to directly process childhood trauma. But it’s obvious that he is, at least unconsciously, reporting from a harrowing experience.” Haas’s keen insight aside, he boldly connects Schubert’s setting to his private life (not without quoting other writings by the composer), inviting, as it were, analysts of his own works to do the same. In my case, however, I will restrict my discussion of in vain in relation to Haas’s sexual orientation to a minimum, given both that it would be over a decade after its completion that the composer would "come out,” and that I would like to more precisely explore the political dimension of in vain, frequently mentioned in relation to the work, but rarely explained.

Today, a few years after the radical changes in his life brought about by his embracing of his sexual orientation, Haas describes dedicating about 80% of his time to composing – in large part thanks to the submissive status of his partner in their relationship, “which means that she makes her own wishes subordinate” to his, with the rest of his time being dedicated to his teaching and his personal life. The successes and concrete achievements of his career hardly seem to temper his urge to produce and to communicate, whether as a composer or as a dedicated teacher. As will be explored in the next section, what defines his work aesthetically seems to be reflected in his personality and his approach to

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21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 Brown, “Decades.”
teaching in its openness and pragmatism. On the other hand, despite the public way in which Haas discusses his sexuality – which he mentions being in part due to his wife’s public role as a BDSM educator, actress, and writer – and the categorization and labelling inherent in being able to assert oneself as “out as a kinky person,” Haas’s music is singular in that it defies categorization and ideology to a certain extent.

2. His Aesthetic & Work

Today, Haas’s name and work evoke several characteristic themes in the world of contemporary music, from darkness to kink, as well as political music, microtonality, and more. Tracing the evolution of his language, it is possible to track the emergence of these important strains in his output, and to appreciate the significance of their adoption by the composer in terms of transforming his style into what it is today. Speaking about his initial studies with Eröd, Haas states that “for all our apparent differences (and probably mutual personal disappointments) I learned from Eröd – apart from many things about the craft of composition – one principle above all else: that the measure of everything is Man, that is, the possibilities inherent in human perception.” This seminal statement can help us understand Haas’s aesthetic from multiple simultaneous angles.

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24 In his assessment of the large amount of applications received by the Columbia University composition department (122 in 2014, for example), Haas refuses to meet prospective students, “because that would mean you can buy a place, for those who have the money and who can come to a private lecture. I decided to not give any composition seminars outside of Columbia to avoid this.” Schweitzer, “Varied Pitches to Fill Empty Spaces.”


27 Several of the topics mentioned in this section will be re-examined in subsequent chapters of this paper in more detail.
First and foremost is his deep attachment to Art – for all its ability to replicate religion’s transcendental experiences – as an essentially man-made cultural construct. When discussing just intonation, for example, he defended his usage of it as having little to do “with a notion of ‘Nature’ determined by trivial physics,” in other words with a physical, objective truth that “pure intonation” seeks to express or seek validation through. He rather explains his use of it as a personal choice rooted in his own taste and imagination. Despite making frequent use of overtone series and spectra in his music, Haas stands apart from traditional spectralists in his refusal to use computers in order to analyze, imitate, and generate complex sounds, such as bells. He does describe the overtone series as “one of the foundations of microtonal harmony,” but rejects ideological explanations and labels for it along the lines of “natural tone row” (Naturtonreihe), or pure tuning (reine Stimmung). He instead describes the overtone series as an “artifact […] exactly as artificial as any other musical material.” His attraction to microtonality as a whole ultimately stems from a purely subjective choice. He describes hearing the composer Ezra Sims in 1986 speak about his choice to compose 12th-tone music, and adopts the latter’s statement as his own: “I ask myself, what is it that I really hear, and if we really listen to what we hear – these two or twelve pitches of an octave which we can annotate and play on the piano – and if I ask myself, what do I want to hear, then these are automatically microtones.” In his second “thesis on microtonality,” Haas goes further in tying human perception to his choice in exploiting microtonality in his music by stating that “there is a basic human need for beats in music” (to which I will return in Chapter 2), demonstrating once again how Haas places our human perception at the core of his compositional decision-making process over any other theoretical or ideological precept.

A second angle from which to interpret Haas’s statement regarding Man as the measure for everything is his concern with expression and the importance he attributes to the audience’s feelings in experiencing his works. His aesthetic is guided by the idea that music is able “to articulate a human being’s emotions and states of the soul in such a way that other human beings can embrace these emotions and states of the soul as their own.”32 In the same conversation with Robert Enright, when the interviewer describes to Haas finding in vain “bewilderingly intense,” Haas responds: “I am happy if you feel that intensity because that means I have fulfilled what I wanted to do: I want to touch other people; I want to embrace them; I want to share the base of their emotions.”33 An anecdote the composer recounted in a separate interview further demonstrates Haas’s deep attachment to the emotions of his audience in evaluating the success of a work. This story also helps us understand a pivotal moment in Haas’s creative output that saw him discard a quasi-scientific, mathematical approach to composition – frequently found in many of his colleagues’ compositional practices – towards a more pragmatic, flexible, and versatile one by which he is known today.

At the beginning of my artistic development, I organized my music based on abstract principles. I composed complex mathematical processes, “serial” would be somewhat of an understatement. And at performances, I was surprised to realize that these pieces, despite their abstract construction, had a strong emotional effect. I thought that the energy of the construction, the power inherent in the mathematically organized materials, would have a direct result in the music. But I noticed that incorrect calculations or other mistakes didn’t diminish the works at all. I composed “Nacht-Schatten” […] on a desktop computer. Then a student of mine did an analysis of it and found over 250 serious mistakes. […] But the piece worked, completely. And that is very hard to explain, because the changes were unintentional.34


33 Enright, “The Living Beings of Sound,” 53.

34 Brown, “Decades.”
When asked what he regards as his greatest artistic achievement, he answered, somewhat elusively, “maybe to communicate emotions.” The tentative nature of the answer (“maybe”) typifies Haas, who is irrefutably attached to the emotional aspect of his music, while remaining nevertheless fluidly vague and resistant to categorization.

During his years of studies, he effectively outgrew equal temperament as a purveyor of pitches in much the same way as he overcame his reliance upon rational, carefully constructed forms and musical content as in Nacht-Schatten, described above. His seminal work, the opera Nacht, which earned him European renown, already featured microtonal intervals as small as 12th-tones (in fact, all his catalogued works are microtonal, with the notable exception of his Violin Concerto from 1998). Through his teaching, Haas found himself exploring the music of other composers who had made effective and successful usage of microtonality in their works, such as Alois Hába and Ivan Wyschnegradsky (both of whose works he analyzed in published articles), but also La Monte Young, Harry Partch, and spectralist composers, with whom he would soon become – prematurely and inaccurately – identified. As will be described in Chapter 2, however, Haas’s music is notable for unabashedly featuring microtonal (and non-microtonal) approaches to pitch and harmony stemming from what are frequently considered distinct schools of thought. It is possible to understand Haas’s extensive familiarity with these different approaches through his activities as a teacher – he taught a course on microtonality in at the Hochschule in Graz, as mentioned above – and as a theorist – he frequently published and presented papers on the topic at music festivals. However, as will be discussed later, it is the pragmatic and uncharacteristic adoption of all these different methods in

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tandem in his music that characterizes Haas’s aesthetic, more so than the fact that most of these methods are actually microtonal; as he notably stated, “I am a composer, not a microtonalist.”

One of the most interesting – and recurrent – techniques Haas uses involves contrasting overtone chords, for example, with what he describes as “other harmonies, which are based on the major seventh, and thus stand in the tradition of the Second Viennese School, and especially of Anton Webern.” Such a contrast is found in several of his pieces, including in vain (2000) and Blumenstück (2000). While specifics of this clash of tuning systems will be discussed at length in subsequent sections, three important points should be noted regarding the quotation that opens this paragraph. First is the deep-seated cross-pollination found in Haas’s music. In his approach to using the major seventh chords mentioned above (in music that is non-microtonal), he frequently makes use of voice-leading techniques he learned in Wyschnegradsky’s music, which is microtonal. This evidence of Haas’s application of microtonal concepts to equal-tempered music shows the extent to which his practice transgressed traditional boundaries and categorizations as are frequently found in music theory and musicology.

Second is Haas’s pedigree. His extremely developed and far-reaching connections to tradition and music history are also highlighted in that statement in which he mentions Anton Webern’s influence on his work. Elsewhere, he admits a veneration of Schubert whom he calls “one of his central gods,” and whose Winterreise served as a directed inspiration for Atthis (2009). Haas also orchestrated Schubert’s incomplete Piano Sonata in C major D. 840 in Torso (1999/2001) (It is also possible to understand Haas’s connection to Schubert in the context of the popular yet unproven claims

36 Varga, Three Questions for Sixty-Five Composers, 102.
37 Hasegawa, “Clashing Harmonic Systems in Haas's Blumenstück and in vain,” 204.
38 Ibid.
39 Schweitzer, “Varied Pitches to Fill Empty Spaces.”
regarding the latter’s struggle with his sexuality, which would no doubt have moved the young Haas as he navigated his own. Another important composer is Mozart, whose Bb Major Sonata K. 454 for violin and piano served as a core in the 1990/91 string orchestra piece ... sodaß ich's hernach mit einem Blick gleichsam wie ein schönes Bild ... im Geist übersehe. Another example is 7 Klangräume (2005) in which Haas makes use of fragments from Mozart’s Requiem (excluding the additions made by his pupils). There are many more such connections found in Haas’s output both as a composer and as a theorist/teacher than there is room to discuss here, but his relationships with other composers can be divided in two categories: those from the distant past (generally Austrian and German) and those from the recent past and present (scattered around the world). His relationship with contemporary composers (especially vis-à-vis their respective approaches to microtonality) will be developed in Chapter 2, but in the category of older composers, I should mention the names of Gustav Mahler, Felix Mendelssohn, Franz Schreker, and Gesualdo, but also, and indirectly, Alban Berg and Benjamin Britten, whose predilection for confronting supposedly incompatible music systems Haas indubitably shares.

A third and final point to discuss in relation to the statement is the manner in which Haas arrived at the idea of juxtaposing two different tuning systems within a single piece, which can in fact be summed up succinctly in the composer’s own words. In a 2011 interview with Bálint András Varga, Haas mentioned that

in the early 1980s, the Graz composer Hermann Markus Pressl wrote an impressive, straightforwardly structured vocal work which he called Asralda. The piece is based on the contrast between temperament (tritone A–Eb) and the overtone series (fifth D–A). That contrast has been stylized in the title, an artificial word, composed of “Asraphael” (=spiritual principle, =tempering, =A–Eb) and “Esmeralda” (=sensory principle, =overtone series, =D–A). The ideological, slightly esoteric background did not interest me in the least. However, the contrast between temperament (in my case mostly tritone-fifth and tritone-fourth chords) and the overtone series was to exercise my mind in many of my compositions over the next thirty years.⁴⁰

Aside from clashing tuning systems, Haas often uses darkness and lighting effects inside concert halls. Perhaps rooted in his experience growing up on the shadow side of the Montafon valley, Haas’s attraction to darkness found expression in his work as early as his opera *Adolf Wölfli* (1980-81). It is also featured in the aptly-named aforementioned opera *Nacht*, and became an integral part of the piece in consideration in this paper, *in vain*, as well as his opera *KOMA*. In discussing his use of darkness in *in vain*, Haas mentions a conversation with the stage director Bettina Wackernagel in Berlin while he was there on an invitation by the DAAD in 1999/2000, in which they discussed *Adolf Wölfli*. Wackernagel encouraged him to continue with his use of darkness, and despite an overall uncertainty Haas felt about employing “darkness in a composition about enlightenment,” he went ahead with it, “not consciously aware of [his] reasoning.” Turning the lights out in a concert hall introduces several components into a performance, such as the memorization of the music by the performers, their coordination, impeded by the invisibility of the conductor/other performers, the heightened sense (or focused sense) of hearing as a result of the loss of the sense of sight, as well as the variable terror, fear, or soothing darkness tends to provoke in different people in the audience. Lastly, there is also the concept of darkness, complex in and of itself, and how it transforms the idea of the piece.

Haas ultimately went yet further in his third string quartet, *In iij. Noct* (2001), where he asks for total darkness during the entire performance of the work (the score even specifies that emergency lights should be covered). The title references “the Third Nocturn of the old Roman Catholic Tenebrae service for Holy Week, which marked Christ’s sufferings and death with the gradual extinguishing of candles.” The score isn’t typical fully notated music, but verbally describes 18 musical “situations” in


42 An extensive consideration of these ideas and concepts and the way they transform Haas’s work is found in Chapter 4.

43 Ross, “Darkness Audible.”
which Haas instructs the performers on how to improvise in reaction to each other, as well as how to aurally cue each other in order to move from section to section. Near its end, the piece features an arrangement of a Gesualdo quote, found in the latter’s Responsories for the Tenebrae service (“I was like an innocent lamb led to slaughter…”). In this quartet, darkness moves from being an important facet of a work to becoming its central theme (or one of them). This adoption of all-encompassing darkness was quickly balanced as Haas began to explore more actively darkness’s dualistic opposite in light.

Lighting effects had already been used in several older pieces, such as *in vain*, in which specific powerful beams of light are flashed onto the audience in a pulse-like fashion, and *Hyperion*, a Concerto for Light and Orchestra (2000), amongst others. Later examples include *Sayaka* (2006) for percussion and accordion and the piano trio *Ins Licht* (2007). The connotations of light, especially as emerging from darkness, offer enriching and wide-ranging parallel interpretations of Haas’s work (he once described a near-death experience in childhood that involved a bright light, and which strongly shaped his musical interpretation of the afterlife). Whether one should read into the biographical or ideological interpretations of darkness and light or restrict oneself to understanding them as sensory enhancements to the music (or even as attempts to re-create something we as modern humans have mostly lost – total darkness) often becomes a thorny question in terms of understanding/explaining these compositions (especially in an analytical context), and will be taken up in Chapter 4 in the context of *in vain*.

A final facet of Haas’s œuvre that I would like to introduce as a segue to our discussion of *in vain* is music that is – with varying degrees of explicitness – political. In Chapter 5, I will survey examples by different composers who attempted to convey political content through their music in

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order to provide a context to Haas’s approach and look at it in more depth. In this section, I will mention three examples – other than in vain – of pieces by Haas that are generally considered to have a political dimension.

The first, Wer, wenn ich schriee, hörte mich ..., is scored for percussion and ensemble, and was composed in 1999. It echoes the struggles experienced by many composers and artists whose social and political engagements are strong and earnest, and who nevertheless feel powerless in effecting change through their art. Haas expressed the “bitter realization of his helplessness as a composer, [that] there is no way his music could serve to better the world,” in this piece, whose title translates as “Who, if I cried out, could hear me?” It was composed during the Balkan War, when Haas describes hearing in Austria bomber aircrafts flying overhead “carrying their deadly burden.” The sober (or defeatist) position Haas adopts in this piece is echoed in in vain. His message is at best difficult to untangle: is he relieving himself of the anguish of helplessness by working? Or is he hoping to rally the audience to his cause by denouncing war? The latter is unlikely, given that the political dimension of the piece is only mentioned in separate interviews (and is not to be found in the program notes to the score). The focus in this situation seems to be on Haas and his experience, and he seems to make no attempts to remedy that. Similarly, when asked if in vain was written in protest to a far-right regime, Haas responded by saying: “No. The message of in vain is my sorrow, my fear, my anger, that the right-wing nationalists are back.” In other words, he is privileging composition as self-healing expression instead of active protest. In the program notes to Wer, wenn ich schriee, hörte mich..., he states: “Every kind of despair

45 Varga, Three Questions for Sixty-Five Composers, 102.
46 Ibid.
formulated in art is beautiful,” giving “beautiful” a strangely hollow – perhaps characteristically – dark core.48

As with most other aspects of his work, Haas’s approach to politics and the political potential of art is fluid and paradoxical. Both the work mentioned above and in vain carry on their surface a somewhat nihilistic, pessimistic renunciation. And yet, as I will argue in Chapter 5, Haas’s apparently negative stance conceals a militant undertone more explicit in other works of his. To a lesser extent, it appears in his Cello Concerto, written four years after in vain, which “begins with a scream in unbearable pain, followed by a section where the drumbeat conjures up the march rhythm of the Prussian army: a plea against fascism.”49 A plea is inherently a militant act, in that it attempts to rally the audience to a specific cause, and yet, Haas once again makes no mention of this specific context in the program notes to the piece, leaving this added political dimension – and this plea – untold: hidden at best, and chimerical at worst.

The third and most strikingly political piece with which I would like to close this section on Haas’s aesthetic is I can’t breathe (In memoriam Eric Garner), a solo trumpet piece written in 2013 shortly after Haas’s move to the United States. In a conversation, Haas describes only realizing the “extent of the problem of racism against people of color” in the United States after moving to New York, where “you get a whole different impression.”50 He describes his horror and the personal manner in which he came to appreciate the situation, both through witnessing Black Lives Matter demonstrations near his apartment in New York, but especially through his wife’s experiences as a black woman. He decided to compose a work in order to declare his solidarity with Black Lives Matter, and in memoriam for Eric Garner. The piece

49 Varga, Three Questions for Sixty-Five Composers, 102.
50 Brown, “Decades.”
begins quite traditionally with a dirge: a free cantilena in twelve-tone space. Then the intervals constrict; the song becomes more and more smothered, ultimately in a 16-note scale. The dirge constricts within a sonic space of other trumpet notes of extreme registers and changing colours – cautionary symbols, perhaps, of the world from which the victim was violently torn away.\textsuperscript{51}

The most striking aspect of this piece is the straightforward manner in which Haas addresses the issue at hand in his program notes – which essentially recount Eric Garner’s final moments, and Haas’s horror at the injustice that plagues the existence of African Americans living in the United States, both today and throughout the country’s history. Such statements by Haas are in a way uncharacteristically direct, and yet remain somewhat opaque when taken in a more general context, for such compositions are few and far between in Haas’s immense output (with only one of them unambiguous and concretely engaged), and are separated by long stretches of time. This dearth underscores what is perhaps Haas’s uncertainty in terms of the effectiveness of what is termed “political music.” What is more, he recently declared that he had

\begin{quote}
decided not to write any more political music. Experience taught me that the language of music isn’t well-suited to the subject. In a political argument, you are arguing against someone, but in music, that’s impossible to do directly. The instant I set something in music, I’m identifying myself with it—even if, morally, I deeply reject it.\textsuperscript{52}
\end{quote}

On the other hand, to illustrate the fluidity with which Haas can reconcile opposites and shift opinions and sides, he had declared in an interview that

\begin{quote}
Artists have a duty to express themselves politically. […] As Austrians, we have a clear responsibility, based on the terrible history. As an artist, we have to be a moral guide. And if you are not, you are fake. This is absolutely clear. […] To stay in a country and support an incorrect system would make an artist guilty.\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

What these contradictions illustrate first and foremost are Haas’s inner struggles between wanting to be politically engaged through his art and his convictions that political music is limited and perhaps even

\textsuperscript{51} “Georg Friedrich Haas: I can’t breathe.” \textit{Universal Edition}.

\textsuperscript{52} Brown, “Decades.”

\textsuperscript{53} Schweitzer, “Varied Pitches to Fill Empty Spaces.”
doomed to fail – which harks all the way back to 1999 and *Wer, wenn ich schrie, hörte mich*.... Despite this latest piece’s composition over a decade after *in vain*, I believe that Haas’s keen sense of injustice and his political ideology have remained the same throughout those years. In this paper, I hope to untangle the political dimension of *in vain*, and to show that despite Haas’s insistence that the work is a strictly personal expression of sadness and sorrow, it nonetheless conceals a logical and intricate political denouncement of fascism and isolationism.

3. Introducing *in vain*

Haas composed *in vain* in 2000 as a commission for the Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR). It received its première on October 29 of that same year by Klangforum Wien in Cologne, led by the French conductor Sylvain Cambreling. The score indicates that the total duration of the piece is 70 minutes, although performances tend to range between 60 and 70 minutes. These fluctuations in duration are mainly due to the flexible nature of the music in the “darkness” sections, to be discussed in Chapter 4. The piece is scored for two flutes (doubling with piccolos and bass flute), oboe, two clarinets (doubling with a bass clarinet), soprano saxophone (doubling with a tenor), bassoon, two horns, two trombones, two percussionists, harp (retuned), accordion, piano, three violins, two violas, two cellos, double bass; a total of 24 performers, the conductor bringing the number of on-stage participants to 25 – the ratio 25:24 expressing the interval of the “small semi-tone” in just intonation.54

The piece presents several logistical challenges. The first is that it requires special lights to be positioned on stage behind the performers, facing the audience, such that they can be turned on at certain points during the concert. They are to be programmed specifically to emit certain colors in a pulsating fashion, carefully coordinated with the music’s tempo, straight at the audience members. The second logistical hurdle is that the concert hall’s lights are to be turned off during the performance in

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54 In contrast to the large semitone which is expressed by the ratio of 16:15.
two separate instances – which I have dubbed the First and Second Darknesses. The lights generally go out in gradual phases, to be carefully programmed and timed with the music, as is indicated on the top staff of the score when applicable.\(^{55}\) Finally, a special light should be positioned above the harp such that only this instrument is lit at rehearsal mark E (pages 81-2) during its solo (“harfe gerade so viel beleuchten, wie spieltechnisch notwendig”).\(^{56}\) Venue and legal circumstances vary from one performance to another, and the exit signs in the hall often cannot be extinguished, tampering with the effect of total darkness desired by the composer.

From a practical, performance-based standpoint, turning the lights off for prolonged periods of time (approximately twenty of the work’s 70 minutes\(^{57}\) – the total length of the one-movement piece itself not the least of technical challenges) makes for tricky rehearsals and the need for memorization by performers. What is more, since the conductor becomes invisible in such passages, performers are instructed to react to aural cues in the dark, and to be able to coordinate their playing to others’ strictly by listening – one of Haas’s rationales for this being that these demands on the performers would result in increased listening to their and their colleagues’ parts in such moments. To complicate matters somewhat, the tuning system used in the piece’s opening up until the lights are turned off (equal temperament for the music until page 75) shifts, initially involving carefully indicated microtones (which would be qualified as \textit{free} in Haas’s categorizations, to be discussed in Chapter 2) that slowly transition towards harmonies that are indicated using Haas’s just intonation notation (the given pitch is notated with approximated accidentals, accompanied by the fundamental and the played pitch’s position within the overtone series).\(^{58}\) Not only is the gradual, subtle shift from one tuning system to

\(^{55}\) See pages 70-75 of the score for example.


\(^{58}\) See measure 77 (p. 83) for example.
another delicate and tricky for performers, but it must be added that, to this day, most performers struggle in performing micro-intervals, even ones as large as quarter-tones. In a conversation with Heinz Rögl, Haas mentioned having “experienced excellent orchestras, including those that play a lot of New Music, where the musicians produced the quarter-tones with a relative lack of clarity that was far removed from the precision displayed in their accomplished semitonal playing.”

Haas composed *in vain* shortly after the October 1999 legislative elections in Austria, which saw, despite the center-left Social Democratic Party’s win, the formation of a right-wing coalition government between the far-right Freedom Party and the center-right Austrian People’s Party, who came in second and third position respectively. As was mentioned above, the piece has long remained understood as an expression of Haas’s “sorrow, […] fear, […] anger, that the right-wing nationalists are back.” When discussing what frequently drives him to compose, Haas once mentioned that, with very few exceptions,

> it is certainly not the case that I sit down with the aim of setting an aesthetic programme or a story to music. Sometimes it begins with moods. In the case of *in vain* it was my consternation at the formation of a coalition government with the far right in 2000; I composed a piece in which the formal progression revives content at the end of the work that had previously been believed overcome.

This statement helps sum up the piece in a nutshell from a formal perspective. It remains doubtful, however, that the unfolding of the work and the return of the opening material (which I label Material A in Chapter 3) towards the end of the piece fail to play a role in “telling a story,” albeit of a different sort (an emotional story). Haas adds that “other people may respond differently when they hear it, but I still

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60 “Georg Friedrich Haas: *in vain*,” *London Sinfonietta*.

cannot imagine that anybody can perceive the moment when the music from the beginning returns at the end as anything but oppressive.”

I agree with this statement but would like to show, in the subsequent chapters, that *in vain* can be summed up in much richer terms than the mere oppressive disappointment experienced by the listener at its end – through its use of different types of imagery, from darkness to the use of light to clashing tuning systems and much more. Furthermore, as is the case with other pieces by Haas, I believe *in vain* is driven by a nihilistically pragmatic dialectical approach to form – in other words, an approach that strongly echoes Adornian negative dialectics. The defeatism suggested by the title (and by the form as a whole, as he mentions above), while displaying Haas’s frequently mentioned pessimism, is better understood as a positive – in the philosophical sense – statement regarding his political and philosophical outlook. Despite denouncing the ascent of reactionary politics in central Europe, what Haas is declaring more forcefully is his own personal belief in human progress. The piece mourns the temporary recession of social values in a society governed by a far-right government, thereby “protagonizing” these values in the work, without needing to refer to them concretely – and despite Haas’s resistance to the idea that the piece may represent a musical unfolding of extra-musical concepts. By doing so, Haas manages to avoid a straightforwardly rhetorical approach, giving his material the multi-faceted and deeply-contradictory characteristics that exemplify society itself – including Haas and his work as a whole.

62 Ibid.

63 Pragmatical philosophy focuses on “a changing universe rather than an unchanging one as the Idealists, Realists, and Thomists had claimed.” Gerald Gutek, *Philosophical, Ideological, and Theoretical Perspectives on Education* (Boston: Pearson, 2014), 76.


65 ‘Consisting in or characterized by the presence rather than the absence of distinguishing features.’ “Positive: definition of positive,” *Oxford English Dictionaries*, 2017.
Haas is comfortable making use of different compositional and tuning systems and drawing equally and interchangeably from what some generally consider to be incompatible approaches to composition. Harry Partch’s work on just intonation – as well as his many followers’ – deeply influenced Haas. On the other hand, so did Grisey’s (and Murail’s and other European spectralists) and Tenney’s (and what some have termed North American)\textsuperscript{66} spectralisms, as well as La Monte Young’s – or his disciple, Michael Harrison’s – “Emancipation of the Comma.”\textsuperscript{67} The list reads like an anthology of twentieth-century microtonal experiments, and would not be complete without Ivan Wyschnegradsky, sometimes considered to be one of the earliest composers to have dedicated his life and his work to the exploration of what lies between two equal-tempered semitones. The Russian composer’s work influenced Haas, although it did so for more than its strictly microtonal aspects: Haas draws from the techniques and approaches to voice-leading and scalar construction that Wyschnegradsky developed in microtonal pieces, applying them to equal-temperament-based music – such as Material A.

Haas has no qualms drawing from any and all of the relatively independent traditions mentioned above, and considers himself free to use whatever means suit the music at hand. His connection to these – microtonal – composers is multi-faceted and no doubt the result of an elaborate analysis of and years of teaching their music. This connection is replicated in his elaborate relationship with many


other – non-microtonal – composers from the canon, as described in Chapter 1, such as Schubert, Webern, Mahler, Mozart, Mendelssohn, and others. He once declared:

I am not really comfortable with being pigeonholed as a “microtonal composer.” Primarily I am a composer, free to use the means needed for my music. There is no ideology regarding “pure” intonation, either as Pythagorean number mysticism or as a notion of “Nature” determined by trivial physics. I am a composer, not a microtonalist.68

I will begin this chapter by discussing two sets of articles Haas published in 2003 and 2007 in which he theorizes and categorizes different microtonal practices. I will then use these papers – not before comparing them and interpreting the differences between them – as launching pads to explore the connections between Haas’s music and the different traditions described above, all the while keeping an eye on how these different observation help us better understand in vain.

1. In Theory

Haas taught and wrote about microtonality and the music of important microtonal composers since the 1980s, while teaching at the Hochschule in Graz. He has since taught courses and lectured on the subject far and wide. In 1999, he gave a talk at the Salzburg Festival titled “Beyond the Twelve Semitones – Attempt at a Synopsis of Microtonal Composition Techniques,” in which he states:

Micro counts as ‘tonality’ only in contrast with ‘normal tonality’ in its role as a system of reference. Where this system of reference has become obsolete, the notion of ‘microtonality’ has been replaced by the free decision of the individual composer in his use of pitch as his material.69

Haas’s attempts at formulating a global synthesis of different microtonal practices – in order to show the diversity and various possibilities inherent in going beyond the semi-tone, as well as to better


theorize it – led him to write a paper in 2003 titled “Mikrotonalitäten,” in which he defines four separate categories of microtonality, shown in Figure 2.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2007</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Equal division of the octave</td>
<td>1. Scales</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Non-European</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Equal division of the octave</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c. Irregularly structured (including Partch’s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Overtone series proportions/just intonation</td>
<td>2. Overtone chords and spectral music</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Aleatoric microtonality</td>
<td>4. Aleatoric microtonality</td>
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*Figure 2.1. Categories of microtonality in Haas’s 2003 and 2007 papers on the subject, showing his thought evolution.*

Four years later, he published two somewhat related papers, “Mikrotonalität und spektrale Musik seit 1980,” (“Microtonality and Spectral Music Since 1980”) and “Fünf Thesen zur Mikrotonalität” (“Five Theses on Microtonality”), in which he presented a new, partly different and partly identical categorization, also shown in Figure 3.1. Both categorizations were published several years after the completion of *in vain*. The 2007 papers logically reflect Haas’s thinking at the time of composing *in vain* less accurately than the 2003 paper, and yet can help us understand the first categorization better by clarifying the latter’s omissions, as will become clear below. How accurately the first categorization reflects Haas’s thinking in 2000 can only be the subject of conjecture. As with most secondary topics related to *in vain* and yet not directly extracted from it, a certain level of flexibility and healthy skepticism is recommended.

Both categorizations share their third and fourth categories. *Klangspaltung*, already discussed in Chapter 2, is the “tone-splitting” (or “sound-splitting,” more literally) that occurs when two microtonal near-unisons are played simultaneously. The category usually refers to instances in which this juxtaposition is done in a controlled and intentional manner, such as through the clash of different
tuning systems, or even different “tonal areas” in just intonation. For example, a B natural tuned to be a just perfect fifth (3:2) above an E would be tuned differently than another B natural, tuned to be a just major third (5:4) above a G (or an equal-tempered B natural, for that matter). The friction between the two would produce the tone splitting referred to in this category. The fourth category, aleatoric microtonality, “arises from techniques like multiphonics, the prepared piano, or indeterminate notation that does not specify pitch.”

The glissandi found in pages 76 to 82 of *in vain* arguably qualify for this label, since the rate of change of the – admittedly very narrow – interval is not specified exactly, especially considering the fact that the music in these passages is both measured in seconds and coordinated aurally due to the conductor being invisible.

An interesting difference between the 2003 and 2007 categorizations is the shift in dimensional perspective that saw Partch’s just intonation (category two in 2003) become a horizontal (scalar) component (category one in 2007), labelled as “irregularly structured scale.” The 2003 category also lacks any mention of spectralism, although some aspects of spectral music may be included under the label of “overtone series proportions.” In “Mikrotonalitäten,” Haas also seems to draw “the primary distinction in categories 1 and 2 between equal temperament on one hand and just intonation and the overtone series on the other.”

It would not be possible to come to that conclusion without the category presented in “Microtonality and Spectral Music since 1980,” in which the scalar component of microtonal music extends well beyond the “equal division of the octave,” to include non-European scales (strangely – and perhaps indefensibly – absent from his 2003 discussion) and irregular scales.

Wyschnegradsky’s 13-note scale, discussed in Chapter 2, would be included in category 1.c in 2007, whereas in 2003, it would fit into category 1 with a footnote (in that while it is derived from a quarter-

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70 Hasegawa, “Clashing Harmonic Systems in Haas's *Blumenstück* and *in vain,*” 205.

71 Ibid. It should be emphasized that quarter-tone music (or 1/8th, 1/12th, etc) are rooted in equal temperament, despite being microtonal (every other note in quarter-tone music is an equal-tempered semitone).
tone division of the octave, it is not regular and/or symmetrical – in much the same way that the
descending scales found in Material A are neither regular nor symmetrical – neither fully chromatic nor
octatonic, in other words). As Robert Hasegawa argues,

The primary conceptual split of the earlier taxonomy between two ways of theoretically dividing
pitch space (equal temperament and just intonation) is abandoned in the later version to
acknowledge that, despite their theoretical differences, both are essentially scalar modes of
thought and thus quite different than either overtone-based or spectral music (which focus on
sounding vertical harmony instead of abstract scale structures). This reorganization suggests that
to Haas the extended just intonation of Partch and his followers is primarily scalar in conception,
not harmonic.72

In other words, category one reflects that Haas’s thinking in 2003 – which is focused on the differences
between equal temperament and just intonation – is centered on the scalar dimension of both tuning
systems, whereas the 2007 categories differentiate between the two dimensions more extensively.

However, it is arguable that Haas’s – perhaps subconscious – oversight in 2003 in
differentiating between the scalar and the chordal more pronouncedly is reflected in in vain in such a
way as to become one of the driving forces of the piece’s inner processes. Material A, through its
alternation between wide, arpeggiated descending runs (chords) and narrow, scalar descents,
encapsulates the friction between the two dimensions. This is exacerbated by the juxtaposition of the
horizontal material (what I refer to as temps strié in Chapter 3) and the vertical, suspended harmonies
(temps lisse). Furthermore, Material B’s committed vertical dimension at its onset (in which still chords
punctuate long rests in striking contrast to the piece’s opening 75 pages) is quickly challenged as the
justly-tuned passages quickly begin to incorporate surface activity and horizontal motions within their
lines – in other words, it begins to incorporate a staunchly horizontal dimension. The friction between
the two, underlining the absence of differentiation in the 2003 categorizations, nonetheless forces its

72 Hasegawa, “Clashing Harmonic Systems in Haas's Blumenstück and in vain,” 205.
way into *in vain*’s musical sound-world and predicts Haas’s eventual embracing of the horizontal dimension inherent within just intonation as a category in its own right.

### 2. In Context

Haas’s music is often – and perhaps erroneously – associated with French spectralism because of the frequent occurrence of spectra in his harmonic language. However, there are important differences between his approach and those found in the music of Gérard Grisey and Tristan Murail (amongst others), despite Haas’s intimate acquaintance with the two French composers’ works. For example, while Haas also makes frequent use of overtones, he does not use computers or spectral analysis in order to compose or replicate complex sounds (such as bells).

As was mentioned in Chapter 1, Haas explains that

the fascination exercised on me by the overtone chord is undoubtedly rooted in its technological origin: I grew up in the vicinity of a power plant. The transformer station – an eerie place with innumerable cables and insulators – emits a constant overtone chord.

His usage of the overtone chord, as well as his understanding of it, echoes closely that expressed by James Tenney who, when discussing his own usage of the harmonic series in his works, insists he is not using the harmonic series to imitate something else… I’m using it because of its special properties or the special properties of the auditory system in relation to it. It’s a unifying structure. It’s a structure that our auditory systems have built into them: the capacity to reduce to a unity, to a singularity… And that’s a very useful formal idea.

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A formal idea that focuses on the chord as an event unto itself, a singular statement that can be varied and developed through the juxtaposition of other, transposed, differently filtered, and/or re-orchestrated overtone chords, rather than new versions of the initial chord, variably corroded by the introduction of ever-more in-harmonic pitches (with the opposite of a pure spectrum being white noise, as is frequently found in Grisey’s works – Partiels, Prologue, etc). This attitude towards integrating spectra within his music and the manner in which it influences his approach to form constitute some of the reasons why Robert Wannamaker has suggested the broadening of the definition of spectral music to include a wider geographical and aesthetic range, and which would be bound by the stipulation “that it invoke Fourier spectral analysis as a conceptual point-of-reference.” A distinction could therefore be made between the French école spectrale and what Wannamaker calls “North American Spectralism” – which includes Tenney. A rapprochement between Haas’s music and this latter type of spectral music would then become much more adequate and accurate.

Haas’s 2003 categorization of microtonality nonetheless omits any mention of the word spectralism, as discussed above. Category 2 instead concerns the “overtone series proportions/just intonation,” which, aside for harking back to Tenney’s usage of overtone series mentioned above, also makes direct reference to Partch’s work. The American composer and inventor dedicated much of his career to the theorization of tuning and the performance/notation of music using just intonation. His book, Genesis of a Music, is a ground-breaking document of the twentieth century which has not only revolutionized the way countless composers understand and approach tuning ever since, but has also earned Partch a broad and loyal following, including such varied composers as Ben Johnston, Kyle Gann, Marc Sabat, and several others. Unlike these composers, however, Haas makes use of Partch’s methods and ideas only when it suits the pieces he is writing. More importantly, he does not consider

just intonation the tuning approach despite spending significant-enough energy and time discussing it with performers and convincing them of its benefits, such that the Hagen String Quartet, who premiered his String Quartet No. 2 in 1998, allegedly uses the phrase “Haas intonation” when performing standard classical repertoire (Classical or Romantic) with pure intonation.77

Unlike Johnston, however, Haas does not consider “all the dissonant music of the twentieth century […] unhealthy for us.”78 Johnston’s personal goal as a composer was to facilitate a shift in musical practice from performing music in equal temperament back to performing music using justly-tuned intervals, as expressed by the “pure” ratios theorized in Partch’s book (and based on theories and calculations dating as far back as the ancient Greeks). “Just as we’re not talking about censoring science in saying let’s not dump things on the environment,” Johnston believes in purging our reliance on what he considers “irrationally dissonant” tuning systems, and “eliminat[ing] the pollution.”79 Haas, in contrast, can be found in his Columbia University studio, in a composition lesson, playing the same chord on three differently-tuned pianos, asking: “Is the idea that this is the right world, and this is the destroyed world?” quickly adding that “this is not the wrong piano and the right piano.”80

As was described above, during the time of composing in vain, Haas made use of Partch’s legacy and of justly-tuned intervals in a mostly-vertical dimension. I have discussed my conviction that it is through the development of Material B and the gradual injection of the horizontal dimension into such staunchly-vertical material that Haas shows early signs of grappling with just intonation’s rich scalar potential – although not significantly enough for him to include it into his 2003 categorization.


79 Ibid.

80 Schweitzer, “Varied Pitches to Fill Empty Spaces.”
The piece also features non-microtonal music, in Material A, which clearly shows to what extent Haas is indebted to Wyschnegradsky’s work. On the other hand, he remained largely skeptical of ‘equal division of the octave’ approaches to microtonality for various reasons ranging from his listening taste to his lack of trust in the abilities of performers to tune these accurately:

I have a rather ambivalent attitude to quarter-tone music. At home I had two pianos tuned a quarter-tone apart which enabled me to explore the concept. […] However, quarter-tone writing is certainly very abstract and also something that is difficult to grasp just by listening to it. I have experienced excellent orchestras, including those that play a lot of New Music, where the musicians produced the quarter-tones with a relative lack of clarity that was far removed from the precision displayed in their accomplished semitonal playing.\textsuperscript{81}

Given the large number of interviews with Haas published in newspapers and journals, it is not uncommon to find him somewhat contradicting himself on certain topics. Sifting through the conversations, I was able to ascertain a few general and important orienting facts regarding his approach to – and general taste in – tuning systems. He describes being “interested in the unbelievably intense sound quality of ‘purely’ intoned intervals. An overtone chord with pure tuning.”\textsuperscript{82} Despite stating that quarter-tone writing is “difficult to grasp by listening to it,” he elsewhere describes the “basic human need for beats in music,” proposing that “the twelve-tone tempered system is so widespread not in spite of, but because of its abstract intervals: because of its wonderfully “false,” beat-rich major and dominant seventh chords.” He also notes the practice of intentionally introducing beating intervals into music, such as in large string sections using vibrato, but also the wide octaves of Balinese slendro tunings: “The resulting beats bring life into music.”\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{81} Rögl, “On the magic of ‘pure’ intervals,” 12.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{83} Haas, “Fünf Thesen zur Mikrotonalität,” 124.
Beats also partly make reference to the Klangspaltung effect of which Haas is so fond, and allow us to draw a line between his work and the sound-world of La Monte Young. The American’s work is deeply steeped in microtonality. His Well-Tuned Piano, for example, makes use of what is referred to as the Septimal Tuning – in that thirds avoid the number 5 in ratios (5:4 and 5:6), but instead use 9:7 for the septimal major third and 7:6 for the septimal minor third, as described and theorized in Partch’s book. Young’s piece Four Dreams of China, scored for eight trumpets, features four lone pitches (F, Bb, B, and C) tuned according to non-tempered ratios, resulting in a complex interplay of upper partials (beatings, essentially) over a long stretch of time.

Michael Harrison, one of La Monte Young’s “disciples,” published an article titled “Pure Tuning” in which he describes “the Emancipation of the Comma,” so widely prevalent in The Well-Tuned Piano – and in much of Haas’s work:

The microscopic intervals between two slightly different versions of the same note, which are tuned via two different sequences of intervals, are called commas. These commas exist only outside the confines of the twelve notes tones of equal temperament. In fact, tempered tunings were developed over the past four hundred years precisely to avoid the commas that are heard whenever music with moderately complex harmonies is played in just intonation. I have discovered that incorporating the commas into the harmonic fabric of my music frees it from the need for tempered tunings and opens up a new approach to tonality.84

Based on the above statement, it is therefore possible to question whether it is Haas’s usage of Klangspaltung in in vain that facilitates our acceptance of just intonation or whether the reverse is actually true, namely that the justly-tuned chords welcome Klangspaltung as a means of creating tension in the music. This chicken-or-egg question cannot hide Haas’s – like Young’s and Harrison’s – attachment to this device and the important role it plays in shaping their music.

84 Harrison, “Music in Pure Intonation.”
A final interesting – if somewhat minor – parallel between Haas’s and Partch’s methods has to do with both composers’ inclination to mimic their own voices through their music – something that would be difficult to achieve using 12-tone equal temperament. Johnston, who knew and studied with Partch, describes him using small intervals to represent the inflection of speaking voices, the melodies of a spoken line. “Everything was without exaggeration, as it is when you set it to recitative, or even to a kind of traditional vocal setting. […] And it did, indeed, sound the way he sounded when he spoke.”

Similarly, Haas declared in a conversation with Bálint András Vargas that

Speech rhythm is also important [to me and my music] – the rhythm of German with Austrian accent which I speak. My melodic structures are largely derived from that speech rhythm. I do not mean any concrete spoken text which will then be transferred to music (as Janáček would do). I experimented with that just once. […] I failed. Since then, I have composed “abstract” speech melodies with an expression of (for me) clear outlines. As if one would hear someone speak on the other side of a wall: one recognizes the melody but understands no word.

Haas’s inclination towards speaking without saying something concrete or easy to sum-up characterizes much of his attitude as a composer. While it may be attributable to his having difficulties using words as opposed to sounds (“My decision when I was 17 years of age to be a composer and not an author might have had something to do with the fact that I noticed that I cannot express myself as precisely in words as in sounds”), I would instead connect this propensity towards greyness (again, as in avoiding black-and-white statements) or towards a certain degree of ambiguity to his consistent insistence to define “himself as a pragmatist rather than an ideologue – the system-building preoccupations of other microtonalists are set aside in favor of the flexibility to draw on a range of

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theoretical concepts for the organization of pitch,”88 contrasted with “Partch’s stated intention to invent a consistent harmonic system on a bedrock of ‘Archean granite’ (the physical certainties of acoustics) rather than the received practices of Western music, including the equal-tempered scale.”89

Hasegawa further conjectures the connection between this attitude and what Lyotard describes as the postmodern “incredulity towards metanarratives,”90 a term with strong connections to storytelling devices and rhetorical self-awareness.91 This conjecture is evidenced by Haas’s aforementioned statement where he declares not composing “with the aim of setting an aesthetic programme or a story to music.”92 In other words, Haas claims to avoid a straightforward, chronological narrative approach. A question to keep in mind as we begin to unpack in vain’s content is the extent to which he manages to avoid such explicit storytelling devices, specifically in the opposition between the piece’s two main materials, to which we now turn our attention.

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90 Hasegawa, “Clashing Harmonic Systems in Haas's Blumenstück and in vain,” 205.

91 The definition of “metanarrative” in the Oxford Dictionary is “a narrative account that experiments with or explores the idea of storytelling, often by drawing attention to its own artificiality.”

Chapter 3
Opposition

As I intend to show in this paper, *in vain* is organized around the idea of opposition and the process by which the differences between two opposing elements (thesis and antithesis) are overcome through synthesis—a method often associated with the idea of “dialectics.” Haas sets up the process from the very beginning of the piece by introducing what I have labelled Material A followed—after an important yet short transition—by Material B. These two musical “states” are opposed on many important levels: tuning systems, textures, usage of silence, and much more. In this chapter, I will unpack the internal organization of each respective element before focusing on the few—mostly hidden—aspects they have in common.

1. Material A

Haas introduces Material A at the onset of the piece, which opens with 75 pages (and 75 measures, one per page) of dovetailed descending lines distributed across the orchestra. The cumulative effect of these lines easily lends itself to imagery and flights of the imagination on the part of listeners/observers, as can be gathered from the descriptions collected in the literature about the piece. Alex Ross, for example, writes that the piece “begins with rapid, swirling patterns, like snow in high wind,” referring to the return of the material later on in the piece as “the snowstorm.” Simon Rattle, who gave a talk about *in vain* in January 2013 before it was performed in the Philharmonie Berlin, describes the piece and its form chronologically to the audience. When speaking of Material A, he similarly used

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93 Ross, “Darkness Audible.”
the snowstorm imagery, as well as comparing it to Ligeti’s *Violin Concerto*’s scurrying figurations, “as though there are a hundred of Alice’s rabbits in Wonderland, disappearing down the holes.”94

While I prefer seeking restraint in imposing overly subjective labels on Material A’s very particular musical character, I will nonetheless venture the striking resemblance between this music and the psychoacoustic phenomenon known as Shepard Tones.

These tones consist of a number of sinusoidal components an octave apart, with a fixed envelope that goes to zero at low and high frequencies. [...] When we raise the frequencies of the sinusoidal components a semitone, we get the sense of an increase in pitch. This sense of change persists, semitone by semitone, but when we’ve reached 12 semitones total, we are back where we started.95

Although “Shepard Tones are somewhat different from musical tones, [because] though they have many partials, they omit partials other than those an octave apart,”96 the analogy in Haas’s writing still holds, with the effect achieved being that “the pitch appears to increase endlessly” – or, the case of the opening of *in vain*, decrease (only on the surface, as will be shown below). The technical manner in which this is achieved, as with the synthesis of Shepard Tones, is to stagger several descending lines (in our case distributed across different instruments) with the heaviest weight placed on the middle of the register. The opening music of *in vain* is notated almost exclusively in a triple-piano dynamic (ppp) and as such, volume is achieved through the density of stacked lines rather than by their loudness. The score features no notated crescendos or decrescendos in this entire opening section, and dynamics are the same for all instruments despite the natural strengths/weaknesses of instruments in specific parts of their register – such as the comparative loudness of the oboe and the quietness of the flute in their respective lower ranges.

94 In fact, most of his talk seems to follow Ross’s article’s outline, indicating he might have been inspired by it. Rattle, “…Where You Discover Where Music Came From,” 15.


96 Ibid.
A further analogy that has frequently been repeated in connection with Material A – and to a certain extent with the piece as a whole, showing the way in which Haas draws connections between the particular and the general, or the specific Material and the entire work – is known as Escher’s staircase.\(^97\) M.C. Escher was a Dutch graphic artist known for his mathematically-inspired works amongst which is *Relativity*, a lithograph print from 1953. It is set in a world in which normal laws of gravity seem to be suspended, and shows a staircase whose beginning and ending coincide, presenting a “microcosm of wandering.”\(^98\)

In our case, the staircase represents both the descending lines found in Material A (that globally rise, as will be shown below) and the piece as a whole. In his notes on *in vain*, Bernhard Günther mentions special staircases found in places like the Vatican or Odessa, where “subtle deviations from the norm, changes in perspective, […] are unsettling.”\(^99\) He also points out the meaning of the French word *vanité* (from the Latin, *vanitas*) as it is understood in the fine arts: “An allegorical representation of death, of the passing of time, of the vacuity of passions and of human activities.”\(^100\) *Vanitas* were visual still-life representations and, as Günther suggests, offer a potential “etymological link between Escher’s curious drawings and *in vain*.\(^101\) As will be discussed in later chapters, these aspects of interconnected, seamlessly and endlessly recurring cycles, like Shepard Tones, “can [and will] also be performed with tempo, where pulses occurring at lower rates that are subdivisions of higher-rate tones

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\(^{97}\) “*Relativity* (M.C. Escher),” *Wikipedia*.


\(^{99}\) Bernhard Günther, liner notes to *in vain*. Klangforum Wien.


can be gradually increased in volume while the higher-rate tones are decreased in volume."\textsuperscript{102} (The significance of this development within Material A will be discussed in Chapter 5). Rattle makes a distinction between the Escher-staircase nature of Material A, “which seemed always to be going upwards and you found yourself simply back at the beginning once more,” making the music “almost like an optical illusion,” and Sisyphus, “who simply was condemned to push the same stone up the top of the hill and have it fall down with him again.”\textsuperscript{103} The sense of obvious condemnation is missing in Haas’s rendition, which lacks the dramatic moment of punishment (the rolling back down the hill to the beginning) – until the very end of the work, that is.

The dominant characteristic of Material A – and of Shepard Tones themselves\textsuperscript{104} – is not the ascent/descent of pitch per se, but the continuous, quasi-static resultant state of the whole. The paradox implicit in a statically moving object perfectly fits the contradiction-ridden microcosm that Haas sets up in his piece, and serves as a perfect introduction to it, for despite the extreme that Material A represents in terms of particularity of character, texture, level of surface activity, and many other parameters to be discussed below, it nonetheless still all blends and merges into what is ultimately an amalgam of these various embedded components: a buzzing, static, bewildering apparition.

This opening material takes up a mere five of the 70 minutes the piece typically lasts (7 to 8% of the temporal dimension of the piece). And yet, just like it spans 76 of the total 216 pages of the score (35%), the material plays a larger role than would appear in an objective, temporal consideration. Furthermore, the initial occurrence of this material arguably sounds longer and more consequential than


\textsuperscript{103} Rattle, “…Where You Discover Where Music Came From,” 16.

\textsuperscript{104} Shepard, “Pitch Perception and Measurement,” 159.
its return in the final four or five minutes of a performance\textsuperscript{105} – and despite the fact that this “revival” gives the piece its title.

What initially struck me about Material A, beyond its make-up, is the manner in which Haas organizes the unfolding of each meaningful layer of the music, maintaining the directional/undirectional (the paradox is important) flow while sustaining the passage’s interest and vitality – for it is the \textit{return} of this music at the end of the piece (and the manner in which it develops, according to my analysis to come) that makes this material undesirable, and not the material itself.\textsuperscript{106} Each page contains a single measure of 4/4 music at quarter-note equals 60. The sheer size and evenness of this passage makes the manner in which the long-term flow of the music is regulated puzzling. In the next few pages, I have chosen to highlight five key musical parameters through which Haas shapes these 75 pages and maintains the – mostly – linear changes and transformations within the seemingly static whole.

\textit{a. Dimensions, Pitch Content, and Sustain Level}

Haas’s music frequently brings into focus the friction between a horizontal, melodic dimension, and a vertical, harmonic one. The opening 75 pages of \textit{in vain} present, on the horizontal level, individual instrumental lines of varying registral expanse. Figure 3.2 shows one extreme, found in the first violins. Most intervals consist of fifths and tritones, bringing to mind the harmonic sound-world of Wyshnegradsky and of the Second Viennese school, with which Haas is intimately familiar. Chords built from perfect fifths feature a stacking of such intervals, with the tritone providing the alternative “other.” Wyschnegradsky’s microtonal music makes heavy use of circles of fourths, which alternate perfect fourths with “major fourths” (interval 5.5), among others. A circle of major fourths produces a

\textsuperscript{105} Based on the Klangforum Wien performance

\textsuperscript{106} This echoes the manner in which Haas treats equal temperament itself, as will be discussed below.
chain of 24 pitches before the recurrence of the initial pitch. Wyschnegradsky then takes the first 13 of those pitches, and orders them into a scale, called his Diatonicized Chromatic Scale.\footnote{Ivan Wyschnegradsky, “Ultrachromatisme et espaces non octaviants,” \textit{La Revue musicale} 290-291 (1972): 145-146.} Haas has made use of similar methods explicitly in other works.\footnote{Such as \textit{Blumenstück}, also composed in 2000.} Material A, however, while being essentially developed in a similar fashion, is distinctive in that it remains rooted in equal temperament – which echoes Haas’s aforementioned statements that “the Harmony of […] Wyschnegradsky […] plays a central role in my music, although not in the fact that it is quarter-tone, but in the semitonal approach.”\footnote{Rögl, “On the magic of ‘pure’ intervals,” 12.} The wide leaps shown in Figure 3.1 present the harmonic content of the music within a single line, in an arpeggiated fashion. This is contrasted by a more scalar, horizontal version, shown in Figure 3.2.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure3_1.png}
\caption{Violin 1, measure 3}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure3_2.png}
\caption{Violin 1, measure 5}
\end{figure}

In the latter case, the majority of intervals making up the lines are major and minor seconds. These often end up forming octatonic scales, although Haas’s frequent addition of extra chromatic
notes (obtained by expanding the stacking of perfect fifths and tritones) pushes the pitch aggregate from 8 closer to 12, all the while maintaining temperedness of tuning. A common feature between the two types of lines is the frequent symmetry and lack of tonal center that results from the usage of such pitch content, important to achieving the overall “Shepard Tone effect.” These two types of writings are frequently juxtaposed, including within a single instrument part, as shown by the examples above which are both played by the first violin, two measures apart. An instrumental part in which abrupt alternations between the wide and narrow intervals are found even more frequently is the accordion, as can be seen in Figure 3.3.

![Figure 3.3. Accordion, measure 3.](image)

The accordion is also one of the few instruments that deviate from the otherwise uniform writing imposed on all instruments in the beginning of the piece, namely that of fast, running, quiet, legato notes (in fast tuplets to be discussed below). The opening measures notably feature two short yet sustained dyads in the high register, as can be seen from Figure 3.3, where the tritone D6-G#6, sustained on beat 1, is followed by the fifth D6-A6, held twice in the rest of the measure. These occurrences cease shortly as the accordion’s writing settles into a lower register, and with scalar
passages more prevalent, as can be seen on page 6 of the score. The next example of sustained pitches is found in the piano and percussion on page 11, as the instruments alternate two chords in tremolo-fashion, the second chord being a transposition of the first up a fifth (the chords themselves featuring the typical stacking of a tritone and a perfect fifth). This quiet and fast tremolo adds to the shimmering restlessness of the passage, while simultaneously contributing to its stasis.

The next sustained pitches are found in the winds, on page 18, in tandem with the cellos, followed by high strings, that last until the end of page 21. Page 28 sees a brief but dramatic return of sustained notes in the brass instruments, to be discussed below. The release of the chord on page 29, after an important crescendo, provides the launching pad for the dynamic level of the passage, no longer restrained to *ppp*, and now notated mostly in a *f* dynamic. The next sustained tones are found in the double bass at page 35, at the end of a large decrescendo to *mp* that begins on page 32. The lowest string instrument transitions from performing low, single pitches, to the characteristic sustained perfect/diminished fifths initially found in the accordion (see page 37, for example). The violas gradually join in, beginning at pages 38 and 40, the saxophone on page 43, the first flute on page 44, the oboe on page 45, horns and violins on page 46, and finally, the bassoon on page 47. These sustained instruments balance the fast, hyper-active layer of the, by this point, mostly scalar activity. The harmonies allow the other instruments to narrow their registral focus, with the overall outcome still being the same. A swap between double bass and low brass instruments is found on page 49, that leads to half the orchestra sustaining a *ppp* chord on page 51, while the other half actively reverberates in short scalar outbursts.

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110 The opening 75 pages of the piece feature one measure per page. Subsequent sections frequently lack measure numbers and feature rehearsal markings instead. As such, I have chosen to use page numbers as the main indicator in the score, there being only one printed edition of *in vain*. 
Figure 3.4 shows the three harmonies sustained through pages 51 to 58 and beyond as an example of the manner in which Haas stacks perfect and diminished fifths across the full register. The \textit{ppp} dynamic ensures the omnipresence-yet-elusiveness of this global color, with the bulk of the attention focused on the short scalar outbursts that continuously surround these chords. The change on page 58, beat 3, is particularly dramatic, with 10 of the voices changing, and only the octave Ds found in violins carrying through.

The end of Material A finds the sustaining winds and brass instruments dropping out gradually beginning with the flute on page 64. The held pitches are slowly taken over by the strings, where the introduction of microtonal intervals (such as can be found in the cellos on page 69), trigger the transition to Material B\textsuperscript{111} significantly before what I have designated as the end of Material A. The permeability of this formal boundary (or its obscurity) is further reinforced by the gradual dimming of lights that begins on page 70.

\textsuperscript{111} Or, more precisely, the transition to the transition, as will be discussed in Chapter 4.
b. Rhythm and Sense of Time

The rhythmic content of Material A is also organized in a very careful and methodical manner, in such a way as to emulate the simultaneously hyperactive and static totality that characterizes the passage. The variable pacing is achieved strictly on the surface-level of the music (in the notated rhythms), while the deeper levels (the tempo and meter) remain absolutely fixed throughout. The sense of fluctuating speed is achieved through the unfolding of gradually varying consecutive tuplets in each instrumental part, which result in gradual written-out accelerandi or decelerandi. This can be seen in Figure 3.1, where a speeding up occurs from a 9-tuplet, through two 10-tuplets, to an 11-tuplet. Figures 3.2 and 3.3 feature a slowing down of the surface rhythm (again, independently of the actual tempo, which remains stable at quarter-note equals sixty) from a 9-tuplet, through an 8-tuplet, to a 7-tuplet for the former, and an 11-tuplet through two 10-tuplets to a 9-tuplet in the accordion excerpt. This approach leads to the constant fluctuation in delivery of every individual line, producing a restless undulating effect. As is the case with the horizontal and vertical treatment of pitch content, however, the dimensionality of the rhythmic (or tuplet) writing is similarly exploited in order to ensure maximum individuality and variety on the horizontal level, coupled with general evenness in the cumulative, vertical result – but not absolute evenness, as the totality still varies, albeit less regularly.

This layering of simultaneous, different tuplets contributes to the buzzing yet suspended feel so strongly prevalent in Material A. In other words, while individual instruments speed up or slow down, the overall effect is close to a static one, changing subtly only over a period of time. Figure 3.5 shows, in a table format, the types of tuplets found over the course of four pages (22 to 25), and illustrates the simultaneously shifting horizontal pace balanced with – or perhaps countered by – a roughly even vertical aggregate (a technique frequently found in Ligeti’s music from the 1950s onward).
Figure 3.5. Tuplets found for each instrument active on pages 22 to 25

Most beats in these pages comprise an aggregate of 7, 8, 9, and 10-tuplets, with the exception of those found on page 24, which lack 10-tuplets, and also feature a thinning of the instrumentation accompanied by a rise in the register of the music, both aspects to be discussed below. The temporary removal of 10-tuplets, while representing a contrast and an important shift in the collective speed (or density) of the music, remains subtle and shows Haas’s keen sense of detail. It also displays his typical resistance to systematization, and his method of simultaneous differentiation and generalization – or amalgamation – and his distinguishing between the individual and the collective, between content and context (rhythm and meter/tempo). It is interesting to note that despite the extensive layering of tuplets found in Haas’s systematic treatment of the vertical dimension of Material A, the polyrhythmic
dimension remains a very concise one, in that all of the tuplets are performed against a single stable and unchanging duration (the quarter-note), which ultimately mostly serves to reinforce it. The quarter-note being equal to a second (as in the unit of time), I am reminded of Elliott Carter’s remarks in defense of the complex, and yet deeply human and biological aspect of polyrhythms:

The rhythm of breathing is different from that of a heartbeat; we never think about it or are even aware of it, but that’s how it is; we are constantly living in the midst of this elementary polyrhythm. Besides that, those two rhythms, our breathing and heartbeat, change under different conditions. [...] Two people don't live according to the same rhythm, but each in an independent manner. This is considered perfectly understandable, and yet it's an incredibly complex phenomenon.¹¹²

The juxtaposition of fast arpeggiated/scalar passages with the long, sustained notes, discussed above, further serves to mold and diversify the music’s sense of time. In his book *Penser la musique aujourd'hui*, Boulez famously speaks of two different types of time which he calls *temps strié* (striated time) and *temps lisse* (smooth time). The former features structures of duration anchored in chronometric time (whether even or uneven) but essentially systematic: pulsation (which is the unit of the smallest common multiple – in our case, the quarter-note). In smooth time, temporal “ridges” are replaced by the duration of specific sounds. No rhythmic unit is perceptible, but rather the continuous flow in time of a sonorous mass set in motion, this suspended sense of time providing an impression of “eternity.” “In smooth time, we occupy time without counting it; in striated time, we count the time to occupy it.”¹¹³ By overlapping independent layers of constantly shifting and modulating striated time set against an all-governing yet elusive beat (again, reiterated because all tuplets fit within a single quarter-note beat) with layers of sustained harmonies, Haas problematizes our perception of time in the passage. The juxtaposition of these two distinct *temps*, and his manipulation of the rhythmic devices

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¹¹³ “Dans le temps lisse, on occupe le temps sans le compter; dans le temps strié, on compte le temps pour l’occuper.” Pierre Boulez, *Penser la musique aujourd’hui* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 107-8. (Translation my own)
discussed above no doubt play an important part in reinforcing the suspended character of this music that looks so different on paper than it actually sounds. The level of activity so apparent on the score, while initially exhilarating in a concert, quickly becomes blurred and eerie as our sense of time shifts.\textsuperscript{114}

c. Register/Registral Envelope

Appendix A features a plot of the highest and lowest pitches found in each of the 75 measures of Material A, allowing us to track the rate and direction of motion of the outer voices in the active lines (as in only within the fast tuplet-driven material, and not the sustained pitches). The Shepard Tone effect, discussed above, achieved through the ever-descending flourishes (arpeggiated or scalar), is very directly challenged – and once again, problematized – by Haas in his treatment of the music’s registral span’s evolution in time, which, in the next few paragraphs, I refer to as a registral envelope. A quick look at the opening seven bars shows a stable lower voice (at C2) against which the upper voice smoothly descends in oblique motion. The initial G#7 (or the A7 that it moves to in measure 3) quickly descends to an Ab3 in measure 7 – in other words, a 3 octave descent in 4 bars.\textsuperscript{115} The descending outer-voice is therefore simultaneously mirroring the descent found on the surface of the music, while also remaining somewhat elusive – in that it resides in the middle-ground dimension of the music as it is perceived by the listener.\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{114} Once again, it is difficult not to connect these techniques to Ligeti’s music, particularly \textit{Lontano}, \textit{Atmosphères}, and the \textit{Chamber Concerto}.

\textsuperscript{115} It should be emphasized that while Appendix A shows held tones, these pitches generally provide the beginning of descending scales/arpeggios, which were discussed above, and are almost never sustained.

\textsuperscript{116} Here, I distinguish between foreground – surface of the music, immediately graspable; middle-ground – the result of slightly elongated processes on the surface, still generally graspable; and background events – difficult to experience concretely, and generally the result of long-term observations and analysis.
Subsequent developments of the registral envelope show an overall ascending tendency in both outer voices. The first such ascents in the bass are found beginning in measure 7 on C2, and ending in measure 13 on C5 (also three octaves, over the course of six bars). Measures 22 to 25, plotted above into Figure 3.5, feature the opening measure’s oblique motion’s mirror image, with the top voice roughly static between Bb5 and C6, and the bottom voice swiftly climbing from C#2 (measure 20) to F#5 (measure 26). This abandonment of the lower register features an equivalent drop of several low-pitched instruments, and is followed by a return of the low range in measure 27. This particular reintroduction of the low register is interesting in that it occurs gradually through a bending of the bottom voice’s trajectory from F#5 in measure 26 back down to C2 in measure 27’s 4th beat – resembling the accordion’s writing in the lower staff of measure 3, second beat (in Figure 3.3). This type of linear shift stands in sharp contrast with the more angular reintroduction of the low register as is found in measure 19, for example, where the lowest voice’s A5 is abruptly contrasted with the reappearance of C#2 on the next beat.

Haas’s tour de force, however, lies in his subsequent treatment of these outer voices. Pages 2 and 3 of Appendix A reveal the true paradox embedded within the ever-descending lines of Material A, beginning around measure 30: the consistent, systematic, and hidden ascent of the registral envelope, concretely mirroring the music’s foreground in its middle- and backgrounds. This exacerbates an auditory illusion that occurs when one listens to Shepard Tones, sometimes referred to as “the Tritone Paradox,” and which explains listeners’ difficulty in discerning whether the pitch is ascending or descending.\(^{117}\) Haas’s riddling of the music with tritones only serves to reinforce this effect.\(^{118}\)

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\(^{118}\) Shepard, “Pitch Perception and Measurement,” 150.
The rising outer voices also feature the same pitch content as the one found in the descending individual instrumental flourishes, discussed above – albeit in inversion. The result is a type of textural writing, vaguely comparable to Ligeti’s in pieces like Atmosphères, where “the sonorous texture is so dense that the individual interwoven instrumental voices are absorbed into the general texture and completely lose their individuality,”¹¹⁹ which in turn creates the illusion of hearing rising Shepard Tones, in this case, despite every single voice performing descending lines: a paradox beautifully exploited by Haas.

**d. Phrase/Cell Length**

This fourth characteristic for the passage is important despite its subtlety. Phrase length (or perhaps more fittingly, cell-length, depending on the specific passage) varies between short versions (3-4 notes, generally arpeggiated) and longer versions (up to 14-note runs, generally scalar). Figure 3.6 shows the piano, accordion, and first violin in measure 22 as an illustration.

The piano’s top staff shows a rare, 8-note arpeggiated run spanning from B7 to F#4 in descending stacked perfect/diminished fifths, as discussed above. More typical arpeggiated cells contain 3 to 4 notes. Good examples are found in the accordion: despite the continuous arpeggiation, these can be understood as repeated cells, such as the B6-E6-Bb5-E5 that opens the measure on the accordion’s top staff, or the F6-Bb5-E5 example that closes it. Scalar runs tend to be longer, despite covering roughly comparable registral expanses. For example, the violin’s descent from Bb5 to Eb4 is made up of 11 notes. A 4-note chordal-cell version of this run, however, would likely be made up of Bb5, Eb5, A4, and Eb4, and would therefore cover the same vertical length, albeit in a leaping and less seamless manner. Other examples include a linkage between the two types of runs, such as the lower

¹¹⁹ Betsy Schwarm, *Classical Music Insights: Understanding and Enjoying Great Music* (Bloomington, IN: Trafford Publishing, 2011), 102. This does not necessarily allude to micropolyphony per se, but rather to the deceptively broad brushstrokes, that are in fact extremely detailed.
staff of the piano, beats 2 and 3 on Figure 3.6: the initial scalar descent from F4 to G#3 sees an elision as the G# goes from being the last note of the descending scale to becoming the first one of the arpeggiated, 3-note cell (G#3, D3, G#2). Another such example is found in beats 3 and 4 of the piano’s top staff, with the 6-note descending arpeggiation’s last note (E5) becoming the first note of a scalar descent that goes into measure 23.

Figure 3.6. Piano, accordion, and first violin parts in measure 22.

The relationship between the two, however – the leaping arpeggiated runs with few notes, and step-wise scalar runs with many – is brought into question. Because they ultimately cover similar registral expanses, regardless of their note-number make-up (as was shown above), it is possible, especially at a fast speed, to confound the two, and to understand them as slight variations of each other. A good instrumental analogy is the “fake glissandi” sometimes used by clarinetists or string
players as substitutes to full, gradual, exact ones, with the audible result often being the same. I am not making the point that fast scalar runs and the shorter arpeggiated versions sound exactly the same, but that they represent variations of each other, much more closely related than may appear through a quick glance at the score – and this can indeed be confirmed by closely listening to the score with this point in mind.

\textit{e. Instrumentation}

Instrumentation plays an central part in Haas’s music, even beyond its oft-mentioned spectralist connections. The role of individual instrumental timbre, and the paradoxical way in which it coalesces into an overtone chord all the while distorting it will be discussed below. However, despite not playing a structural role in this passage, instrumentation is nonetheless central to Material A’s unfolding, in that it provides one of the main tools for preserving musical interest in the otherwise largely static and blurry material. I will provide several examples taken from the 75 pages of the section as an illustration of the creativity Haas displays in handling his instrumental forces.

The opening measures of the piece are scored \textit{ppp} across the instruments used, as mentioned above, and feature the percussion, piano, accordion, and strings, cleverly dove-tailing (see page 1, especially the string writing) cascading short legato 4-note arpeggiated cells in broad registral sweeps. The piano and accordion function as binding elements in the otherwise scattered and disjunct texture. This is quickly followed, however, by important shifts in orchestration. For example, after the introductions of flutes and clarinets in measure 2, strings, winds, and keyboard instruments dominate the texture until measure 11 when the winds suddenly drop out, closely followed by cellos and basses: this is also the measure in which the percussion and piano add shimmering tremolos in the middle of the texture, as discussed above. The brief return of the lower instruments in measure 13 mostly helps
cover up the exit of the keyboard instruments, leaving the upper strings alone, fully exposed. The following pages continue in the same fashion, with frequent shifts in subtle colors and a close mapping of the rising-envelope-to-come on the instrumentational realm. Measures 22 to 25, for example, shown in Figure 2.6, clearly demonstrate the abandonment of the lower string and percussion instruments into pages 24-25, where the upper strings and the clarinets are left exposed as the collective rhythmic density is slowly expanded with the reintroduction of 10-tuplets, absent on page 24. This orchestral shift directly correlates with the rising envelope mapped in Appendix A.

A particularly important event occurs at the brass instruments’ first entrance at measure 28 in a – highly atypical in the music so far – rhythmic unison quickly followed by a loud crescendo of the sustained chord and a vertical cutoff at the loud $f$ dynamic, thereby increasing the dynamic threshold of the music up until that point, which had been restricted to $ppp$. The crescendo found in the high register, shortly after the brass crescendo, plays a dual role, first in following the global trend towards louder dynamics after this abrupt and surprising surge, and second in its relationship with the timbral particularities of brass instruments, which predominantly have a slower high envelope (in other words, their higher partials speak later than the lower ones). The crescendo in the brass instruments preceding the one found in the higher instruments therefore serves to stretch the gesture and illuminate the upper register in a particularly effective way, of which Haas takes full advantage by subsequently staggering much louder descending lines in the higher parts of the register, beginning on the second beat of measure 29. This gesture therefore reconciles the high register, pointed at by the brass, with the lower range from which it emerged. In other words, that the low and high registers, in physical opposition, are merged and the opposition overcome, through the presence of the brass in this passage, in that their low written pitch is fundamentally defined (timbrally) by the important – if somewhat delayed – presence of those high overtones. This constitutes a subtle but powerful example of the dialectical
approach Haas displays in this piece. He subsequently restricts his usage of brass instruments until later on in the section, at which point their role changes: they become agents of transition between Material A and its dualistic opposite, which we will now discuss.

2. Material B

I have identified Material B as beginning on page 84 of the score and lasting until about page 100 – although another plausible starting point is the second system of page 82. This music displays a quasi-antithetical relationship to that of the opening on multiple levels, which will be individually addressed below. The first and foremost difference is the tuning system employed: we have left equal temperament behind and find ourselves in a world of just intonation where harmonies fit into a tightly controlled mold based on the overtone series. I have chosen to restrict the following analysis, as I have done in the preceding section, to the particularities inherent within Material B itself.

The first clarification to be made is that Material B is separated from the end of Material A by nine very important pages of music during which Haas plunges the concert hall into complete darkness. This transitional section, which I have chosen to ignore for the time being, constitutes what I will later on be calling the First Darkness section, and which will be discussed at length in Chapter 4. It goes without saying that the juxtaposition of Material A, with its very specific character and its grounding in equal temperament, with Material B and its broad, still, justly-tuned harmonies, provides Haas with a special challenge, and the opportunity for a carefully thought-out transition. The importance of his choice to gradually extinguish the concert hall’s lights as the music penetrates this transitional section, as well as the positioning of Material B on the other end of the “dark tunnel” is difficult to overstate.

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120 The second system of page 82 features the beginning of a transition in which the lights are slowly turned back on. This process is completed on page 84. I have therefore chosen to attach this short transition to the previous section, and to term page 84 as the official beginning of Material B, although counterarguments are presented in subsequent paragraphs of this section.
While the analysis of the transition will be deferred to a later portion of the paper, no discussion of Material B can be complete without duly acknowledging the special and unusual context in which these carefully tuned harmonies first sound: With the light coming back on, these chords acquire a new meaning, one that would be incomplete, were the visual conditions to be ignored.

In this section, the score shows, next to every pitch, an Arabic numeral followed by a German note name in parentheses: For example, the G5 quarter-sharp, found in the first flute, at measure 90, is accompanied by the notation $I1.(D)$, indicating that this pitch is the 11th partial of an overtone chord built on the fundamental pitch D, in other words, D2 (absent in this chord). It should be noted that while the pitches that make up the overtone chords are frequently microtonally-tuned (or justly-tuned), the fundamental pitches themselves remain nonetheless anchored in the equal-tempered system – a fact of no small significance to our overall analysis, as will shortly become apparent.

Material B features 11 of the 12 tempered pitches as fundamentals of the chords (the twelfth, missing fundamental, F, is actually featured at the very end of page 83, perhaps giving credence to the idea of including the material from page 82’s second half onwards into Material B proper). The use of such a large number of overtone chords in a work is difficult to manage, in practical terms, as far as the ensemble is concerned, because performers, when playing a specific pitch, need to picture (or mentally hear) the assigned fundamental (often absent, as will be seen below) in order to accurately tune their pitch in relation to it. The more fundamental pitches are used, the bigger the challenge for musicians to perform this act accurately.\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{121} While discussing writing music for different groups, Haas once declared that “I always try to compose for each situation in which the work will be performed. Poème was a commission for the Cleveland Orchestra and I knew there would be hardly any rehearsals because they are extremely expensive in the USA. […] I encountered the exact opposite with Natures mortes in Donaueschingen, where there were far more rehearsals than usual. And I knew that Sylvain Cambreling was conducting; hardly anybody else is as familiar with my music as he is. In that work I could afford myself the luxury of writing five different overtone rows for a large orchestra. They needed six rehearsals plus realisation. Bruchstück has a single overtone chord, in vain has twelve – because it was for Klangforum.” Rögli, “On the magic of ‘pure’ intervals,” 14.
The texture in this section is also very different from that of the opening, with instruments playing sustained notes in a block-like fashion. That said, the entrances are often split into groups, such as on page 84: in the D-fundamental chordal block, groups of notes enter in measure 88 and others in measure 89, before staggered entries are introduced in the woodwinds as an added timbral variation. In the next chord, on a C#-fundamental chordal block, string entries are split into two groups, one entering on the downbeat of measure 92, and the second half playing on the third triplet eighth-note of the beat. Each added entry is given a very specific dynamic envelope, and pitches are often picked up by other instruments. The internal logic of the passage is therefore quite similar to that of the first section in the sense that events that seem to be drawn with broad brushstrokes are in fact very carefully crafted with a multitude of minute details.

In his aforementioned talk on *in vain*, Simon Rattle describes the particular sound of Material B as “pure, original tones almost fighting with our modern sounds.” He compares the music to lights, “if you can hear lights, you hear lights! You have to use mixed metaphors in this piece.” Going further, he compares the darkness preceding Material B to a primeval swamp from which music is born, “a very long, slow, patient birth.” He also compares the experience, in large part due to the effect of turning the lights back on, to that of seeing the work of Olafur Eliasson (a Danish-Icelandic artist whose work is known for incorporating the elements, such as air, water, and light), and “particularly the work in the [2013] Berlin exhibition he had, where you walked into a gigantic room which was full of smoke and extraordinarily bright lights came to you in the smoke, so you were completely disorientated and almost drowned with colour.” The imagery is rich and intense, and is reiterated across the

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122 Rattle, “…Where You Discover Where Music Came From,” 16.
123 Ibid., 15.
124 Ibid., 16.
literature and in various program notes, but while I shall retain the vividness it arouses, I will once again refrain from imposing such subjective imagery onto the music, and will instead begin by orienting our attention to the technical underpinnings and challenges of this material by breaking down the passage into five important facets that drive the form.

\textit{a. Harmony}

Perhaps the most important and crucial dimension of Haas’s music due to its fundamental connection to tuning, harmony as a category – perhaps harmony-as-tuning or tuning-as-harmony – embeds a variety of parameters that all work together to achieve movement and contrast within a single process. In Material B, each verticality is organized around a fundamental, be it present or – more frequently – absent. The harmonic content – or “flavor” – is conveyed first through the specific scoring/filtering of the chord in question, second from the chord succession, or progression (i.e., the fundamental moves down a major versus a minor third, or moves up a perfect fourth versus a tritone, etc.), and last through the voice-leading that results from the first two.

Appendix B shows, in a table, the succession of individual chordal-blocks for the entirety of what I have identified as Material B (pages 84-100), specifically emphasizing the fundamentals and their featured overtones, amongst other details. The music until measure 115 offers few occurrences of the fundamental, and a general avoidance of partials below the 4th. The subsequent passage, however, begins a push ‘upwards’ in terms of partials, with some as high as the 15th (in the D chord of measures 123-127). This is ultimately followed by a reemergence of the lower register in the G chord.

\footnote{With the last quote making reference to the “Second Darkness,” which is followed by vivid beams of light that flash the audience, almost aggressively, at a later stage in the piece.}

\footnote{The table permits, in particular, tracking the presence or absence of the fundamentals in the chords.}
on measures 141-143, which features the fundamental, but also the 2nd and 3rd partials, absent in all previous chords.

A striking feature of the aforementioned passage (from measures 120 to 141) is the absence of any fundamental. Following the well-grounded G chord from measures 142-143, the passage leading to measure 160 offers, from a purely harmonic standpoint, a return to a middle-level in terms of partials (between the 6th and the 12th in general), in order to prepare the important chord built on B natural that slowly comes together in the strings in measures 163-164, and which features a full stack of low partials (1st to 4th, 6th, 10th, 11th, and 14th), inaugurating the final section of Material B, a passage heavily reliant on the low register. The A and G chords in measures 172 to 180 also offer a a packed set of low partials, with the 1st to the 4th, as well as the 6th and 8th (the A chord also contains the 9th and 10th, while the G chord features the 5th, 7th, and 11th partials). These chords are followed by the fullest stacking of partials seen thus far in the section, with the F# chord in measures 188-190 comprising the partials between the 1st and the 7th, the 9th, 11th, 12th, and 15th.

The potential danger of juxtaposing chords that are fundamentally the same – the overtone series – in such a lengthy succession is a lack of diversity of harmonic color (such an important concern to many composers after the advent of spectralism). Haas’s solution is in part the varying filtering of partials described above. The omission of certain specific overtones greatly varies the resulting harmonies. This goes to show the extent to which Haas’s harmony comes close to encompassing other important musical concepts, such as pitch (since in theory overtone chords have “the capacity to reduce to a unity, to a singularity,”¹²⁷ that of the fundamental) and timbre (which is defined by a collection of overtones, each with its respective loudness/dynamic).

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¹²⁷ Dennehy and Tenney, “Interview with James Tenney,” 79–89.
The most important omission is the fundamental. This crucial pitch, which lends the chords its name, is less frequently found in the beginning of the section (thereby rendering these chords less fused, or perhaps lacking in focus). But other partials’ presence/absence can greatly transform the sonorities as well: the table in Appendix B shows, in measures 153-155, for example, Haas carefully and subtly filtering out the fifth, eight and tenth partials of D, focusing instead on the fourth, sixth, seventh, and ninth, before introducing the eleventh partial as well. The table regularly features multiple voicings of chords built over the same fundamental (the beginning of the section, for example, shows three successive voicings of a C# chord). Continuous filtering of these harmonies, therefore, both internally and in relation to each other, ensures that no two consecutive chords are the same, maintaining the forward motion of the material through a process of variation.

Another important way through which Haas maintains interest in the lengthy succession of overtone chords is through an effect he calls *Klangspaltung* (tone-splitting), which “occurs through the use of microtonal near-unisons.” These are achieved through two different approaches in Material B: the first, most intuitive approach consists in microtonal fluctuations in certain voices against a stable unison in another, such as can be found in measures 172-174 in the violas, with the second viola sustaining an E3 while the first viola gradually and regularly bends its E natural upwards towards an E quarter-sharp. A second manner in which this is achieved makes use of the specific tuning of partials in the overtone chords, and takes advantage of the differences in tuning systems. An example is found in measures 198-200 between the second violin (instructed to play an equal-tempered B4) and the second flute (instructed to play a B4 justly tuned over an E as its 12th partial – and therefore higher than the violin’s B). Another example, found early on in the section in measure 113, occurs when the

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129 Hasegawa, “Clashing Harmonic Systems in Haas's *Blumenstück* and in vain,” 220.
piano punctuates a G-fundamental chord with tempered versions of pitches, adding D4, G4, and A5 to the overtone on G reverberating in the strings.\textsuperscript{130} The piano’s D4 will be tuned slightly lower than the D4 played by the second cello, which will be tuned as a perfect fifth to the (absent) G fundamental, and will therefore result in friction and tone-splitting, adding subtle tension to the music. Occurrences of \textit{Klangspaltung} increase significantly in later stages of the piece.

\textit{b. Silence}

The chordal blocks described above are separated by rests adorned with fermatas of malleable duration, giving silence a prominent place in this musical realm – whereas it was entirely absent from Material A. The breaks between the chordal blocks play a very important part in the pacing of the passage, but while their duration is mostly left up to the conductor, it is their presence altogether that is striking at first.\textsuperscript{131} Silence is to sound as darkness is to light and as such, Haas’s choice to juxtapose the two dualistic opposites repeatedly immediately following the First Darkness is very revealing, as he renews the practice of contextualizing concepts of musical materials as a way to explore and transform them. In other words, by making silence an active participant in the music, he gives himself room and opportunity to transform it and the way it is experienced.

The first, and possibly most important silence, occurs at the end of page 82’s top system. This is the first rest heard so far in the piece following five to six minutes of continuous activity, and immediately precedes the transition in which the lights become gradually brighter into measure 88, the beginning of Material B, where such hushed breaks become preponderant and varied. The function and the effect of the first silence are undoubtedly different from future occurrences, regardless how

\textsuperscript{130} The reverberating effect, achieved through dynamic swells and a tempo change, will be discussed below.

\textsuperscript{131} “Dauer der Fermaten ist variabel: gehalten, nachklingen lassen, Reaktion auf die Entwicklung der Klänge, Aussetzen der gemessenen Zeit,” p. 83 of the score. On the other hand, some do have specified lengths, and mostly occur before the section identified as Material B proper begins (p. 82, bottom system, for example).
differentiated later rests are through their duration, what precedes their appearance, and what comes
after them. Rests can therefore be explained as respite, as the anti-thesis of sound, as well as “music
reduced to nothing, and nothing raised to music,” as was said about John Cage’s 4’33′. Silence is the
ambient sound of the concert hall and the unwanted noises produced by musicians and audience
members. Silence also serves to render the darkness in which it emerges more uncomfortable, and to
some downright terrifying. “It is the extinction of thought,” or thinking taking a breath, but this
meaning is destined to change, as quietness obstinately continues to insert itself between the chordal
blocks of Material B.

Again, it is possible to explain these silences from a very practical musical standpoint: the
perpetuum mobile character of the opening section features very little respite and warrants a change of
gears. Silence – at first – feels somewhat welcomed by the listener, regardless of its deeper implications
of an ideological nature. As with darkness (which becomes more than the absence of light), Haas
manages to transform a superficially negative process into a positive one, in which a dearth of
something is understood as an addition, and an absence becomes an opportunity. In her article “Utopian
America,” Gordana P. Crnković discusses Cage’s ideas from his book Silence, and the close connection
between silence and horizontality. “Horizontal being is being in which one does not define oneself and
one’s language vertically, according to the given centers of power, meaning or subjectivity. Horizontal
being is a condition of potential freedom in which one can elude one’s (and the center’s)
preconceptions.” Following Crnković’s idea, silence can be interpreted from a political angle, which
is something I will be discussing further in Chapter 5. For our current discussion, however, and beyond

134 Griffiths, Modern Music and After, 30.
135 Gordana P. Crnković, “Utopian America and the Language of Silence,” in John Cage: Composed in America,
the ideological, utopian value of silence as horizontal – and therefore dualistically related to the vertical chords that interrupt it – silence can also be understood as space, and as room for the listener’s own thoughts and imagination. In the same way as words can be separated from each other by blank space, allowing one’s mind to reflect on them in a personal manner, silence allows one’s thoughts to form and develop, and can be interpreted as a state of mindfulness, as it is understood in Zen Buddhist philosophy.\footnote{Mark Epstein, \textit{Thoughts Without a Thinker: Psychotherapy from a Buddhist Perspective} (New York: Basic Books, 1995).}

Regardless of one’s initial interpretation of silence as it first settles on Material B, its systematic and consistent return slowly transforms it in the listener’s mind: It comes to acquire a much heavier presence, forcing the listener to follow its pace or grow anxious. As such, despite its definition as the lack of sound, silence becomes an active participant in the piece, and serves to heavily shift our perception of time, in much the same way as Material A’s suspended throbbing did before it.

c. Tempo

The bottom line of Appendix B’s table tracks the changes of tempo found throughout Material B. Those sometimes occur at the very onset of large vertical entrances, and other times halfway through the large chordal events. Material A’s tempo, quarter-note equals 60, remains an anchor throughout Material B, with Haas frequently returning to it after smooth – and not-so-smooth – tempo shifts.

Page 93, for example, has an initial tempo of quarter-note equals 96 quickly slowing down to quarter-note equals 40 within the span of four beats before abruptly returning to quarter-note equals 60 in the middle of the measure. Page 87 features an accelerando from 60 to 108 over the course of 3 bars which sees the large G overtone chord, supplied by a low G1 fundamental in the harp, release its sonority into a large fermata-ed silence, after which the tempo abruptly reverts to 60. The tempi most
frequently used by Haas are 40, 60, and 96, with occasional uses of 52, 72, 144, and 180. It should be noted that the rate of tempo changing increases significantly in the latter half of Material B.

The frequent return to what may be termed as the global tempo for the piece so far (quarter-note equals 60) gives these tempo changes a pendulum character, as though the speed of the music sways sharply in a certain direction, invariably returning to the middle-point, before swiftly swaying in the other direction, and so on. Throughout these pages, using juxtaposition and transformation (accelerandos and/or decelerandos), Haas molds the tempo and bends it back and forth, ensuring that few pages go by without a significant fluctuation of the pulse. This juxtaposition of gradual (if hasty) and abrupt changes echoes the ways in which the music develops on its surface, as will be discussed below. The direct parallel is emphasized as the section unfolds, around page 94 for example, as Haas begins to introduce rhythmic pulsations in the instrumental lines. Multiple players, vertically aligned, pulse their harmonies in an accelerating fashion, thereby maintaining the fluctuation of speed despite the tempo being steady in that particular passage. Inversely, page 87 features the string instruments regularly crescendoing to \textit{mf} before quickly receding, at an even rate of a half-note. The tempo, however, increases smoothly to 108 over these few bars, therefore destroying the regularity written on the page and imbuing it with rush and momentum. This provides a perfect example of the manner in which Haas exploits the dichotomy between rhythm and tempo (content and context, surface and structure), as he had done in Material A – albeit with the reverse approach, by writing stable rhythmic units on the music’s surface, and injecting the deeper layers of sound with agents of change and instability.
Instrumentation and Paradox

Instrumentation plays a pivotal role in Material B. Its first and most obvious purpose is, as with Material A, to diversify timbre, allowing for modulations of tone color and directionality as we navigate the succession of different chordal blocks. It becomes somewhat difficult to disentangle the timbral role played by instruments (in other words, their own inherent tone color) and the timbral result achieved by instruments adding certain specific partials to the overtone chords, as was described in section a above. The intersections between timbre and harmony proliferate in Material B, complicating the delineation of instrumentation as a concept in-and-of-itself.

A good example of orchestration working in the more traditional sense was mentioned above. It occurs right at the section’s beginning, with two sets of string entries slowly merging to form the large D-overtone chord (with a missing fundamental). The 6th, 7th, 8th, and 11th partials are slowly introduced in measure 89 on the third violin, the second viola, and the second cello. These exact same pitches are shortly taken over, through a broad cross-fade, by wind instruments, in measures 90 and 91, thereby offering a rare example of instrumental color operating relatively independently of harmony and partial filtering. Another example is found in measures 97-100: the 4th, 6th, 7th, and 9th partials of the B-overtone chord are introduced in the strings before being gradually taken over by woodwinds, allowing the same chord to modulate its timbre without altering its notated pitch content.

An important challenge Haas faces in Material B is that of finding a role for his tempered instruments, namely the piano, the accordion, and the pitched percussion. He approaches the problem with two different solutions: the first involves restricting the pitches assigned to those instruments to ones that fit into the justly-tuned overtone chords (almost always the fundamental). Examples include the accordion’s F#1 in measures 116-119 or A1 in measures 173-176, or the piano’s

137 The harp is not one of those instruments, since it is tuned justly from the piece’s onset, and is therefore capable of playing pitches in the ‘keys’ of C, B, and C#.
Bb1 of measure 167. The second solution consists in using tempered pitches specifically with the intent to produce the *Klangspaltung* effects described above (a form of acceptance of the instruments’ limitations and an attempt to use them to his advantage). Examples of this include the aforementioned chord on the piano in measure 113, or the accordion’s E5 in measure 152, which clashes with the D overtone chord’s 9th partial (by 4 cents, the just interval of a large major second, represented by the ratio 9:8 producing 204 cents instead of equal temperament’s 200).\(^{138}\)

As in most spectralist pieces, however, there is an added, paradoxical dimension that greatly challenges one’s understanding of orchestration: unlike spectra synthesized by sine tones, each instrument provides its own set of added overtones inherent within its timbre, thereby further complicating the resulting soundscape. This exacerbates the degree to which a score is representational when, by refining the level of microtonal precision in tuning, it strives to paint very precise pictures using what are essentially other pictures. While performers are instructed to carefully tune their notes in order to fuse into a large overtone chord, the spectral envelopes inherent to the instruments on which they play frequently complicate the merging potential of these large blocks of sounds – perhaps to an unresolvable degree.\(^{139}\)

As such, a new dichotomy is brought forth in these passages, with the precision of harmonic content and tuning colliding with the imprecision of the score and its means, and therefore, of the resulting spectra, burdened by a whole set of partials found within individual instruments’ spectral envelopes but un-notated, or unapparent, in the score. Zooming out far enough, one might recognize the ‘idea’ of the overtone series pointed at by the music, but a closer look, or a closer dive into the sound quickly reveals that it is much more complex and, in fact, grey.


\(^{139}\) As I hinted above, this paradox, inherent to so much spectral music and beyond, brings to my mind works sometimes referred to a photographic mosaics.
e. Surface Activity and Dynamics: Development

While the individuality of instrumental loudness in Material A was relinquished in favor of a group dynamic level, almost every entrance in Material B is carefully shaped and specified—micro-managed, in comparison. Haas initially makes use of two basic dynamic envelopes, shown in Figure 3.8: the first, found on the downbeat of measure 88, features a gradual swell of sound, variably sustained before receding. The second, found in the violins on measures 94-95, mimics the envelope of a plucked string: the pitch’s loudest point is its attack, and is followed by a relatively swift decay. As such, both types of envelopes share a smooth diminuendo to silence.

![Figure 3.7. Two types of envelopes initially found in Material B, and the two derived and later introduced.](image)

While most instruments’ dynamic envelopes in Material B’s opening correspond to these first two types, new envelopes quickly begin to appear, giving a strong impression of development. However, one of the first good examples of development is found in the aforementioned repetitive dynamic swells to *mf* found in the strings on measures 109-113, and shows envelope 1 occurring in a “loop,” and at a relatively fast pace. Further development is found in the uncharacteristically (for Material B) even and sustained attacks found in the winds in measures 120-121, and whose lack of dynamic “hairpins” suggests an organ-like sound, meant to stand out in the midst of much more gradual and smooth dynamic envelopes in surrounding instruments (envelope 4). Envelope 3 is found in elongated crescendos whose highest dynamic is at their (accented) cutoff, such as those performed by the winds in measure 143, or those (slightly different, in that the *f* dynamic is reached several beats before the
cut-off) in the high strings in measure 164, as well as 180. It should be mentioned, however, that these are the only examples of notes whose ending does not feature a decrescendo.

A second source of development in the piece occurs when Haas injects the surface of the music with microtonal inflections, small disturbances that provide the same kind of energy as the dynamic transformations. Examples include the aforementioned clash between the E3 in viola 2 and the E3 quarter-sharp in viola 1, in measures 172-174. Another example shows the high strings in a small but vivid glissando in measures 178-179. The slow and increasing infusion of turmoil onto the music’s surface in pages 84-100 prefaces subsequent developments in the music beyond Material B. Both the microtonal deviations, which result in Klangspaltung, as well as the dynamic palpitations introduced onto otherwise-sustained limpid harmonies trigger this process of transformation that helps distinguish Material B so strongly from Material A. Material B might even give the impression of being impatiently developmental in nature, as though Haas struggles and fails (or perhaps he simply does not want to) preserve it intact for long enough before beginning the piece’s dialectical developmental process. The most jarring, downright aggressive, and foreboding sign of the clash of tuning systems to come is found in measures 197-200, in which the strings gradually merge into a harmony straight out of Material A (a stacking of perfect and diminished fifths across a wide register), while the winds sustain an E-overtone chord that quickly recedes, triggering the end of what I have termed Material B, and the beginning of a long developmental section.

3. Common Grounds

Despite being fundamentally opposed in their character, texture, pacing, tuning system, dynamic treatment, and more, Materials A and B hide important and deeply consequential common

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140 Shown in Appendix B.
traits that will prove crucial in the piece’s development. I have already briefly mentioned the manner in which Haas exploits the schism between the surface and structure of the music, by manipulating tempo freely while maintaining a stable rhythm, and vice-versa, thereby putting into question the distinction between means and ends as separate compositional concepts.\footnote{In other words, the speeding-up of the music which, as an end, is achieved through two different means: the acceleration of either the tempo or the notated rhythms.} He also approaches the listener’s sense of time as an important factor in the long-term pacing of the music. In Material A, the overlapping of \textit{temps lisse} and \textit{temps strié} allows him to craft a sound-world as rich as it is vague, reminiscent of Paul Valéry’s discussion of lightness: “Il faut être léger comme l’oiseau, et non comme la plume” (“One should be light as a bird, not as a feather”).\footnote{Italo Calvino, \textit{Six Memos for the Next Millennium} (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 16.} The fast flourishes of Material A are weighed (or dragged) down by the sustained chords’ gravity – or perhaps the type of lightness found in space, where both gravity and air resistance are chimerical. In Material B, Haas challenges our sense of time by confronting us with heavy, consequential silences, that separate careful statements in the form of broad but straightforward harmonies. The long rests’ refusal to subside stands in contrast with the bubbling energy hidden within the chords as they spontaneously begin to develop and metamorphose.

And yet there is a fundamental aspect of the music that inextricably links the two materials, hinted at above: the equal-tempered nature of the fundamentals anchoring the successive chords in Material B. Haas refrains from using non-tempered fundamentals, unlike elsewhere in his œuvre,\footnote{\textit{Blumenstück}, for example.} thereby providing a crucial common-ground for the subsequent development of the piece. An attempt to plot the successive fundamentals onto a staff, however, reveals the extent to which Materials A and B are linked – well beyond the equal-tempered nature of the fundamentals. Figure 3.9 shows that the
succession of pitches actually replicates the exact melodic writing found in Material A (with a strong focus on minor and major seconds, and minor thirds).

*Figure 3.8.* The succession of fundamentals in Material B, plotted onto a staff, resembles the melodic lines found in Material A’s surface and deeper levels, shown in Appendix A.

It therefore becomes clear that Material A’s pitch-content, found both on its surface (in the descending scalar flourishes) and in its deeper layers (shown in Appendix A), is also duplicated in Material B’s own structure. It is very carefully hidden – and impossible to discern through listening – but is extremely consequential to the analysis found in subsequent chapters.
Chapter 4
Darkness

1. Haas and Darkness

Turning off all light sources in an artistic performance may sound less radical to some of us at first but remains nonetheless a challenging feat in the context of an acoustic classical music concert. Unlike digital electronic music performances, in which the bulk of the action takes place inside a machine in binary form, Haas’s performers are seated on stage (or around the room, as in his third string quartet, *In iij. Noct*) with instruments they are expected to handle blindly. They are also forced to perform the music from memory and give up reliance on visual cues for coordination. Haas had already experimented with darkness in pieces completed prior to *in vain*, and would continue to explore ways of using it in his music in subsequent years, including in the aforementioned third string quartet, completed in 2001.

A difference between the two pieces, however, is that *in vain* features 20 minutes of darkness out of the approximate 70 the work is meant to last, whereas the string quartet is played exclusively in darkness. Performances of the string quartet – which was played by JACK Quartet in New York City in sold-out concerts – typically begin with

a test of darkness for the sake of the audience. […] Some people can become anxious in this situation, even with the music. So the lights in the studio were turned off and the audience […] was plunged into darkness for about a minute. […] When the lights came back on, [the artistic director] invited anyone who found the darkness unnerving to leave with ‘no shame.’

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Alex Ross describes initially feeling “a fear such as I’ve never experienced in a concert hall: it was like being sealed in a tomb.” During JACK Quartet’s West Coast premiere of the piece, Benjamin Uphues (who works in the dark dining restaurant Opaque) was brought in to blot out even tiniest pinprick of illumination. [...] Each audience member was required to sign a waiver releasing the presenters from liability and to provide an emergency contact before being admitted. [...] Like soldiers in Iraq, ushers were provided with night vision goggles. A somewhat mystified-looking fire marshall was on hand as well.

And yet, most observers agree that the fear/discomfort/terror subside once the music actually begins. This brings me to the second important difference between *in vain* and *In iij. Noct*: the former is *interrupted* (twice) by darkness, which becomes a discrete event over the course of the piece – albeit one that subsequently comes to characterize the work as a whole – whereas darkness is the string quartet’s basic condition, its permanent state, its new normal. In the former, the moment of panic, or fear (or excitement, soothing, etc) is experienced by the listener in the midst of the piece, twice, and is therefore intertwined with the music. The same can be said of the flip side of darkness, namely the moment the light is turned back on (also twice), which enriches and adds complexity to the idea of darkness. In the string quartet, darkness becomes accepted by the listener early on in the piece – although it is arguable that it transforms and acquires nuanced interpretations and levels of darkness as the work unfolds. As such, the same basic idea – darkness – acquires, through the two works, rather different functions.

The challenge I face in this analysis, which is fairly common in analyses of many of Haas’s works, is precisely this attribution of meaning. As I have shown several times so far, Haas’s personality, his work, and his aesthetic exude a deep fluidity and a non-committal attitude towards dualistically-opposed concepts. I would even argue that this resistance to labels, to choosing sides, to black-and-

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145 Ross, “Darkness Audible.”

146 Swed, “Music review: Georg Friedrich Haas’ revelatory romp in the dark.”
white situations, is what fundamentally defines Haas as a creator. His usage of darkness, similarly to his usage of silence, stasis, tuning systems, and much more, is therefore inherently plural in its interpretation and in its meanings.

His attraction to darkness stems from his earliest childhood, as described in Chapter 1, having grown up on the “dark side” of a high-altitude valley in the Austrian Alps. His relationship with nature similarly mirrors the complexity of his feelings towards darkness. Interestingly, darkness and nature are combined in the following story he shared during an interview:

I lived for some years in the mountains in Austria and I liked walking outside at night. One night there was no moon and there was a very dense fog and I really couldn’t see anything and I thought I would go back. But in a very few minutes I discovered that my feet automatically found their way. When I crossed a small bridge over a river I experienced the sound of the water, the changing of the noise of the water, with an intensity I had never had before. When I came back I understood what had happened; I am a human being whose ancestors for hundreds of thousands of years had to survive in darkness without electric light. All our bodies have the ability to do that but we live in such a way that we cannot use those abilities. It’s like there is a desire for darkness that we cannot fulfill. If I ask you when did you ever have the experience of total darkness in your life, the answer is probably very rarely. I think it fills a gap for the audience if we present them with this situation. It makes a very strong emotional reaction with our bodies.147

Haas’s use of darkness in *in vain*, as well as in several other works, cannot be explained succintly and without contradictions. Although he turns off the lights in a work in which he explicitly claims to address the rise of the far-right – of *obscurantism* – in European politics, the darkness is nevertheless not strictly a denouncing element. It would make sense to make the parallel between the music played in the dark and the symbolically regressive, and yet Haas both contradicts that (as will be discussed below) and offers much more to the listener through his handling of the concept. Just like silence in Material B comes to represent more than the absence of sound, darkness in both of its occurrences in the piece (on pages 82 and 163) comes to embody more than the obscure, the regressive, the

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147 Enright, "The Living Beings of Sound,” 50.
denounced. Before a further analysis of *in vain’s* two Darknesses, I will briefly unpack the complex and contradictory content behind the concept.

### 2. Theorizing Darkness

Darkness, like fire, hides numerous contradictory and parallel interpretations. In the same way as fire soothes and terrifies, cooks and burns, cleans and eradicates, darkness enhances the senses and terrorizes, is our basic condition and our worst fear, symbolizes peace, rest, but also regression and backwardness. An entire dissertation would barely scratch the surface of the topic, and yet I’m going to attempt to introduce some of the associations and interpretations of darkness found in the literature.

“The most obvious influence of night is to limit what we can see and do, and for me this seems to foster the kind of awareness in which creative work can grow,” writes American author John Daniel. In his essay, “In Praise of Darkness,” he describes his experience during a four-and-a-half-month experiment in solitude in which he retreated to a cabin in Oregon’s Rogue River wilderness to write. Like Haas did in the aforementioned statement, he describes walking through nature at night, and the acclimation to darkness he experienced as minutes went by, perhaps rooted in humanity’s original subjection to night’s utter darkness.

Our age is hostile to night and to all things dark – and so, paradoxically, we make night darker. [...] And what am I but a perfect likeness of modern enlightened man when I hike or ski by headlamp, peering ahead in the bondage of my narrow light beam oblivious to the rest of the cosmos, accompanied at times by the annoying moths just as monomaniacally addicted to light as I am?  

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150 Ibid., 621.
As time went by, Daniel’s sleep pattern began resembling that of people in the pre-industrial world, in that it occurred in two phases, with a brief but significant period of awakening in the middle of the night. He describes the qualitative difference between blind and enlightened cognition:

There is a blindness in [illuminated] seeing. My vision catches on the surfaces of things, gets snagged and tugged about by their multiplicity. As I watched the trees in darkness it was not distinctions I saw but their commonality, not their names I knew them by but their essential namelessness. Backed by the planet’s drop of liquid light and the first few stars, they announced their membership in a wilderness vaster than daylight eyes can apprehend, a wilderness to which I too belong. I felt closer to them. They seemed to have crept nearer.\textsuperscript{151}

While the preceding comments are generally focused on the visual and the semantically clear (such as trees, but also defined objects), they can nevertheless be applicable to the visual dimension of a musical performance. The spatialization of music, which we experience so accurately through our sophisticated hearing apparatus,\textsuperscript{152} is frequently reaffirmed through sight. The removal of the ability to watch performers as they labor to produce the music isolates listeners and forces them to accept a higher level of uncertainty, or at the very least their inability to “see for themselves.” In turn, as with Daniel’s trees, the musical material becomes less specific, or perhaps its specificity becomes less consequential. The gestures merge into a whole, drawing the audience nearer – as Daniel would have argued.

Speaking more recently, in a conversation about Haas’s third string quartet, JACK’s previous cellist, Kevin McFarland, states that “the submissive person who is willingly giving over his or her agency can be getting precisely what he or she wants,” adding that “in the darkness there’s a subspace that the audience can enter.”\textsuperscript{153} This sub-space can be understood as a niche, or an embedded territory,

\textsuperscript{151} Daniel, “In Praise of Darkness,” 620.


\textsuperscript{153} Woolfe, “A Composer and His Wife: Creativity Through Kink.”
and yet not an entirely new one. In the nineteenth century, for example, “it was common for inexpensive portraits to be drawn as silhouettes, the subject’s head shown in profile as a sharply defined solid shadow.” Thoreau also associated darkness with spirit. He would often walk around at night because he found it “necessary to see objects by moonlight as well as sunlight, to get a complete notion of them.” Outside at dusk, he wrote, “I begin to distinguish myself, who I am and where… I recover some sanity. The intense light of the sun unfits me for meditation, makes me wander in my thoughts. […] Our spiritual side takes a more distinct form, like our shadow which we see accompanying us.” Daniel lists countless examples of poets, writers, and even saints (such as St. John of the Cross, a 16th-century Spanish saint imprisoned for his heresies who wrote of night as the “sweet guider” that brought him closer to God). Goethe and other German Romantics, Walt Whitman, the American poet of night Robinson Jeffers, and Emily Dickinson are all listed in his musings about darkness’s place in literature, with the constant reverberation of the importance of darkness in achieving a multi-faceted and complete picture. This echoes Alex Ross’s description of in vain, in that it “transforms the concert hall into a place of shuddering mystery, suggesting that the way of truth goes through the dark.”

Darkness as purveyor of perspective, without which no view or understanding of a subject/situation is complete, stands in contrast with Darkness as facilitator, or perhaps as enhancer. It has long been the subject of conjecture whether the loss of one of the senses may result in the over-development of another. Further derivations of the question are to be found throughout history, such as the so-called Molyneux’s Problem, in which the Irish scientist and politician William Molyneux asked John Locke

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155 Ibid., 623.
156 Ross, “Darkness Audible.”
“whether a man who has been born blind and who has learnt to distinguish and name a globe and a cube by touch would be able to distinguish and name these objects by sight, once he had been enabled to see.” 

Thinkers and writers continue attempting to answer this question today, with summaries of different approaches and methods over the centuries easily filling several books on the topic.

The French philosopher Michel Serres, in discussing the problem and what he considers to be the non-handicap of blindness, richly conjures the Greek myth of Argus Panoptes (from whose name is derived the Panopticon, much discussed in recent centuries), whose entire body was covered with eyes in such a way that he never slept and was always vigilantly surveilling Zeus. The latter, desperate to evade Panoptes, enlists the help of Hermes, inventor of fire, but also of the lyre, and therefore, in Serres’s interpretation, of music. Hermes begins to play the flute to Panoptes in what Serres considers to be a struggle between the arts of hearing and of sight. The music was so beautiful and moving that Panoptes’s eyes filled with tears, allowing Hermes to approach and kill him. Serres defends the sense of hearing over that of sight, denouncing our over-emphasis on vision: the words theory or intuition for example, in their Greek or Latin origins, both come from “vision,” or “sight.” Further, he underlines our familiarity with words that refer to people who have lost their sense of sight or hearing over those that indicate the loss of odor and taste (anosmia and ageusia respectively).

Serres also argues that while sighted people see the world in perspective, blind people see it in relief. He distinguishes between two worlds, that inhabited by the sighted and that inhabited by the blind: they are not the normal and abnormal worlds, nor the correct and the incorrect worlds (which evokes Haas’s approach to, well, everything), but rather two different entities valid in their own right.

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He decries the “squareness” of our contemporary world, in which we build perpendicular streets, cubes, squares. “Rigid, we inhabit slabs; supple, you haunt sails;¹⁶⁰ we are of the plane, you are of the fold; we the flat, you the relief; we the vertical walls, you clothes and hessians. We are masons, painters, surveyors; you are musicians, sculptors, weavers. […] We walk in the rigid; you swim in the fluid, this fluid that allows the cube and the sphere to resemble one another.”¹⁶¹ Michel Serres may as well be describing Haas’s aesthetic in these passages, so focused on the fluidity of approach and on amalgamating supposedly distinct concepts.¹⁶²

The theory that blindness – or a simulation of it through the usage of darkness – serves to enhance our other senses has been explored in several artistic endeavors. Since the late nineties, establishments offering dark dining experiences have proliferated across the world from Switzerland where

a blind clergyman, Jorge Spielmann, started a dark restaurant where the patrons could experience for a short time what it was like to be blind. This concept, which can trend toward marketing gimmick, has been copied by restaurateurs in Europe, North America, and Asia. The emphasis is less on sharing the experience of blindness and more on exploring the supposed heightening of the senses of taste, smell, and touch that occurs when sighted people are deprived of vision.¹⁶³

In his book *The Omnivorous Mind*, John S. Allen discusses the important role played by sight in our perception of taste. He quotes several neurological studies that seek to explore the relationships between our different senses and ways in which taste can be enhanced through the limiting of sight and through chemicals, but also through craving and hunger. Whether these elaborate correlations have

¹⁶⁰ “Voiles,” also translatable to “veils.”
¹⁶¹ “Les Entretiens des Aveugles de France,” 15. (Translation my own)
¹⁶² Serres’s speeches and writings on the topic are very rich and varied, and deserve much more elaboration and space than I have room for in the current paper.
their equivalent when it comes to hearing (as in the *taste* component of sound, equivalent to the difference between the detection of flavor and forming an opinion about it) is uncertain at this point, but the potential of a similar experience in hearing explains Haas’s interest in exploring this concept through his work.

Darkness’s antonym, or dualistic partner, is light. The Second Darkness of *in vain*, to be discussed below, is interrupted by the aggressive flashing of sharp colors onto the audience. The lights abruptly turn on and off, and can be quite jarring to experience, in my opinion. By juxtaposing darkness with such vivid and artificial lighting, Haas displays this opposition in its most extreme manifestations. This juxtaposition also allows for a few secondary observations. The usage of lighting effects in music is, at this point, quite old. Not only has it always played a role in ritualistic ceremonies and theatrical performances of which music is an important part (theatre, opera, but also some religious services), but examples of the usage of colors in concert pieces abound during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Scriabin is a notorious case: his *Prometheus*, a large work for piano, orchestra, optional choir, and Chromola (a color organ), calls for the usage of a light show as opulent as it is specific. Similar ideas can be found in none other than Wyschnegradsky, who was no doubt influenced by his elder compatriot’s aesthetics, and who placed colors at the core of both his harmonic language (going beyond Scrabin’s ‘*harmonie-couleur*’) and his concept of ‘*surart,∗’ in which a “synthesis not of different art forms, but of artistic sensations [lead us] to something we have dubbed ‘*surart,∗’ and that must combine art, religion, philosophy, and society”.164 A more recent example is Martin Creed’s *Work No. 227*, which caused controversy after being shortlisted for the Turner Prize prize in 2001.165 The

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installation, a room in which lights go on and off every five seconds, explores the sensation changes that occur when people are suddenly plunged into utter darkness.

In *From Light to Dark*, Tim Edensor discusses the ubiquity and overlooked importance of darkness and of light in our world, exploring the two concepts from the perspectives of geography and urbanization. In doing so, he introduces a crucial distinction between light and illumination, the former referring to natural light (as in originating from the sun, for example), and the latter ranging between small candles and Times Square’s neon extravaganza. The strong flashes of light at the end of the Second Darkness appear more fitting in the illumination category, leaving open the question of whether it is possible to find “natural light” in the work: would the concert hall’s basic, usually-well-thought-out apparatus that accompanies most performances, be considered natural? Or are the only specimens to be extracted from the musical content itself (in Material B’s lucid harmonies, for example, as discussed by Simon Rattle in Chapter 3)?

Darkness, like time, has been strangely neglected in theory. “There are virtually no time specialists in anthropology […] [because] time is curiously invisible and constitutes one of the most taken-for-granted features of our lives.” And yet darkness is dark matter, of which the universe seems to be mostly composed, invisible and so far undetectable. It is also the world’s primal, formless state in Genesis: “The earth was without form; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. […] And God said, Let there be light; […] and [He] divided the light from the Darkness.” Dividing the two, or ignoring one and assuming the omnipotence of the other (as Edensor argues society does by

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conjuring mental images of space and geography almost strictly in light – which Haas puts into question in relation to concert halls)\textsuperscript{169} is a common attitude. Haas himself partook in such division, such as in his opera \textit{Morgen und Abend}, premiered in 2015 at the Royal Opera House in London. He states not seeing

night-time as a romantic concept of sweet dreams, but more as a continuation of the concept of being surrounded by darkness, in the sense of being mentally deranged – as a moment of grief, hopelessness, darkness. The “night side” of things is essential to my music. This concept describes something that plays a major role in my spiritual consciousness (and probably that of many other people as well).\textsuperscript{170}

Haas considers the usage of darkness in his third string quartet, \textit{In iij. Noct}, for example, as a crucial partner to the Gesualdo quotation that occurs near the end of the piece. They are both necessary and complementary, for darkness is not a thing into itself, and is meant to be understood in the bigger context of the piece. In later works, he gives light a more prominent place, such as in his \textit{Hyperion: Concerto for Light and Orchestra} (2006), in which he tackles “the perception of light – as a musical instrument.”\textsuperscript{171}

Before moving on to an analysis of \textit{in vain}’s two Darknesses, I would like to briefly mention one of the many ramifications on the subject that shall remain unexplored in this paper, but which could easily become the topic of a different study on Haas’s aesthetic.\textsuperscript{172} I refer to the rich connection between darkness, light, and an \textit{esoteric} component to musical composition, crucial to a good

\textsuperscript{169} \textit{“The key objects of geographical analysis, space, place, and landscape, are thoroughly shaped by the light or darkness that suffuses them. It is as if these geographical entities were, by default, conceived as being washed in a neutral daylight rather than being dynamically conditioned by vital light and dark.”} Tim Edensor, \textit{From Light to Dark: Daylight, Illumination, and Gloom} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), viii.

\textsuperscript{170} Rögl, \textit{“On the magic of ‘pure’ intervals,”} 12.

\textsuperscript{171} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{172} Darkness is also a very potent topic in post-colonial studies, and examples of the association of darkness (or blackness) with pejorative connotations abound in the literature. This side topic, while it plays an important role in our contemporary understanding of darkness, is only very indirectly connected to \textit{in vain}. 
understanding of composers such as Webern, Schoenberg, and many others – including Haas, although less self-professedly so.

3. in vain’s Two Darknesses

As previously stated, the concert hall lights are extinguished twice over the course of in vain – which I have dubbed the First and Second Darknesses. The first occurs gradually, beginning on page/measure 70, with the indication “the light grows darker until measure 75 (without limiting the legibility of the conductor’s score).” By page 76, the scores indicate “dunkel bzw. wenig Licht” (‘dark or little light’), and the notation changes: the 4/4 meter is replaced by a temporal score. Instrumental entrances are coordinated in relation to one another, with performers expected to memorize their parts and their relations to others’. For example, the first horn on page 76 is expected to begin playing a D4 when the double bass finishes a glissando from C#2 to D2 (through microtonal intermediaries – including a C#-1/6th-tone sharp). Haas supplies the general pacing of instrumental entrances, indicating on top of page 76 that “the individual entries of the winds follow one-another at a temporal distance of 10 seconds.” All string instruments are active in this passage, the majority sustaining a *sempre non vibrato* chord throughout, with a few select performers instructed to alter their pitches, through a crescendo and a glissando, in close conjunction with the wind players, who only play in those moments. As such, the large chordal block sustained by the strings can be said to become less

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173 Esoteric is the knowledge reserved to those who can decipher the signs in use in a work. Laurence Wuidar, ed., *Music and Esotericism* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2010), 3.

174 Haas described not feeling drawn to Pressl’s esoteric compositions as well as not being interested in the potential for mysticism in Pythagorean numbers in relation to just intonation, and despite the anecdotal 24:25 observation regarding the number of performers in the work as discussed earlier.

175 “bis zu Takt 75 allmählich immer dunkler werden (ohne die Lesbarkeit der Noten und die Sichbarkeit des/der DirigentIn einzuschränken)” (translation my own). Haas, *in vain*, 70.

176 Haas, *in vain*, 76.
noticeable, framing the smaller events and microtonal fluctuations that come to disturb the music’s steady and static surface.

Appendix C shows, in a table, a summary of the events that occur over the course of the five pages that precede the major moment that upheaves the section: the harp solo. Amongst other parameters, the table shows the approximate duration meant to separate the individual wind entries: beginning at 10 seconds on page 76, the time intervals gradually shrink to 3-4 seconds by page 80, demonstrating how Haas is carefully and subtly shaping the material under an apparently steady surface. This change of pace constitutes one of the few otherwise differentiating features of the passage. The dynamic envelope remains largely steady, with the static background at \textit{ppp} and the instrumental swells that accompany pitch changes rising to a \textit{mf}. Those pitch shifts always involve microtonal pitches, which provide an important contrast to the 75 pages of strictly equal-tempered music that precede this dark section (Material A). The orchestration is slightly manipulated in order to create relatively memorable events, such as the tam-tam swell on page 77, or the accordion’s return on page 78 (after dropping out on page 76) or its noticeable swell on page 79. The instrumentation of the passage otherwise remains fairly even and steady. In tandem with the general pacing of the wind entries which seems to accelerate (in terms of the time intervals separating them as discussed above), the lowest voice, sustained by the double-bass (also indicated in Appendix C) steadily rises throughout the passage, beginning at C#/D on page 76, and rising to B by page 80. The evenness and subtleness of the bass’s climb is suddenly broken a few seconds before page 81 when the double bass F2 swiftly moves down a tritone to B1.

This leap of the bass voice is accompanied by the introduction of another new notation in some of the instruments above. The second violin, for example, is instructed to tune an A natural as the 7th
partial of B (the same B played in the bass). Other instruments in that final chord of page 80, most importantly the second viola’s F#4, remain tuned according to equal temperament. This slow and gradual introduction by Haas of Material B’s tuning system is interrupted on page 81 when a beam of light is suddenly flashed onto the harpist. As mentioned previously, the instrument is tuned justly, such that it is capable, through pedal changes, to perform in the ‘keys’ of C natural as well as the two keys a semi-tone above and below (Cb/B and C#/Db). The harp, tuned to the double-bass’s B, begins to pluck two and three-note chords, rhythmically notated, that constitutes in vain’s only solo material. The solo, carefully coordinated with other instruments still plunged in the dark, lasts just over a minute, and is followed, on page 82’s first system, by the piece’s first rest. What follows mirrors the preceding material’s emergence from equal temperament in that it already fits into Material B, prompting me to state earlier that the true boundary of Material B is debatable.

The emergence of light in such a subtle-yet-dramatic fashion (only over the harp at first) in fact mimics a sun-rise, with the piercing of the sun’s first rays – the only discrete moment of the entire process – contrasted with the elongated and gradual intensification of light that follows (and is also replicated in Haas’s score, with the instruction that light should be “growing brighter up to measure 88”). The harmonies, as shown in Appendix C, become justly-tuned, and are already separated by the rests that would so strongly characterize Material B, although the tempo changes remain absent, with the incomplete transition still making use of the temporal notation of this First Darkness section.

One way of reading into this simulation of a sunrise when discussing the dramatic shift from Material A to Material B would be to consider that Material B (just intonation, so staunchly defended by many composers such as Partch, Johnston, and others) is born after equal temperament plunged the

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177 Haas, in vain, 82.
state of music into a dark age (ruining harmony,\textsuperscript{178} and so on). However, such a reading is superficial and yields too easily to our temptation to square angles and to write things black on white. While equal temperament-based material preceded the First Darkness, it was nonetheless performed almost exclusively in the light, with short portions of the passage found in the transitional lighting phase, in much the same way as Material B’s early harmonies were performed in a slow shift of lighting intensity. The First Darkness’s content, on the other hand, does not fit into either of the two Materials, and is in fact – almost exclusively – \textit{transitional}. The tuning system seems to be slowly flexing, the over-active surface receding, allowing its paradoxically static character to settle and come to the foreground. As I will discuss in the next chapter, Haas reserves his first injection of darkness into the piece – an unequivocally central moment – not for Material A, nor for Material B, despite their protagonist roles in the unfolding of the work, but rather to the transition, shining the light on the importance of change and of hybridity in the piece.

As I put it in Chapter 3’s discussion of Material B, the static chordal harmonies of the section seem eager to develop. Microtonal fluctuations and outbursts of energy begin to taint the placid surface more and more often, making it as difficult to select an end-point for the section as it was to pick a starting one. The development that follows Material B is long and sinuous, and a closer analysis of its unfolding is featured in Chapter 5. To allow a better understanding of the Second Darkness, however, I will briefly summarize three consequential aspects of pages 101 to 163 here.

First is the directionality of development of the surface material in terms of where it originated. For example, the descending lines found in the brass starting in measures 240-243 (and their inversion found in measure 458, for example) are clearly derived from Material A’s fast descending flourishes,

\textsuperscript{178} Duffin, \textit{How Equal Temperament Ruined Harmony}. 
and are applied to Material B’s static justly-tuned chords. In other words, parameters/characteristics taken from one material (in this case A) are applied to the other. What quickly becomes clear – and with heavy consequences on the global analysis of the piece – is that this process occurs almost exclusively in one direction: from Material A to B (with Material A almost never incorporating facets of Material B in its own development).

Second is the systematic pattern of setting up the listener’s expectations and invariably thwarting them. Haas manipulates important precedents, such as the emergence of sustained chords in the midst of Material A, or – more importantly – what occurs when the lights are out, by reusing the same procedures – in the several returns of Material A – with a different outcome. These recurring deceptions (albeit largely subconscious ones) experienced by the listener in small, discrete moments of the piece, contribute to the general idea of the piece and its title, which is therefore the result of much more than a singular event, namely the recurrence of Material A at the very end of the piece, as is frequently stated by commentators, including Haas himself.

This regular recurrence of Material A constitutes a third important aspect of the development, for it takes place a total of three times before the concert hall lights are extinguished for the second time, between pages 123 and 148. The scope of each recurrence of the material varies, but the developmental potential within it, while self-referential (in that it only involves aspects derived from itself), is extremely memorable and important to the identity of the piece as a whole, as I will discuss in Chapter 5.

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179 Several more examples will be provided in Chapter 5.

With those things in mind, let us now turn our attention to page 162. As the music transitions towards the Second Darkness, around measure 508, the surface of the piece is undergoing the tempo equivalent of Shepherd Tones (with regular eighth-note rhythms decelerating with the tempo reaching its half speed before doubling back to its original value, and undergoing the same process again). The projectors illuminating the musicians and the stand lights are gradually extinguished, leaving only a small beam on the conductor which itself vanishes at measure 530, leaving the performers in pitch-darkness as they tackle a long section strictly from memory. The temporal notation is reintroduced – with variations, since many performers are given independent instructions as to tempo and pacing. The music remains tightly controlled, however, as Haas specifies which instrumental events (or cues) performers should be listening for an indication of when to begin playing. Specific instruments are also still given temporal durations in seconds. For example, on page 164, string instruments enter somewhat loosely (as long as their entrances are carefully staggered) over the course of eight seconds. The two trombones then enter on pitches that belong to a Bb overtone chord. Their entrance is meant to coincide with and support the crescendo swell in the strings, as Haas clearly indicates in the score.181

Over the course of the next pages, several of the important materials derived during the development section are used and taken to climactic proportions. The repeated note figure, derived from Material A’s fast scalar material and Material B’s chordal stasis (in other words, an active surface, rhythmically speaking, with a static and repetitive pitch and harmonic content), first found explicitly on pages 159-162, slightly before the Second Darkness, saturates the opening few pages of the Second Darkness, from pages 164-167. Sustained pitches are introduced in their midst in some of the winds as partials of a big C overtone chord. The repeated note figures (or tremolos) are rather abruptly

181 “das cresc. von 2.+3. Vi, 2. Va. und 2 Vc. etwas unterstützen (ca. 5 sec nach dem Maximum des ersten Streicher crescendos beginnen)”
abandoned on page 168,\textsuperscript{182} at rehearsal 1, as a truly shocking event occurs: an intense beam of light is suddenly flashed onto the audience on the “downbeat” of the page. The score indicates that during performances in which such lighting effects are impossible, a signal by the conductor has to be arranged (see page 168 of the score). Complete darkness quickly engulfs the flash of light, as a loud \textit{(ff)} harp glissando rings across the stage, while the strings’ tremolo notes undergo two important transformations: the first is that they merge into the C overtone chord introduced at the end of page 167, and the second is that the pitches begin regularly sliding upwards as each instrument climbs the partials of the C overtone chord. Forty seconds later (at rehearsal 2, still on page 168), the flash of light happens again, and will continue to do so at ever-shorter time intervals, shown in Figure 4.1. Haas’s treatment of the time-intervals separating these flashes closely resembles that of several other parameters in the piece, some of which will be discussed in Chapter 5. The irregular but long-term directionality of the material serves to drive the music towards climaxes of sorts. The failure to deliver such climaxes, such as occurs when these dramatic, rhythmic lighting effects are replaced by a brutal return of the concert hall’s full lights at page 178, measure 530, are in alignment with the thwarting of expectations discussed above. Over the course of these pages, two important events take place: the first is the introduction of several layers of slower, repeated-note figures, meant to be staggered and uncoordinated. Each accelerates independently of the others, as this rattling of the music's surface is contrasted with sustained chords derived from Material A, such as can be found in the piano on page 173, rehearsal 14, for example. These sustained pitches eventually come to dominate the surface after rehearsal 16, as Haas juxtaposes the equal-tempered tuning with just intonation, over and over again, allowing massive chordal blocks to clash and reverberate with rich and complex levels of \textit{Klangspaltung} and ear-bending contrasts. The dynamic levels reached at page 173 retreat, as Material

\textsuperscript{182} They are in fact repurposed as double-stopped tremolos in the strings, with their speed no longer changing.
B’s chordal blocks, interspersed with broad glissando sweeps linking chords, once again exhibit the paradox of rising individual *lines* (such as on page 175, rehearsal 17, with the first trombone’s E4 rising to an F#4) and regularly descending chordal *roots* (the F# overtone chord followed by an F natural, Eb on page 176, D, C, and so on).

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Duration in secs</th>
<th>40</th>
<th>35</th>
<th>31</th>
<th>28</th>
<th>25</th>
<th>22</th>
<th>18</th>
<th>22</th>
<th>24</th>
<th>32</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Duration (ctd.)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>8.75</td>
<td>8.25</td>
<td>7.75</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4.1. Plot of time intervals (in seconds) separating the brief light flashes in the Second Darkness (pages 168-178).*

These chordal blocks, like the light flashes, undergo a long-term accelerando such that by the time the concert hall’s lights are back on, on page 178, the chords last a few seconds each at most. I have discussed in Chapter 1 that Haas’s conception of overtone chords, unlike composers from the French spectral school, is strongly focused on these strictly harmonic (in other words is made up strictly of partials) harmonies’ ability to fuse and blend. As such, time becomes a crucial factor in allowing these harmonies to “lock in.” In discussing this specific passage, Haas asserts that by accelerating the tempo and the rate at which these chords follow one another, he manages to destroy the music’s basic character, which I would add is an equivalent to *censorship.*

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I think that the perception of microtonal structures is closely connected with the compositional use of time. The same event may be perceived quite differently in different tempi, depending on whether the time is available for the special intonation quality of the music to “lock in” or not. Towards the end of *in vain*, I compose a large-scale process, which begins with slow glissandi, always rising from one overtone chord to the next. At the same time the fundamental descends in contrary motion. . . . Then the glissandi disappear and only the falling overtone chords remain, becoming faster and faster. The fundamentals always remain within the tempered system. The overtones are therefore outside of this system. When the distance between two chords shortens to a duration of about one second, these intonation differences of the overtones become more and more disturbing, while at the same time it becomes more difficult for the performers to realize them. [...] The overtone chord character is gradually lost, and finally everything ends in a very fast moving tempered twelve-tone vortex.184

The return to equal temperament takes place on pages 178-179, around the time when the lights are turned back on. The immense surge of energy that took place during those several minutes of darkness crystallize in series of short justly-tuned chords that collapse from within, as the entrances fail to both align and coalesce into a single unity. The subsequent alignment of attacks (and return to homophony), on measures 534-536 is sabotaged, as it were, by the chords’ short durations.

This brings me to my final point, and the reason why I consider Haas’s setting of precedents a crucial factor in manufacturing disappointment and frustration in listeners. By assigning the First Darkness such a crucially transformative role – in that it was when the lights first went out that we as listeners were propelled from a safely-equal-tempered tuning system into an entirely new realm (as far as the piece is concerned) – Haas is setting up the listeners’ expectations for the Second Darkness. In other words, when penetrating the Second Darkness, and especially given the massive developmental devices found within it, listeners come to expect a radical change to take place at the “end of the tunnel,” an expectation strengthened by previous experience, but also somewhat eroded by Haas’s regular deceptions along the way. As listeners, we are viscerally expecting something major to occur at

184 Ibid., 127-128.
the end of the section, despite the quiet foreboding that lingers.\textsuperscript{185} The consequences of the Second Darkness and of this heightened and thwarted sense of expectation is the key to unlocking \textit{in vain }'s entire form, as well as the political dimension I argue lies at the core of the work as a whole, both of which we will now explore in the final chapter of this analysis.

\textsuperscript{185} It is arguable whether two iterations of an event suffice to create a sense of expectation in the listener. The question is related to the transformation of Sonata Form in modern performances of works from the Classical Period in which the Exposition is not repeated or, in the case of later works, the repetition is altogether absent from the score. The question of whether only hearing the exposition once hinders the thwarting of the listener’s expectation during the Recapitulation is subject to debate. In this analysis, I will assume that the first hearing of the material suffices to elicit a strong sense of expectation in the listener, especially given the enhancement produced by darkness.
Chapter 5
Dialectics, Form, and the Political Dimension

1. On Dialectics and its Political Ramifications

Tasked with defining the word dialectics as a preliminary for our discussion about form, I find myself in a difficult situation, for the word offers different – and often contradictory – meanings. I will attempt to avoid unnecessary complications and an exposition of the term’s different definitions and applications, and straightforwardly restrict my presentation to the aspects and connotations of the word that help further our understanding of in vain.

Encyclopedia entries on dialectics offer such a broad history of the term that it becomes difficult and impractical to relate it here. Seeking a succinct definition, I turned to the dictionary, and amongst the six definitions the Merriam-Webster Dictionary offered, I retained:

Any systematic reasoning, exposition […], or argument that juxtaposes opposed or contradictory ideas and usually seeks to resolve their conflict: a method of examining and discussing opposite ideas in order to find the truth.186

In more concretely philosophical terms, the dictionary also offers a Marxist variation on the Hegelian usage of the word: “Development through the stages of thesis […], antithesis, and synthesis,”187 and that is the definition that best sums up my usage of the word dialectics. The term has long been an important core to leftist political ideology and philosophy. Marx used it extensively, but died without having published a much-needed clarification of his reconstruction of Hegel’s dialectical method, leaving his many followers forced to “construct [Marx’s] dialectic from his widely dispersed remarks on this subject and from the use to which he put dialectics in his theories.”188 Lenin once stated that

187 Ibid.
If one were to attempt to define in a single word the focus, so to speak, of the whole [Marx/Engels] correspondence, the central point at which the whole body of ideas expressed and discussed converges – that word would be *dialectics*.\(^{189}\)

The authors of “Introduction to Dialectics” themselves were forced to admit that a brief definition of the term is in fact impossible, since “there is no consensus on it.”\(^{190}\) Forced to provide a working definition from which to begin a lengthy discussion, they offered this “potted” version:

Dialectics is a way of thinking and a set of related categories that captures, neither misses nor distorts, the real changes and interactions that go on in the world. It also offers a method for investigating a reality so conceived, and of presenting our findings to others, most of whom do not think dialectically. Dialectics, therefore, doesn’t itself explain capitalism. Rather, it helps us see and investigate the capitalist relations and processes, of which we ourselves are part, as they have unfolded, are now unfolding, and have yet to unfold. Using dialectics – and with a lot of hard empirical research – we can develop a theory that can explain capitalism in its becoming. Marxism is such a theory.\(^{191}\)

This definition shows the extent to which the authors are focused on the political – and economical – ramifications of dialectics’ potential and use. The authors go further in stating that understanding Marxism *is* understanding dialectics, and that because of the “serious limits to how dialectical our thinking can become in a capitalist society, […] no society requires dialectics as much. […] Given the connection between dialectics and becoming class conscious, [helping people think more dialectically] is a necessary prerequisite for bringing any communist future into existence.”\(^{192}\)

Looking at a more recent, music-related philosophical context, one finds dialectics in use extensively in Adorno’s work, for example, such as in his *Philosophy of Modern Music*. In the introduction, Adorno describes basing the book on the dialectical principle adhered to by Walter Benjamin in his book on the German tragedy: “The history of philosophy viewed as the science of

\(^{189}\) Ibid.

\(^{190}\) Ibid., 334.

\(^{191}\) Ibid.

\(^{192}\) Ibid., 335.
origins is that process which, from opposing extremes, and from the apparent excesses of development, permits the emergence of the configuration of an idea as a totality characterized by the possibility of a meaningful juxtaposition of such antitheses inherent in these opposing extremes.”¹⁹³ In Adorno’s case, this meant the sole consideration of Stravinsky and Schoenberg in his discussion of “modern music,” with the belief that everything contained in between the two extremes these composers represent is embedded within them, and is therefore not in need of explicit mention. This indeed echoes Schoenberg’s statement in the foreword to his *Three Satires for Mixed Chorus*: “The middle road is the only one which does not lead to Rome.”¹⁹⁴

It is interesting to ponder whether Haas would agree with Schoenberg’s statement, for on the one hand, the middle road can be understood to mean flexibility and compromise, which Haas demonstrates in his refusal to commit himself to a single compositional school of thought, and in his propensity to change hats (and techniques) whenever this suits the music at hand. On the other hand, the middle road also represents moderation, strangely absent in *in vain*, for example – at least in the manner in which the piece is set up – and its radically different sound-worlds. Regardless, there is a clear methodological similarity between Adorno’s rationale of pitting Stravinsky against Schoenberg – in order to transgress the extremes they represent and arrive at a synthesis, in other words a more global and general view of “modern music” (Western contemporary classical music, that is) – and *in vain*’s clash of two self-contained and yet deeply related musical realms: both methods are dialectical at their core, and both are therefore focused on the end product of such a process, in other words, the result of the synthesis of the two extremes.


¹⁹⁴ Ibid.
The word dialectical can be applied to concepts and parameters that greatly vary in scope, in much the same way that dynamics, harmony, density, and many other musical parameters can be analyzed on a micro- or macro-level (and many other levels in between). For example, as I have mentioned above, Haas often treats tempo and rhythm dialectically in the piece. Tempo, like meter, is a foundational element of a piece of music, in that it exists in the deeper layers of the material. Put differently, tempo and meter cannot manifest themselves directly, but are always expressed through other events/parameters (such as rhythm, harmonic rhythm, dynamics, articulation, and more). Rhythm, on the other hand, exists on the music’s surface, and is inserted (as content) into the context provided by meter and tempo. As such, there exists a dialectical relationship between the two, in that they both express pacing and speed (they both represent specific events – pulses, beats, icti, etc – that occur through time, whether regularly or irregularly). Their antithetical relationship is due to the fact that they belong to different hierarchical depth-levels of composition: in the foreground and the background.

At several points over the course of *in vain*, Haas manipulates these differences in such a way as to arrive at the same ends through opposite means. For example, on page 162, Haas notates repeated eighth-note rhythms (repetitive and static) while regularly changing the tempo (directional): the result is a fluctuating pace of delivery of the lines as they are experienced by the listener. This fluctuation is identical in the opposite situation in which Haas notates 75 measures of fixed tempo and meter in which individual lines are provided rhythms of increasing/decreasing number of notes per beat (tuplets). The tuplet changes, which are surface-level events, negate the music’s foundation’s stasis, providing the listener with the same undulating pace as in the first case. Haas thus maintains the ends despite reversing the means.

Many other examples of this technique are found in *in vain*, as described in previous chapters, such as Haas’s treatment of the music’s surface in the opening 75 pages of the piece, in which all
flourishing lines are descending, and the plotting of the long-term development of the register reveals that the global registral envelope is actually rising. A final example I will mention (not for lack of others) is provided by the dichotomy between the fusing (theoretical) unity of Material B’s large overtone chords, and the embellishments and microtonal fluctuations that occur on the individual, instrumental level. A similar – and more extreme – example of Haas exploiting the relationship between the individual and the collective is found in his 1994-1996 piece(s) “…Einklang freier Wesen…” The work is scored for ten instruments with one important distinction: it can be performed by the ensemble, but can also be presented as solo pieces or smaller combinations.

As mentioned above, both short and long-term applications of dialectics are possible. Einklang freier Wesen’s entire form and concept is arguably determined by the dialectical relationship between the solo parts and the tutti work. In in vain, Haas treats several of the discrete and limited musical events in the same logic (as in he does so dialectically). Most important for our analysis, however, is the implication of labelling the whole form of in vain as dialectical. Given the word’s deep political – specifically leftist – connotation, this simultaneously enriches the piece and provides a much-needed explanation of its political dimension, or meaning, often mentioned but rarely thoroughly explained.

Whether Haas’s use of dialectics in the piece hides a leftist agenda – or undertone – is bound to the realm of conjecture and is not my main point of focus. Instead, I would underline the inherent parallel between dialectics and the traditional political system, typically formed by a left and a right. The interaction between the two provides the impetus for change and what in French is called alternance, which is the “regular succession in power of political parties or coalitions […]. Alternance is facilitated by the existence of a two-party system and the usage of a majority voting process.”195 In

195 “Alternance,” Dictionnaire Larousse en ligne, 2017. (Translation my own)
other words, dialectics, through the opposition of two elements, mimics the theoretical functioning of the political process as it is found in much of the Western world.

Much of *in vain*’s twist, however, lies in the fact that this dialectical process fails (intentionally, on Haas’s part). Why I consider it to have failed and how this is achieved will be discussed below. The ramifications of this failure – specifically politically speaking – are themselves as complex and multifaceted as all other things to do with Haas’s work. Namely, is the failure of the process an indictment of its protagonists (or perhaps a single one of them)? I feel tempted to agree, but Haas telling his student “this is not the wrong piano and the right piano” during the composition lesson echoes through my mind dissuasively. Is *in vain* denouncing the regular erosion of social progress in our societies, and the inevitable slippage of the political spectrum towards the extreme right? Or is it denouncing the very nature of our political system? I believe a unique and final answer is not possible, but would venture an interesting parallel (to add credence to the last interpretation) in Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics*, which attacks Hegel’s more “positive” approach, and “flouts tradition, […] [seeking] to free dialectics from such affirmative traits without reducing its determinacy.”

Put simply, Hegel’s – and Plato’s, and many others’ – dialectics, which seek knowledge through the opposition of two categories, inevitably lead to the integration of the two’s identities into a greater, broader, new one that encompasses the two while nevertheless going beyond them. Adorno greatly denounced this positive aspect of dialectics through which the resultant sum was greater than its parts, and argued for what he termed a negative dialectic. “Dialectics is the consistent sense of nonidentity,” and most crucially, it is applied not – only? – to exterior objects of knowledge, but to the process of thought – or in our case, to the political system – itself.

197 Ibid., 5.
Various – contradictory – interpretations of both Haas’s use of a dialectical process and the failure of this process are therefore possible. In the next section, I will complete the analysis of the development section that precedes the Second Darkness in order to better explain what I have described as the failure of the dialectical process, after which I will revisit the political dimension of the piece by examining it in relation to other political composers’ works in an attempt to establish how and whether in vain works as a political statement.

2. Form and the Failure of the Dialectical Process

Haas’s usage of dialectics in in vain is heavy in consequences, including for the political content of the piece. It also provides a clear conception of the form, despite Haas’s declaration in an interview that his forms are “very, very bad.”

I decided 25 years ago to stop the construction of forms and to replace this process by just listening to the organic development of the sounds, of the living beings of sound. […] If you analyze my music based on the traditional aesthetic categories you would have to say that my forms are very, very bad. But I am proud they’re bad, because I know so many composers who make extremely good constructed forms that are terribly boring. Given the choice, I prefer to write bad forms rather than boring forms.\textsuperscript{198}

The use of a dialectical process in a piece of music does not necessarily give the form a pre-defined shape, on the other hand. There are many ways of exploiting the conflict between the two opposed parties/materials, with the process of overcoming the separation serving as the driving force for the work as a whole without necessarily prescribing the exact manner in which this should be done.

However, a work’s outcome – or its general conclusion – becomes heavily reliant on this achievement. I believe I have sufficiently shown above the dialectical foundation of in vain, by examining Materials A and B separately, and by highlighting the importance of transitions and transformation in the piece, something Haas was no doubt underscoring when he decided to turn the

\textsuperscript{198} Enright, "The Living Beings of Sound,” 53.
concert lights off during the first and most significant transition. Material B begins to transform shortly after beginning (as I have discussed above) and is followed by a lengthy development section in which characteristics of some materials are repurposed and applied to other parameters and other materials. I will now turn my attention to this development section and describe its most significant moments.

The closing measures of what I have termed Material B in Chapter 3 feature the stacking of a large, equal-tempered chordal block in the strings that seems taken straight out of Material A, against a justly-tuned Eb chord in the winds and brass (page 101). What follows is a similar trading back-and-forth between characteristics drawn from the two materials presented in the piece’s beginning in what may be described as a purely developmental approach – as it is found in the music of many standard canonical figures of Western classical music, from Mozart to Mahler. Page 105 sees the introduction of shorter rhythmic units in the lower strings, most of which converge towards a quarter-note. The second cello’s note values in measures 230 to 234 are shown in Figure 5.1 to illustrate the manner in which Haas treats the pitches’ durations. The long-term directionality of the passage, as the note-values converge towards a quarter-note, echoes Haas’s treatment of several other parameters in the piece thus far, such as the tuplets in Material A, but also the distances between wind entrances in the First Darkness mentioned above (Figure 4.1). The stacking of four independently fluctuating and yet undeniably pulsating layers (the two violas and the two cellos in the aforementioned passages) echoes Material A’s hidden pulse. That material’s more blatantly recognizable descending figures begin seeping into the material around page 107 in the brass. The intervallic content of the descending lines is strictly dependent on the overtone chords prevalent in such moments. The rate of descent is also increased gradually over the course of several pages. On page 110, these independent lines’ rate of change is transposed more globally as the full orchestra is split into two independently pulsating layers: the winds and brass versus the strings and percussion instruments (including the piano). The resultant
large G overtone chord, split across the orchestra, shimmers internally as it is constantly and aggressively re-articulated across the ensemble: the superficially active surface is contradicted by the passage’s globally static harmony, in other words Material A’s general characteristics are once again applied onto Material B.

<table>
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<th>1.58</th>
<th>1.32</th>
<th>1.08</th>
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<th>0.75</th>
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<th>0.66</th>
<th>0.75</th>
<th>0.75</th>
<th>1</th>
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</table>

![Plot of the second cello’s note duration progression in measures 230-234.](image)

Page 111 features a return of temporally notated material and a clever reiteration by Haas of his commitment to the ideas of transformation and transition in the piece: the short attacks in the strings, now homophonic, undergo a gradual accelerando that effectively connects the sustained pitches that characterize Material B to their paradoxical opposite: tremolo notes. In an approach reminiscent of Lachenmann’s music, Haas instructs the string performers to speed up their rate of attacks gradually until the surface energy becomes much more intense. Eventually, when the speed is so high that it becomes a tremolo, the level of activity quickly subsides, and the surface activity is subsumed by the overall stability of the lines: tremolo notes become roughly equivalent to sustained pitches, albeit with a slight timbral twist. This tendency to connect opposites, both through paradoxes (they are ultimately

199 One of the greatest examples that come to mind is *Guero*, in which single plucks (or attacks) are contrasted with a glissando, which is essentially a quick juxtaposition of dozens of such individual attacks. The piece exploits the dichotomy between the two by juxtaposing them as well as transforming the one into the other, while in so doing, evoking the percussion instrument’s characteristic sound.
very similar) and through transitions, is an important part of what I describe as a dialectical treatment of material. Haas also achieves this in this section by initially instructing each string player to undertake the accelerando independently of other string instruments, once again juxtaposing the individual and the collective.200

Page 114 sees the return of Material A’s stacked fifths/tritones equal-tempered harmonies, as well as the overlapping of these with justly-tuned chords in subsequent pages. The tempo also undergoes a curious change on this page, as it is halved to quarter-note equals 26. This technique foreshadows the upcoming tempo modulations Haas will be performing as he develops Material A. The glissandi in the strings found around page 115 increase in prominence until page 120 where, combined with the increasingly descending lines of the brass and the static character of Material B’s chords, lead to the saturation of the surface with tremolos. These become very important on pages 120-122, whether they feature small-note fluctuations (notated by Haas as trills, for example on page 122 in the winds) or wider tremolos (as found in the strings and percussion on that same page).

At this crucial point in the piece, an abrupt change occurs as Material A’s fast descending lines are reintroduced in the midst of page 123’s tremolos and sustained microtonal chords in the winds (which are neither justly-tuned, nor 12-tone equal-tempered, but a stacked, stable hybrid as found in the First Darkness). This amalgam of broad tremolos and fast flourishing descending lines continues until exhausting itself on page 128, with the reintroduction of static, justly-tuned chords. This change is short-lived, however, as the fast descending lines swiftly return on page 129 (briefly interrupted for one measure on page 131) slowly building up to a full-fledged Material A (strongly rooted in equal temperament) that lasts until page 139. An important difference between pages 131-139 and Material

200 “Ohne Koordination mit den anderen Streichern,” page 265 of the score.
A, however, is the absence of any sustained chordal material, as though Material A, resisting any sort of compromise with regards to Material B, went further than reappearing intact, in fact purging itself of any common characteristics it shares with its dialectical partner.

Page 139 sees the emergence of a sustained chord in the strings which, although it is quickly abandoned, provides yet another good example of Haas playing with the listener’s expectations: by carefully revisiting a previous configuration of the music’s surface, he sets up expectations as to its unfolding, expectations that he invariably thwarts, reaffirming the piece’s title. For example, after the injection of the sustained chord on page 139, the listener may come to expect the music (essentially Material A) to progress towards sustained chords as it did in the piece’s opening (pages 60-75). The abrupt subsequent purging of these sustained chords, however, denigrates these expectations, on the contrary progressing in the entirely opposite direction, as Haas isolates Material A’s most characteristic content: the fast descending lines.

What follows, beginning on page 143, is the first application by Haas of the pitch shift process (going up or down smoothly, usually in scales, as found from pages 131 to 143) to tempo as a preparation for a more thorough mapping of Material A’s Shepherd Tone characteristics onto the realm of tempo. The technique is introduced on page 142, where the music’s rhythm (the surface) speeds up to reach thirty-second notes. The tempo is then doubled on page 143, from 52 to 104, while the rhythms are halved. The tempo then begins to gradually slow over several pages while the instruments are given straight sixteenth notes (static rhythms against a shifting tempo versus the steady tempo with shifting rhythms of page 142), with several metric modulations in a row intended to slow the pace considerably. The tempo is gradually slowed to quarter-note equals 60 three times before being

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201 On pages 146, 147, and 148.
doubled to 120 as the rhythmic notation is halved, allowing Haas to slow the fast flourishing lines of Material A until they begin resembling Material B’s static sustained notes. This constitutes the reverse of the procedure that led the long sustained notes to a tremolo as described above. In other words, Haas is yet again traveling along the continuum that separates two different states, underlining manners in which they can be connected, and in the process both bringing them closer together while reaffirming their differences.

Beginning on page 149, an interesting contrast occurs as Haas stabilizes the tempo, nonetheless retaining the decelerating surface rhythm (in a written-out decelerando). The initial homophonic texture of measure 393 also collapses as we reach page 150 into several independent chordal blocks that swiftly modulate back to Material B’s static surface, albeit with Material A’s stacked chords of equal-tempered fifths and tritones (in other words, Material B, once again, adopting important characteristics of Material A). Page 152 features the development section’s only rest, which once again demonstrates Haas playing off our expectations: the vibraphone tremolo of measure 413, and the suspended chords that follow recall Material B’s beginning. The microtonal fluctuations of measures 419-420 accentuate this expectation, despite the absence of justly-tuned chords in this passage. Needless to say, this isn’t Material B at all, and this failure of the material to return, although occurring on such small scale in terms of the overall form of the piece, nonetheless contributes to the pattern of thwarted expectations that gives the piece its name.

Page 155 features a return of temporal notation, and is followed by a short yet strongly reminiscent harp solo in measures 442-444. This is followed by a re-emergence of justly-tuned chords on page 156 in the strings, followed by an inversion of the descending tendency of the brass instruments on page 157, as the lines begin to energetically climb the harmonic series ladder of the
chordal blocks, such as in measures 458-460 on page 157. The large Ab overtone chord is contrasted with an equal-tempered chord on the subsequent page, followed by a few back-and-forths over the course of several pages, which see the reintroduction of the tremolo idea. On page 159, for example, string instruments begin performing fast tuplets, repeating single notes, and gradually slowing down the ratio of the tuplets in a written-out decelerando against a steady tempo, ultimately connecting two sets of opposites: the fast rhythmic attacks to long sustained pitches, as well as the equal-tempered harmonies of measure 475 (for example) to the justly-tuned chords of measure 479. This occurs several times over the next few pages, including using percussion instruments. This dramatic-looking/sounding gesture encapsulates the tempo process of pages 143-149 (with the long metric modulations), the descending lines of Material A (and by now much more, as it is found everywhere), and the two tuning systems that bookend the gesture – and the piece’s dialectical process.\textsuperscript{202} This compacted, broad, written-out ritenuto is repeated once more on page 162 where three metric modulations (again combining tempos of quarter-note equals 120 slowing down to 60 before being doubled, and so forth) over the course of seven measures, as the surface rhythm slows to a homophonic half-note that itself continues to slow down until the end of page 163 at which point the house lights are completely out and the Second Darkness is underway.

As discussed above, the Second Darkness plays an important role in two ways: first, it exploits the precedent set by the First Darkness (and the manufacture of expectations), and signals an important change to come. Second, it features important developments in the handling of parameters, as Haas takes most of the processes to their climactic extremes. The clash of tuning systems is blatant, including at the very onset of the section, on page 164, where the piano and accordion reiterate the repeated note gesture that gradually slows down by performing broad chords with stacked fourths and

\textsuperscript{202} Such as on page 159.
tritones. This shimmering layer is juxtaposed with chords in the strings that are built on Bb and E fundamentals. The tritone that separates the two roots further demonstrates the seeping-through of characteristics, as the intervalllic content of Material A (present in the piano and accordion) “infects” the justly-tuned chordal blocks.

The accelerando/decelerando found in the independent voices that combine to produce a large textural effect continues to be exploited in subsequent pages, as tremolos and fast rhythms dominate the surface of the music until page 168 and the first abrupt flash of light, as described above. The glissandi that then gradually begin to connect the tremolo overtones played by the strings, such as on page 170, also demonstrate the influence of Material A’s directional register handling, including the paradoxically static result, since despite the upward motion of most voices in this entire section (including the subsequent passage on page 175, discussed in chapter 4, in which the rising trombones pitches are countered by the descending fundamentals, in what Haas called “contrary motion”)

203 the unchanging C-fundamental overtone chord negates the expected effect of steadily rising voices, in much the same way that Material A’s stubbornly descending lines are countered by a roughly static and suspended texture.

I would in fact go further and name pages 168 to 173 the true climax of the piece. The abrupt light flashes initially signal to the listener/audience member the importance of this moment. Material B’s justly-tuned harmonies have adopted most of Material A’s core characteristics (the active surface, static background, ever-rising content, and so forth), leaving us on the brink of a new state of things; in other words a resolution, a synthesis, the arrival point of the piece’s dialectical process.

What instead occurs is the relatively fast unravelling of the situation and sabotage of the entire process. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, Haas describes slowly speeding up the overtone chords in such a way as it becomes both difficult for the performers to tune them accurately and quasi-impossible for the listener to perceive them as justly-tuned chords. As such, Material B’s tuning system falters and fails, ultimately reverting to a tempered tuning system – albeit one with quarter-tones (in other words still equal-tempered despite being microtonal).

I have already described the transition back to a fully lit concert hall and would now like to take a minute to discuss what occurs after the end of the Second Darkness in more detail. A quick glance at page 180 will convince the reader that those stacked descending lines (despite the occurrence of quarter-tones in some) constitute what is basically Material A. Haas composes the reverse tempo process found on page 162 (for example), by slowly and gradually speeding up the tempo. The regular quarter-notes notated on the score become eighth-notes on page 181 as the tempo reaches 120 before being halved. The same process occurs on pages 182 (tempo of 104 becomes 52) and 184-185 (same tempo relations) before settling on the Tempo Primo of quarter-note equals 60 on page 188, achieving the transition back to Material A in its identical first occurrence.

Similarly, the microtonal intervals mentioned on page 180, for example, remain deeply related to Material A. A quick glance at the first flute on measures 553-556 shows that the flute’s descending line is essentially a quarter-tone transposition of what is otherwise scalar material found in the opening of the piece (or more radically, in the oboe during those same measures). The microtonality of this passage is therefore not at all related to the type of tuning found in Material B (which would fit into the “overtone chords proportions” of Haas’s 2003 categories) while being directly derived from Material A’s equal-tempered material (both of which – the microtonal and strictly 12-tone – would fit into what
Haas calls “equal divisions of the octave”). In other words, this constitutes yet another development of Material A which stems solely from its own content, utterly disregarding Material B’s contribution to the equation. In subsequent pages, the evenness of the rhythms (contrasted with the fluctuating tempo) is also abandoned as the final (initial) tempo is reached on page 188. This shortly follows the appearance of the indication “Übergang zu temperierter Intonation”\(^{204}\) (“transition to tempered intonation”) in the flutes, for example, which expunges all microtonal intervals from the music.

What follows is the “cleaned-up” version of Material A, in which short appearances of sustained elements are quickly ignored and discarded, with only the strictly descending lines allowed in. The sustained materials’ appearances play two roles: first, they appear to plead for inclusivity, if not offer a short-lived resistance to their forced removal. Alternatively, they reinforce the sense of expectation/deception yet again by teasing the listener into hoping for a different outcome. The full list of these sustained sounds is: the tam-tam reverberating attack on page 189; the four-note A-overtone chord in the brass on pages 191-192 (accompanied by the same tam-tam hit); an Ab overtone chord also in the brass (also accompanied by the tam-tam) on page 193; the same gesture with an F# overtone chord (that includes the first flute and the violas, this time) on page 194; the same group (including the accordion) playing F then E and Eb chords on pages 195 to 196; and a final attempt on page 197 which result in a fully-sustained chord across the orchestra. The event, however, only serves to deceive the listener into believing a change is coming on, as the tempo procedure described above slowly unfolds on pages 198-202, again involving the quarter-tones in the flutes (for example), and once again leading to what is essentially Material A from page 203 onwards. Similar interjections with the tam-tam attack and the brass take place on pages 204, then 206-214 where the tempo process happens for a third time.

\(^{204}\) Page 184 of the score.
in exactly the same manner, before the process is abruptly interrupted on page 216, in what seems to be the musical equivalent of the word etcetera.

The recursive and inevitable repetition of Material A, including the mediation of sustained chords in its midst, the discarding of microtonal content, and the inevitable return to the tempo modulations do not constitute in themselves the “oppressive”\textsuperscript{205} return of material thought to be overcome, which Haas mentions in his discussions of the piece’s ending. The return of Material A itself at the end of the work does not constitute sufficient impetus to give the piece and its form the shape it has, either. Through the dialectical process put in place by the juxtaposition of these two opposed materials from the very onset of the piece, the expected outcome is carefully planned, with the listener expecting it to be an embodiment of both Materials A and B. The unfolding of the development, however, shows two unexpected factors that contribute to what I have termed the failure of the dialectical process: the unilateral chain of influence between the two materials – in other words, Material B has consistently demonstrated its ability to absorb characteristics from Material A (including what I described as the climax of the piece on pages 168-173) whereas Material A’s substantial developments could be the result of a different piece in which Material B would be altogether absent: they are strictly derived from Material A’s content, and it alone. Secondly, it fails in producing in a new material, which either synthesizes or goes beyond the two original ‘protagonists’ of the piece, instead offering a more purified and reactionary Material A, cleansed from any of Material B’s characteristics and influence.

3. in vain’s Political Dimension

The political content of a piece of music tends to be layered and multifaceted. It can moreover be differentiated based on whether it is found, unhampered, on the music’s surface, or on the contrary, if it is hidden deeper into the music’s more technical and structural foundations. For example, much of Copland’s music’s political content is supplied through the verbal and dramatic supplements to the music such as titles (Fanfare for the Common Man), stories with a political angle (Rodeo [gender equality], The Second Hurricane [race], Billy the Kid [poverty]), and more. The political dimension of Cornelius Cardew’s music, on the other hand, can be found in his technical and logistical approaches to his music-making, as theorized in his writings (Stockhausen Serves Imperialism) and projects (The Scratch Orchestra). Lachenmann’s music harbors a similar political component, which is to be found concretely in the manner in which he challenges institutions through his music (orchestras, opera houses, and so on), and more abstractly in the manner in which instrumental and compositional techniques are deconstructed in his works, as well as in his writings (“The ‘Beautiful’ in Music Today,” for example).

In other words, I differentiate between two categories of political pieces: pieces whose political content is found in the subject matter (titles, plot-lines, text, etc.) and others that are theorized as political through the manner in which the more abstract technique of composition illustrates political ideas and concepts. Haas’s music fits within the second category (and most specifically Lachenmann’s approach), in that its political dimension seems to be coded into the music rather

\[206\] The two categories do have in common the fact that their respective political content is usually accessible largely through paratextual means.
abstractly. This esoteric quality\textsuperscript{207} is nonetheless etically\textsuperscript{208} applied to him – in view of his denouncement of Pressl’s esoteric music, for example.\textsuperscript{209} I would argue, however, that the abstract and difficult-to-pinpoint political message is due to more than his personal choice of avoiding concretely communicating ideas, and has much to do with both Haas’s self-professed struggle with words and his propensity to encompass more than one point of view when setting up situations.

While discussing his decision at the age of seventeen to become a composer (and not a writer), he declared that his “decision […] might have had something to do with the fact that I noticed that I cannot express myself as precisely in words as in sounds.”\textsuperscript{210} Furthermore, he similarly rejected the idea of approaching writing a piece of music “with the aim of setting an aesthetic programme or a story to music. Sometimes it begins with moods. In the case of \textit{in vain} it was my consternation at the formation of a coalition government with the far right in 2000.”\textsuperscript{211} Haas is, after all, highly non-committal in his use of different traditions and schools of thought. This shows a deeply personal manner of self-expression, which involves integrating widespread schools of thought within his own way of thinking and composing.

In that context, it is interesting to compare his approach to Copland’s on two important levels. First, both composers considered the time for experimentation over, and were eager to make use of their elders’ discoveries. To Copland, for example, “the challenge was not to find new styles and techniques to distance contemporary composition from the music of the Romantic past, but to find new

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{207} As discussed in chapter 4, this refers to a rather elaborate system of ‘signs’ to be decoded by the informed listener in order to ascertain the music’s deeper, hidden “meanings” – if such a thing is possible.

\textsuperscript{208} “Emic” stands for “the believer’s point of view,” while “etic” for the use of scholarly, technical perspectives and terminologies. In other words, we can etically describe Haas’s music as esoteric (under the rubric “Western esotericism”) while acknowledging that he would have identified himself differently. Wuidar, \textit{Music and Esotericism}, 239.

\textsuperscript{209} Varga, \textit{Three Questions for Sixty-Five Composers}, 104.


\textsuperscript{211} Ibid., 15.
\end{flushleft}
audiences and modes of expression best suited for the modern present.” Haas is similarly more interested in drawing from the different approaches to microtonality developed by earlier composers rather than restricting himself to any one of them. The same can be said about his treatment of musical material, including in *in vain*, as I will discuss below: the more significant analytical facts have less to do with what Material A and B are, and more to do with what they become, and what Haas does with them.

The second interesting parallel between Haas and Copland has to do with the differences in how their political pieces are set up and open themselves up to interpretation. While Copland’s music has come to represent, to many, the ultimate “American sound,” the extent to which many of his works display his alignment with the global aims of the Cultural Front in the United States is today largely forgotten. In fact, his is music written for and about the collective, the general public. He makes extensive use of folk and contemporary references, which no doubt played a large role in the success his music had in his day. These are less obvious for subsequent generations: an uninformed listener – the majority of today’s “masses” – is bound to miss the subtleties, and this might in part account for the repurposing Copland’s music has suffered ever since. The question that lingers with regard to his music’s political angle is whether the subversion of the political content of his work was intentional or inevitable.

Haas’s music, perhaps because of the example provided by composers such as Copland, lends itself significantly less to political (mis)interpretation per se (not to say it will not be misinterpreted). A piece like *in vain* is frequently described as “having a political angle,” but few commentators have specifically articulated the manner in which this is the case. In fact, Simon Rattle went as far as

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213 Ibid., 176.
declaring that *in vain* is “not a tragic or a political piece, it is more as though you are wandering into some kind of extraordinary forest, some kind of primeval darkness, where you discover where music came from.” The “oppressive” nature of Material A’s return in-and-of-itself hardly serves as a concrete vehicle of political content, and while Haas has argued that the piece constitutes a very personal reaction to events (which happen to be political), I feel compelled to read much more deeply into the political implications of the manner in which *in vain*’s process is structured and carried out.

*In vain*’s dialectical process, which mimics the modern political system’s polarization of left and right, constitutes a concrete and deliberate insertion of a political paradigm into the piece. I have earlier posed the question of what the failure of this dialectical system signifies, politically. It is possible to read materials A and B very literally, with Material A constituting the regressive, flattening, simplistic “ruiner of harmony,” while Material B represents the progressive, open, inspired, better alternative. As I have hinted above, however, and based on Haas’s comments regarding equal temperament, I feel resistant to labelling Material A as “the far-right” (or even the “right”) simply for the fact that it makes use of this particular tuning system, or for its cascading lines as metaphors for the decline of social progress. On some level, however, and despite the piece not being a “setting [of] an aesthetic programme or a story to music,” Material A *does* represent that which Haas is denouncing in the piece. The reason, however, has more to do with Material A’s consistent disregard of all characteristics of Material B in its development (as I mentioned above, the material would likely develop in the same manner were it to be found in a different piece without Material B) and its tendency to resist change. Again, the significant factor is not what Material A *is*, but how it behaves.

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214 Rattle, “…Where You Discover Where Music Came From,” 15.


216 Despite the temptation to interpret, for example, tritone-ridden Material A as expressing *irrationality* (the tritone, the exact middle of an octave, can only be expressed in ratios by square-root of 2 (an irrational number): 1.
over the course of the piece. In fact, Material A-as-the-far-right may be what Haas was referring to when he described “the language of music [as not] well-suited to the subject [of politics]. In a political argument, you are arguing against someone, but in music, that’s impossible to do directly. The instant I set something in music, I’m identifying myself with it – even if, morally, I deeply reject it.” A political argument – ideally a dialectical process, in that it yields tangible results – does seem to serve as the basic model for in vain, with Materials A and B confronting each other over the course of the piece.

This indeed echoes Adorno’s negative dialectic which places the focus on the thought-process and the friction between the different materials more so than on the materials themselves. The failure of the dialectical process in in vain can therefore either be due to Material A’s refusal to adhere to a constructive and fair exchange, choosing instead to sabotage the process by disregarding its opponent entirely, or it is due to the dialectical process’s fundamental flaws which facilitate the re-emergence of Material A, or at the very least is powerless to prevent it from doing so. In other words, in vain may be interpreted as a much deeper criticism of our political system’s powerlessness in the face of bigotry and resistance to change.

Because of Materials A and B’s starkly differentiated features (and their arguably archetypal make-up), in vain’s main musical driving force becomes form. The development of the material is significant only in the broad picture painted by the dialectical process’s drive towards a resolution, or

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217 Brown, “Decades.”

218 Elliott Carter once described “the idea of static immobility [as] an evasion of our human experience of time. […] In my view, the idea of development is the most interesting aspect of life.” Restagno, Elliott Carter: In Conversation with Enzo Restagno, 10.

219 Music similar to Materials A and B is in fact found in several other pieces by Haas. He also once admitted that “for nearly two decades, I composed basically with only two chords. And I have not yet exhausted all the possibilities inherent in the relationships between them.” Varga, Three Questions for Sixty-Five Composers, 106. The two chords are the overtone chord and the ‘Wyschnegradsky’ chord, a stacking of fifths/fourths and tritones in equal temperament.
the emergence of a new material. It is less Material A’s inherent tuning system, or its cyclical, paradoxical, hypnotic texture that matters, and more so its self-referentiality, and its refusal to be an active participant in the dialectal process. In those terms, Material B serves as a better model, not only in its progressive tuning system, or for its use of silence, but also because of its ability to “compromise” and to adapt to Material A’s existence; in other words, in its ability to “espouse the changeability of the world,” which is how Adorno describes dialectics. In other words, Material B is dialectics, which, keeping in mind the appropriation of dialectics by Marxists (discussed above), makes Material B the left. It could therefore be deduced that in vain illustrates a two-sided political argument, in which Haas denounces the inevitable failures equally attributable to Material A’s “behavior” and to the fallibility of our democratic political process.

“As Christian Wolff […] has pointed out, almost all composers called political are leftist,” and while I do not know whether Haas identifies as leftist, his mobilization against the far-right (and subsequently for African American rights and against police brutality through his piece I can’t breathe) demonstrates a politically committed individual. After all, he did state in an interview that artists have “a duty to express themselves politically.”

As Austrians, we have a clear responsibility, based on the terrible history. As an artist, we have to be a moral guide. And if you are not, you are fake. This is absolutely clear. […] To stay in a country and support an incorrect system would make an artist guilty.

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220 As I mentioned in Chapter 3, silence has been theorized as a horizontal being in which it is possible to free oneself from the vertical configuration of power and subjectivity. Silence as used by John Cage is frequently theorized in association with a utopian vision of a freer, more democratic world.


223 Schweitzer, “Varied Pitches to Fill Empty Spaces.”
Reading into *in vain’s* dense content from a political perspective is therefore not as far-fetched as may be assumed when hearing Haas renounce writing political music for its shortcomings, or when hearing him describe the piece as a very personal reaction to the election results.

The final point I would like to make, however, concerns Haas’s reluctance to openly discuss *in vain’s* political content. While on some level, unpacking the piece so squarely is both complicated to do succinctly and rather trivializing, I believe the deeper reason for Haas refraining to discuss the piece in detail has more to do with his reluctance to align his music with what can be described as committed art.

Around the time Copland was being questioned by Senator McCarthy regarding his leftist views, several European composers were actively shielding their music from any blatant and overt associations – or subsequent subversions – by ascending “the ivory tower of *l’art pour l’art,“ a nineteenth-century philosophical idea that found in the highly polarized political climate of the time a fertile ground to erect a strong and durable foundation – one that is still powerful today, and that serves as a shield to a horde of committed non-political composers. As Jean-Paul Sartre concedes in a conversation with René Leibowitz, “music composed using serial techniques directly and intentionally challenged convention at the very time when the Cold War antagonists were demanding conformity and transparency in artistic expression as a means of ensuring fidelity to their ideological values. In short, what Sartre predicted and what Boulez subsequently delivered was a music that, by being impervious to meaning arising from external associations, was resistant to ideological appropriation.”

It would be as erroneous to fully identify Haas’s music with the trend exemplified by composers such as Boulez (who were accused by Lachenmann of dismissing the “concept of Beauty” as suspect,

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225 Ibid., 591.
and whose refusal to deal with “the aesthetic problem” did considerable harm to “avant-garde”

music)\textsuperscript{226} as it would be to call his music openly politically committed (\textit{engagée}). I instead see Haas taking the middle road and weaving in the two approaches simultaneously, demonstrating yet again his ability to operate within paradoxes and outside dogma – in itself arguably the most important and crucial “moral guidance” he can offer his audience in today’s polarized and divided society.

Haas’s reluctance to assign \textit{in vain} an explicitly political angle perhaps ultimately lies in his mystic romanticism. Music’s core characteristic is perhaps its resistance to clear-cut interpretations, forcing the coexistence of several often-contradictory explanations. Haas’s facility with paradoxes and plurality is at the root of his compositional practice and would explain his dislike of music as a representation of a program (or meaning) coded into sounds, whether or this occurs in the cases of \textit{I can’t breathe} and \textit{in vain}. The question remains as to why this transposition is problematic to Haas in his political pieces but not in his operas, and would have to be the subject of another investigation.

I would like to end this paper with a final question and an anecdote. Given the critical acclaim \textit{in vain} has received and the rich complexity of the work’s make-up, one is left wondering why Haas ultimately considers the writing of such a piece a failure of sorts. Is his explanation regarding the inevitability of becoming identified with materials he rejects truly the core of his reasoning? Were this to be the case, the many difficult subjects and characters found in his operas should cause him to similarly abandon the theatrical genre as well. This is not the case, prompting me to conclude that there are other factors at play when it comes to a political work such as \textit{in vain}. I would venture two: the first is the subtlety of the message in \textit{in vain}. Commentators such as Simon Rattle and Alex Ross passionately advocate for the piece, calling it a “staggering experience”\textsuperscript{227} and a “modern

\textsuperscript{226} Helmut Lachenmann, "The 'Beautiful' in Music Today,” 20-21.

\textsuperscript{227} Rattle, “…Where You Discover Where Music Came From,” 16.
They easily expound on the piece’s scope, the usage of darkness, the virtuosic handling of large masses of instruments, etc. The political dimension of the piece, however, rarely registers with commentators, which may be disappointing for Haas. The second, more important reason, looks at *in vain* from the broader perspective of music – and much of art’s – (in)ability to effect actual, true change in the world. Olafur Eliasson, whose work was mentioned in connection with *in vain* by Simon Rattle, recently started a project with the engineer Frederik Ottesen called Little Sun, which aims to supply lamps and sustainable energy to people with no access to electricity. The lamps, which are charged by being left in the sun (five hours in the sun yield five hours of strong light) are sold at a higher price in parts of the world with access to electricity in order to lower the cost for people living in areas of the world (1.1 billion people) with no access to power. Could a piece of music’s arguable impotence at effecting this level of change in such a concrete and direct manner be a reason why Haas – like many composers – stays away from creating openly political works?

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228 Ross, “Darkness Audible.”

Bibliography


Appendix A – Outer Voices Per Measure in Material A (mm. 1–75)
Appendix B – Analysis of the Chords in Material B (p. 84-100)
(y axis shows Partials, x axis shows chords by Fundamentals in the order that they are played)

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- Q=72
- Q=60 => 108

**microtonal fluctuations**
- fund.
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**Tempo**

- Q=60
- Q=40
- Q=60
- Q=52

**Microtonal fluctuations**
| 15th | 14th | 13th | 12th | 11th | 10th | 9th | 8th | 7th | 6th | 5th | 4th | 3rd | 2nd | 1st (fund.) | measure numbers | G | G | E | Eb | D | D | C | B | B |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|             |                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|      |      |      |      |      |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | fund          | fund            | 141 | 142-3 | 145-8 | 149-51 | 152 | 153-4 | 156-9 | 161-2 | 163-4 |

**Tempo**  
Q=60  
Q=40 => 144  
Q=96 => 40; Q=60  
Q=96 => 60
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**Tempo**

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- Q=60
- micr.
- fluct.
## Appendix C – Major Events and Parameters in the First Darkness

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<tr>
<th>Light</th>
<th>on harp</th>
<th>on harp</th>
<th>gradually brighter</th>
<th>gradually brighter</th>
<th>on</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wind entries</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20 + rest</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>distance (sec)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dynamics</td>
<td><strong>ppp – mp, harp mf</strong></td>
<td>**mp decresc. harp mf</td>
<td></td>
<td>rest**</td>
<td><strong>ppp – mp</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass</td>
<td>C#, Dqb, Db, Cq#, C (cluster)</td>
<td>Dqb, D, D#, Db (cluster)</td>
<td>Bb – A</td>
<td>F# – F</td>
<td>A – G#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events</td>
<td>Harp solo ‘in C,’ crotales enter</td>
<td>Harp solo ‘in C#,’ first rest of piece</td>
<td>Bass drops out, harp solo ends, rest</td>
<td>Conducted, tempo changes, clarinet high note, strings alone</td>
<td>Lights on completely, staggered entrances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuning System(s)</td>
<td>Just / Microtonal</td>
<td>Just / Microtonal</td>
<td>Just</td>
<td>Just</td>
<td>Just</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitch Changes</td>
<td>Microtonal / harp in partials</td>
<td>Microtonal / in partials</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>Partial</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>