

**MUSIC AND CATACHRISIS: LACHENMANN'S ...ZWEI GEFÜHLE...
IN THE THEATRE OF JUDITH BUTLER**

NB: cited examples are contained in the PowerPoint slides that are appended to the paper

(Slide 1: Title) Introduction

(Slide 2: Outline) In this presentation, I argue that Judith Butler's mobilization of 'catachresis' offers a productive lens through which to consider Lachenmann's ...*zwei Gefühle*... (*Two Feelings*). I begin with a brief explanation of the ambivalence that constitutes Lachenmann's relation with music, emphasizing the ways that this ambivalence connects to Butler's mobilization of catachresis. With these parameters established, I proceed to a consideration of the way that *Two Feelings*' form unfolds with respect to the vocalist, showing how a catachrestic reading might be productive of new understandings of the work. Finally, I conclude by remarking on the multiple and entangled nature of this formal reading, noting how these characteristics point to the broader relevance of my study.

Ambivalence and Catachresis

(Slide 3: *Musique Concrète Instrumentale*) Each sub-term of the term *musique concrète instrumentale*—a term which was coined precisely to account for Lachenmann's music—is a sort of dialectical double entendre, drawing Lachenmann proximate in the same movement that makes it radically contingent. Firstly, *Two Feelings* is 'music', but not really; Lachenmann thinks his music in the form of the question "it is not music, [but] what is it?" (Lachenmann in Steenhuisen, 14). Secondly, *Two Feelings* is 'concrete' or 'real' in that it mobilizes a material construction of sound, but this sonic ontology arises from an understanding of sound in which materiality is precisely what is in contestation. This is the reason that Lachenmann has not simply produced electronic compositions: he is working with the "energetic aspect of sounds" (Lachenmann in Steenhuisen, 10) because "even the most exciting sounds are no longer exciting when projected through a loudspeaker" (Lachenmann in Steenhuisen, 10). Finally, *Two Feelings* is 'instrumental' in that an

ensemble of (relatively traditional) instruments performs the piece, but these instruments are not used instrumentally. Instead the instruments themselves (rather than the notes that they produce) are mined so as to produce a kind of living materiality of the orchestra that has “nothing but mediations to show for itself” (Hennion, 83). Collectively, then, Lachenmann’s profoundly ambivalent relation to *musique concrète instrumentale* offers a lens through which to understand the redefinition of traditional instruments that is undertaken in *Two Feelings*, the way that the piece unfolds, and ultimately the construction of materiality that it enacts.

(Slide 4: **Catachresis**) Judith Butler’s critique of the materiality of sex offers a useful approach to Lachenmann’s complex relation to materiality, because it articulates precisely the ambivalence that I have just mentioned.¹ Listening to Butler, we might say that in the discourse of music, sound itself has often been associated with materiality, whereas music has been associated with the principle of mastery. That is, music is made *from* sounds, and this making constitutes a certain claim to evolutionary super-ordination (as evidenced, for example, in the meaning attached to the observation that monkeys cannot hear music). However, in this opposition of sound and music, sound is precisely what is excluded (in and by the opposition), because when sound is described within musical descriptions it is at once a substitution for and displacement of the sounds themselves. That is, when and where sounds are represented within the economy of music is precisely the site of their erasure. As a result, one can’t think of (let alone hear) sounds through the figures that music provides, but rather through siting sound as the unsoundable condition of figuration. Sound is that which can *never be* sounded within the terms of music proper, but whose exclusion from that propriety is its enabling condition. Simply put, then, we might say that the discourse of music only hears sounds in catachresis, that is, in those figures that function improperly: if I am listening to a virtuosic violin performance of Mozart, for example, I am enveloped in the music, but I *hear* and

¹ See *Bodies That Matter*. While Butler is never quoted verbatim in this presentation, the syntax of her writing frequently haunts it.

notice the inadvertent harmonies of partials emitted from an overpressed bow, or the rhythmic squeaks of fingers on a fingerboard. This catachrestic nature, I think, denotes precisely where Lachenmann enters the discourse of music, returning sounds to haunt and co-opt the musical language from which they are excluded.²

Formal Delineations in the Voice

(Slide 5: The Vocalist's Changing Status) I would like to turn, then, to a specific consideration of the vocalist in *Two Feelings* from this perspective. In this consideration, I will discuss how the voice is part of a deconstructive process in *Two Feelings*, but also how its performance remains productive of certain regulative ideals. That is, I will try to maintain Lachenmann's question of the musical as an open one: in the question "if it is not music, what is it?" a certain degree of identity remains present as the spectre of music. This ambivalence points again to the relevance of catachresis as an interpretive tool: if *Two Feelings* does not develop along traditional formal lines, it does nonetheless change over time in a way that is not completely divorced from *telos*. That is, the piece exists as a performance that moves through time, rather than as an open construction, installation, or other 'anti-teleological' form.³

With this in mind, I would like to proceed by registering the changing role of the vocalist in *Two Feelings* as performative of formal divisions of the piece.⁴ In particular, I will suggest that we can hear, through the vocalist, a division of *Two Feelings* into three sections: (1) the 'voice as

² The term 'sound' is here used in place of the German 'Geräusch'. While the latter literally translates as 'noise,' Lachenmann points out that the German does not have the negative connotations of its English counterpart. For example, he says that one "would describe the sound of wind blowing as *Geräusch*, to imply that it's a beautiful and natural sound" (Lachenmann in Schmidt, 118).

³ To insist on this distinction is to move from the Butler who wrote *Gender Trouble* to the Butler who wrote *Bodies That Matter*, and who has ultimately continued to a prolonged study of melancholy.

⁴ This reading might be found objectionable on two levels: firstly, in that articulating 'sections' of the piece constitutes a reduction of its nuanced formal process by ignoring the multiple strata that are in play; secondly, the choice of the voice as a formal delineator contrasts the more conventional reading of the piece relative to the guitar (idiomatic guitar techniques are often deployed in other instruments). I do not have the time to address these objections here except to suggest that charting a plane of consistency relative to the movement of the voice is a doubled charting: it is a mapping of a certain series of events, but it is also a performative mapping of *Two Feelings*'s catachrestic mode of signification (in the sense that it points as much to what is not included in the reading as it does to what is).

catalyst' (mm.1-107); (2) the 'dispersed voice' (mm. 108-198); and (3) the 'voice as non-voice' (mm.199-end). Needless to say, these divisions are neither discrete nor total (and numerous possible subdivisions exist).

The Voice as Catalyst

(**SLIDE 6: Fig. 1**) Fig. 1 displays a quantitative analysis of entrances and exits of the voice and instruments over the course of *Two Feelings*.⁵ As we can see, the contour of total instrument density (measured *numerically*) generally follows the entrances and exits of the voice in the first section. Here we can consider the voice as a musical catalyst in two senses: firstly, the overall fluctuations in energy that characterize events in the section tend to flow to and from the voice, and, secondly, the voice is (as a result) established at this point in the piece as a unified and identifiable figure in the ensemble. (**SLIDE 7: Ex. 1**) This relationship is most simply exemplified in the vocalist's first entrance at m. 4: the initial text "so-donn" acts as an impulse of energy that is sustained and intensified through m. 6 by an ascending "snoring effect" in the violins and violas, and is only released by the vocalist's re-entrance at m. 7 (see Ex. 1).

This clearly articulated vocal identity bears noting because, in contrast, the rest of the ensemble tends to be treated in ways that undermine the perception of individual instruments as such. This 'fusing' of instruments is accomplished, foremost, through orchestrations that establish a physical causality within the ensemble. (**SLIDE 8: Ex. 2**) This physicality is generally hidden in and as the fabric of the piece, but *is* prominently exemplified in Lachenmann's use of the piano as a resonance chamber for the ensemble: when the sustain pedal of the piano is held down in m. 64, for example, the resonating material is derived not only from the *fff* chord played on the piano, but also from the piano's sympathetic resonance with the *fff* articulations in the brass and winds (see Ex. 2).

⁵ Although this figure quantitatively graphs the changes in instrumentation in *Two Feelings*, it should not be read as indicating density in the sense of the degree of sound that is present. Instead, the graph is intended to chart parallel entrances and exits of instruments.

In contrast to the vocalist, then, the identities of the individual instruments of the ensemble are here subjugated to the behaviours of the collective.

Beyond demonstrating the complex internal causality that allows the vocalist to propel the ensemble in the first section, the piano at this point also bears noting because its lid is closed and opened three times over the course of the measure. This treatment of the residual resonance of the piano suggests that the resonance itself is implicitly treated as a sustained sound (rather than as detritus to an attack). That is, the decay of the sound is not treated teleologically, but is instead treated as itself a sound, which is to say that decay is understood as a qualitative (rather than quantitative) mutation implicated in a process of energy transference.⁶ Put another way, whereas a C, for example, persists as a C as it fades to silence, energy *transforms* as it decays. The point is that the sonic ends achieved by the technique extend from a physical relationship being established, and that this relationality results in the ensemble exhibiting the non-linear movements of a swarm. When the voice enunciates in this context, the effect is akin to placing the nozzle of either a leaf-blower or a vacuum cleaner into a bee-hive (depending on whether the vocalist triggers or halts activity); hence, the ‘voice as catalyst.’

The Dispersed Voice

The second section of *Two Feelings*—the voice as dispersed voice—immediately contrasts the first, in that it begins with the first extended absence of the vocalist (mm. 107-130). The section does not end with the vocalist’s re-entrance at m. 131, though, because this re-entrance occurs in tandem with the first instance of non-vocalist speaking in the piece, the percussionist’s emphatically spoken “O”.⁷ As a result, there is a pronounced dispersal of text material in the measures immediately following,

⁶ To this end, then, the piano is similarly used (without the lid-lifting) in mm. 213-215 to provide a resonant accompaniment to the tuba’s emphatic quasi-melodic figure.

⁷ There are two recordings of the work, one with Lachenmann himself performing the vocal part and one with a female vocalist; the percussionist is male in both. The male percussionist’s speech has a very different effect, depending on the gender of the primary vocalist(s).

with 13 of the next 23 measures featuring non-vocalists speaking. Thus, in the instances where the vocalist does become, once again, the primary conduit of the text (in mm. 159-160, mm. 162-164, and m. 166, for examples), she does so no longer as the *de facto* instigator of the collective ensemble activity.⁸ (SLIDE 9: Ex. 3) As a result, when the vocalist speaks at m. 159, for example, she does so as one voice amongst many. In this section, then, the pointillistic presentation of text (in terms of its origin) exists as part of a pointillism of the general ensemble, where the latter comes to full fruition in the pizzicato texture that begins at m. 182 (see Ex. 3) and proceeds to fizzle its way out over the course of the remainder of the middle section. (Ironically, this collective ‘fizzling’ is one of the more unified and identifiable textures of the section, perhaps even of the piece.)

The Voice as Non-Voice

The third and final section of *Two Feelings*—the voice as non-voice—might be thought as the dialectical unification of the first two. This unification, however, is not a resolution but rather a registration of the antithetical character of the piece. In other words, although the voice is once again presented through the vocalist, and the vocalist is frequently the focal point of musical events, the passage through the first two sections of the piece has served to reinterpret the voice such that its discursive status, as voice, is no longer central. In deconstructive terms, the voice is put under erasure. This shift is audible in two complimentary ways: firstly, the voice’s figures are less abrupt and tend to come ‘from nothing’ less often (i.e. they tend to be a pivot point in a continual process, rather than to initiate or cease activity); and secondly, the ensemble as a whole is generally less directed towards excitation than in the opening. The voice at this point is a kind of metaphorical paraphrasing of Deleuze and Guattari, reaching “not the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I [or not]” (Deleuze and Guattari, 3).

⁸ Alternately, this point could be argued by saying that the dispersal of the voice has instigated a general dispersal of kinetic energy in the piece through this section.

Simply put, if the first section deconstructs the identities of individual instruments by treating the ensemble as a single relational instrument that the vocalist *acts on*, the third section reveals this separation of the vocalist as illusory, showing that the voice itself is implicated in the material reality of the piece: the relationality *is* the sound of the piece, and there is no outside from which to hear it. Thus, when the vocalist enters as the sonic focal point at m. 199, I would argue that she does not do so *as voice*. Rather, the vocalist and the text have been rendered as (relatively neutral) rhetorical effects.

(**SLIDE 10: Ex. 4**) This reading is most clearly exemplified in the many instances of elision between the vocalist and ensemble in this section. For example, at m. 249 the vocalist's spoken syllable "un" is elided with a low F on the English horn (see Ex. 4) such that the two are heard as a single sound. Because the English horn pitch does not feature any extended techniques (a relatively rare occurrence in the piece), not only does the pairing cause the speaker to be heard as a sonic medium rather than as a textual one (because it is fused with a non-textual instrument in the English horn), but it also promotes the registration of the English horn as a sonic medium rather than as a medium through which pitches are articulated (since it is fused with a non-pitched instrument in the 'speaking' vocalist). That is, even when the horn is simply sounding a pitch without any extended techniques, the pitchness of the note is troubled by its sound as a result of the pairing. If musical voices are traditionally differentiated through their pitch content, obfuscating this content goes some way towards deconstructing these voices in favor of a recombinant ensemble understood in terms of its eventfulness, its movements.⁹

This understanding offers insight into the 'vocal solo' that takes place in mm. 234-266; here, where the voice is most clearly present, is also the place where the voice is most undecidable in character. That is, the voice is presented audibly and with fewer sonic connections to the ensemble

⁹ To this end, Lachenmann says: "The aspect of observing an acoustic event from the perspective of 'What happened?', this is what I call *musique concrète instrumentale*" (Lachenmann in Steenhuisen, 10).

than are often found elsewhere, but also with a text that is almost completely obscured because the phonemes, while distinctly discernible, are dramatically scrambled. (SLIDE 11: Ex. 5) From this, we can decipher the ‘quasi parlando’ instruction given to the percussionist at m. 280 (see Ex. 5): the invocation of specific text in the context of a non-pitched (and non-texted) instrument is indicative that the *tension* between text and sound, the tension between vocalist and instrumentalist, has become fully realized as the piece itself. Paradoxically, then, by drawing text and sound proximate to one another, Lachenmann emphasizes their separation as constitutive of both.¹⁰ The voice is integral to the music precisely in the sense that it partakes of the process of energy transference that constitutes *Two Feelings*’s musical motion. Returning to Butler, we might say that the voice is performative of a music that is always under erasure.

Conclusions

In this sense, we might think of Lachenmann’s compositional practice as a radically citational one, the catachrestic usurpation of the “musical” for fully non-musical purposes. After all, pitches, rhythms, and ‘classic’ instruments are all present! If Stockhausen’s *Kontakte* demonstrates that diverse musical parameters are unified in the single parameter of material sound,¹¹ *Two Feelings* shows that this construction of sonic materiality—like every construction—is itself manufactured through an ambiguous implication in other, necessarily excluded, parameters. With this in mind, a final point should be made: in contrast to some of what I have argued, the vocalist in *Two Feelings* all the while serves a rhetorical function *as vocalist*. This returns us to the description of *Two Feelings* as miming music catachrestically; it is important not to neglect the fact that a vocalist *is present*, even as the significations of her presence are continually called into question. In deconstructive terms, then, the vocalist insists on her dual status as both present and absent. In this sense, the vocalist might be

¹⁰ Indeed, the ‘parlando’ instruction is given again in m. 289, this time without even the alibi of specific text.

¹¹ In *Kontakte*, Stockhausen unites pitch and rhythm through the concept of frequency. This approach anticipated ‘spectral’ music, which similarly combines sonic parameters through the notion of timbre.

understood not as a (neutral) medium through which the libretto passes, but rather as the undecidable status of the libretto itself: as the opening of music (or perhaps the suspension of music)

From all of these considerations, we can begin to understand *Two Feelings* as a more general insistence that the exclusion that mobilizes the sound/music binary is the differentiating relation between sound and music, where music occupies both terms of the opposition, and sound cannot be said to be an intelligible term at all. Perhaps this is the reason that Lachenmann speaks of energy and events when he talks about his music, despite the fact that physical drama plays only a minor role in the works: his explicit awareness of the ‘event-ness’ of sounds speaks to an implicit awareness of the idea that sound is always-already co-opted into the discourse of music where it is, on the one hand, deprived of its soundness and, on the other hand, constructed as the sound of music. Thus, for Lachenmann, ‘sound’ cannot be said to *be* anything, to participate in musical ontology at all. Sound—eluding grammar—is set under erasure as the impossible necessity that enables musical ontology. Sounds are the disfigurations that emerge at the boundaries of music, both as its very condition and as the insistent threat of its deformation; sound cannot take a form—cannot be notated, recorded, or manipulated—and in that sense, cannot be music. And yet *Two Feelings* remains a musical question, one that traces sound as the site at which a certain drama of musical difference plays itself out.

Works Cited

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Music and Catachresis: Lachenmann's ...zwei Gefühle... in the Theatre of Judith Butler



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Outline:

- 1) Introduction: connections between Lachenmann's ambivalent construction of musical materiality and Butler's mobilization of catachresis.
- 2) The vocalist's formal delineations from this perspective:
 - a) the voice as catalyst (mm. 1-107)
 - b) the dispersed voice (mm. 108-198)
 - c) the voice as non-voice (mm. 199-end)
- 3) Conclusions: sonic materiality and *Two Feelings*.

Musique Concrète Instrumentale

Musique: “it is not music, [but] what is it?”

Concrète: “energetic aspect of sounds”

Instrumentale: *Two Feelings* is performed on conventional instruments, but they are not used instrumentally

Catachresis:

used to denote the (often intentional) use of any figure of speech that flagrantly violates the norms of a language community.

Common forms include:

- Using a word in a sense radically different from its normal sense.
- Using a word to denote something for which, without the catachresis, there is no actual name.
- Using a word out of context.
- Using paradoxes or contradictions.

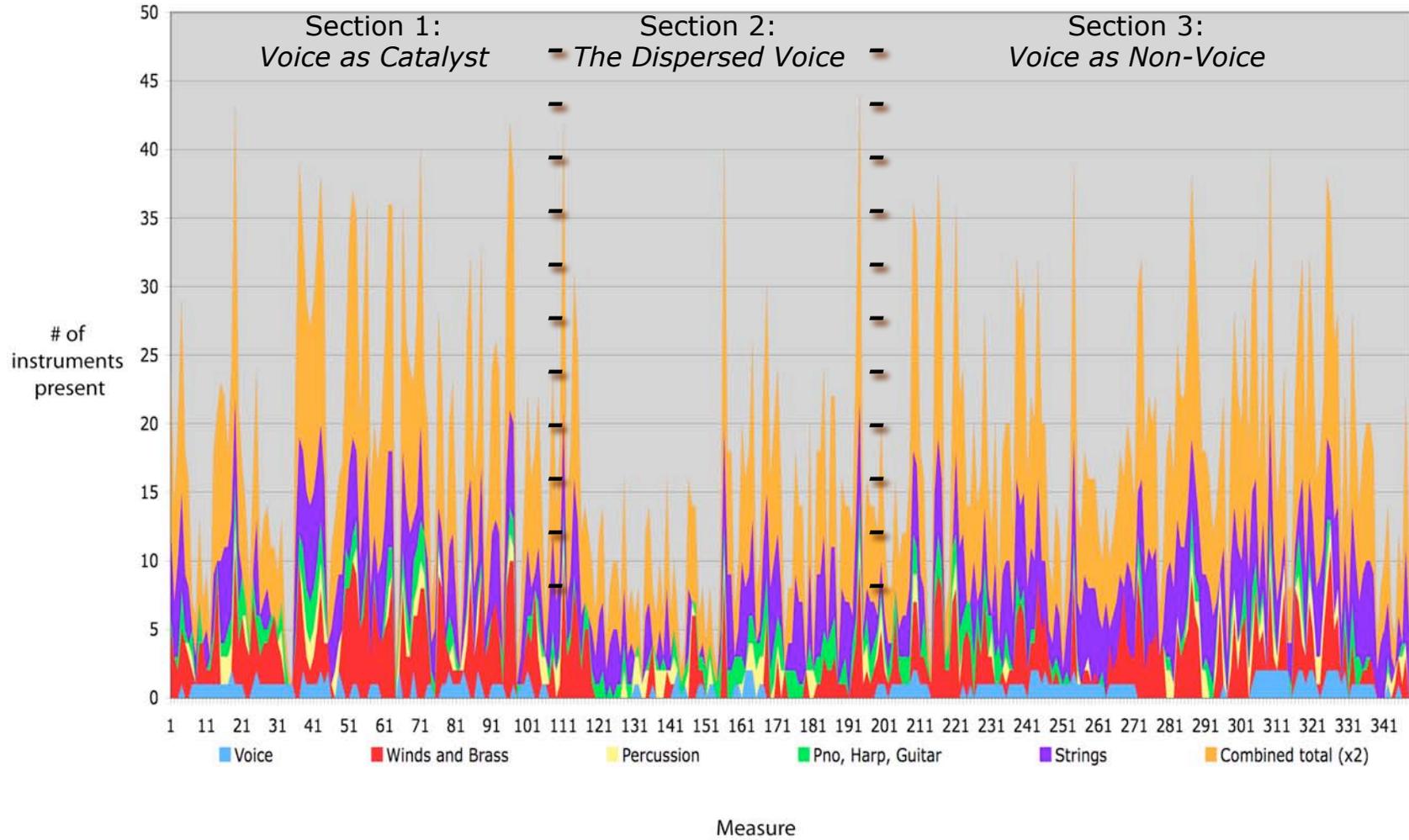
The Vocalist's Changing Status

Mm. 1 - 107: the 'voice as catalyst'

Mm. 108 - 198: the 'dispersed voice'

Mm. 199 - end: the 'voice as non-voice'

Fig. 1: Fluctuations in instrumentation in ...zwei Gefühle...



Ex. 1: Initial voice entrance, mm. 3 - 7

The image displays a musical score for measures 3 through 7. The score includes parts for two sopranos (Spr. 1 and Spr. 2), two violins (VI. 1 and VI. 2), two violas (Va. 1 and Va. 2), two violas (Vc. 1 and Vc. 2), and a double bass (Kb.).

Voice Parts:
- Spr. 1: Lyrics "erstickt" (dies) in measure 3, followed by a rest. In measure 7, lyrics "BR-ULL- -T NI-CH- -N-E-RND" are present.
- Spr. 2: Lyrics "f SO DO-NN- **)" in measure 3, followed by a rest. In measure 7, lyrics "BR-ULL- -T NI-CH- -N-E-RND" are present.

String Parts:
- Violins (VI. 1, VI. 2) and Violas (Va. 1, Va. 2): Play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. Dynamics include *mp*, *pont.*, *sf*, and *poco f*. A handwritten note "rushing waves/winds" is written above the staves. Performance instructions include "mit Bogen auf Saiten stoppen" (stop with bow on strings).
- Violas (Vc. 1, Vc. 2) and Double Bass (Kb.): Play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. Dynamics include *mp* and *sf*.

Other Details:
- A green highlight covers measures 3-7 in the vocal staves.
- A circled '8' is visible at the top of the score, likely indicating the start of a section or rehearsal mark.

Ex. 2: Piano resonance (with lid-lifting), mm. 63-64

The image displays a page of musical notation for piano, specifically measures 63 and 64. The score is written for multiple staves, including the piano and celeste. The notation includes various dynamic markings such as *fff*, *f*, *p*, *ff*, *sfz*, and *sf*. Performance instructions like "multiphon" and "ad lib." are present. A section of the score is circled in green, highlighting the piano part in measure 64, which features a complex, resonant texture. Below the main score, there are two staves labeled "3" and "4", each with the instruction "Tastatur mit Metallstab". At the bottom of the page, there is a small diagram of a piano keyboard and the text "(Start. Ped.)".

Ex. 3, Pizzicato texture ending Section 2, mm. 182-84

Seiten ad lib. zwischen Wirbel und Sattel

Klav. Ped. *f* *poss. sempre* Ped. 7 } Ped.

(klingt zwei Oktaven höher)

Git. *p* mit Gleitstahl getupft

$\left(\frac{4}{4}\right) \text{♩} = 63$ (nicht dirigieren, aber die Takte mit Handbewegung schließen) $\left(\frac{3}{4}\right)$ $\left(\frac{6}{4}\right)$

Diese Pizzicati frei in den jeweils abgesteckten Zeitraum verteilen

Vl. I pizz.* *p* *pp* *f*

Vl. II pizz.* *p* *pp* *f*

Va. I pizz.* *p* *pp* *f*

Va. II pizz.* *p* *pp* *f*

Vc. I pizz.* *p* *pp* *mf*

Vc. II pizz.* *p* *pp* *mf*

Kb. pizz.* *mf*

Ex. 4: Timbral ellision between vocalist and ensemble, m. 249 - 250

The image displays a musical score for measures 249 and 250, illustrating timbral ellision between a vocalist and an ensemble. The score is written for four parts: Engl. H. (English Horn), Klav. (Clavier), Git. (Guitar), and Spr. 2 (Soprano 2). The time signature changes from 6/4 in measure 249 to 4/4 in measure 250. A green circle highlights a specific musical phrase in the Engl. H. part of measure 250, which is marked *pp*. A vertical green line connects this phrase to a similar phrase in the Spr. 2 part of measure 250, which is marked *(p)* and includes the lyrics "UN- -T NUN". The Spr. 2 part also features a 6/4 time signature in measure 249. The Git. part is marked *p* in measure 249. The Klav. part is marked *pp* in measure 250.

Ex. 5: 'Quasi-parlando' instruction given to non-speaking percussionist, m. 180

♩ = 40

4
4

Tamtam Rand mit Metallstab streichen, **quasi parlando**

(ICH A-BER IRRE UM- HER GE-TRIE-BEN VON MEINER

Schlz.1

mp leicht gedämpft halten, "schattenhaft" behält

Schlz.2

Tamtam Rand mit Metallstab streichen *p* *ppp*

*) diesen Text nicht sprechen ihn der Artikulation zugru