

# “A Nomad of Sound”: The Austrian-Born Composer, Interpreter, and Performer Pia Palme

Susanne Kogler



All content is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Received: 09/04/2015

Accepted: 09/03/2017

Institution (Susanne Kogler): University of Graz; Institute of Musicology

Published: 19/09/2017

Last updated: 19/09/2017

How to cite: Susanne Kogler, “A Nomad of Sound”: The Austrian-Born Composer, Interpreter, and Performer Pia Palme, *Musicologica Austriaca: Journal for Austrian Music Studies* (September 19, 2017)

Tags: [21st century](#); [Artistic research](#); [Composition](#); [Feminism](#); [Palme, Pia](#); [Performance](#)



## Abstract

This paper is an introductory study of the works by the Viennese-born composer Pia Palme, who characterised the community of Austrian female artists as a productive and particularly innovative one. Palme herself is part of this productive and lively scene, but her role in it is twofold, for she is well known not only as a performer and composer but also for her cultural, political, and feminist engagement. From 2007 to 2013, together with the vocalist Gina Mattiello, she organised *e\_may*, a festival dedicated to commissioning and performing pieces by contemporary women composers. Both *e\_may*'s international programme and Palme's œuvre show that Pia Palme is an internationally oriented artist. Born and living in Vienna, she has been collaborating with artists from all over the world since the beginning of her artistic career. Without a doubt, the exploration of Pia Palme's works and their specific position in the Austrian music scene relates to gender and women's studies, as well as to Austrian music studies. Writing a portrayal of Pia Palme means exploring a specific female contribution to contemporary Austrian music. However, at the same time her œuvre raises questions about the terms "female" and "Austrian" themselves: How can these categories be understood? This article's objective is therefore to illuminate, with the help of Pia Palme's œuvre, what the label "woman composer" and "Austrian music" might mean in this specific context.

---

# Introduction

[1] This paper is an introductory study of the works by the Viennese-born composer Pia Palme. In her article “Schillernde Zwischenwelten”, published in the Austrian Music Magazine ÖMZ,<sup>[1]</sup> Pia Palme characterised the community of Austrian female artists as a productive and particularly innovative one. According to her, the works produced by artists such as Cordula Bösze, Claudia Cervenka, Elisabeth Harnik, Sophie Reyer, and Elisabeth Schimana are marked by a strong willingness to transcend boundaries. Frequently, they combine electronic media, improvisation, elements of popular music, and Western classical traditions.

Pia Palme herself is part of this productive and lively scene, but her role in it is twofold, for she is well known not only as a performer and composer but also for her cultural, political, and feminist engagement. From 2007 to 2013, together with the vocalist Gina Mattiello, she organised *e\_may*, a festival dedicated to commissioning and performing pieces by contemporary women composers.<sup>[2]</sup> This hugely successful festival featured individual approaches to composition and improvisation situated somewhere between electronic music, new music, and sound art.<sup>[3]</sup> In programmes of festivals dedicated to contemporary music, women composers are still a highly underrepresented group.<sup>[4]</sup> Therefore, the main objective of *e\_may*'s founders was both to offer their female colleagues opportunities to have their music performed and to make women's contributions to contemporary Austrian music more noticeably felt.

Both *e\_may*'s international programme and Palme's œuvre show that Pia Palme is an internationally oriented artist. Born and living in Vienna, she has been collaborating with artists from all over the world since the beginning of her artistic career. In May 2013 she was composer in residence at the Austrian embassy in Tehran, where she held workshops and performed with Iranian musicians and composers. Since 2011 Palme has been doing research for her PhD with Liza Lim and Monty Adkins at the University of Huddersfield, England. Therefore, her most recent works written within the framework of the arts PhD programme are also contributions to the recently established field of artistic research. The doctoral thesis she is preparing is entitled *Composing the Noise of Mind*.<sup>[5]</sup>

Without a doubt, the exploration of Pia Palme's works and their specific position in the Austrian music scene relates to gender and women's studies, as well as to Austrian music studies. Writing a portrayal of Pia Palme means exploring a specific female contribution to contemporary Austrian music. However, at the same time her œuvre raises questions about the terms “female” and “Austrian” themselves: How can these categories be understood? This article's objective is therefore to illuminate, with the help of Pia Palme's œuvre, what the label “woman composer” and “Austrian music” might mean in this specific context.

Gender studies in music have been characterised by lively discussions concerning the impact of female viewpoints in the arts for at least two decades. Continuing the work of groundbreaking studies by Eva Rieger and Susan McClary, scholars such as Marcia Citron and Suzanne G. Cusick did pioneering work by developing new approaches in order to unmask and overcome stereotypes that exclude women from musical life and history.<sup>[6]</sup> As far as biography is concerned, Melanie Unseld recently engaged in a wide-ranging historical analysis of changing concepts and their impact on musicology.<sup>[7]</sup> Concerning the debate on whether there is a female aesthetics that contrasts with the dominant male approach, a major contribution was made by the Australian scholar Sally Macarthur.<sup>[8]</sup> In her recent works, Macarthur argues the case for a Deleuzian approach.<sup>[9]</sup>

Drawing on the work of philosophers, such as Deleuze, and Deleuze with Guattari, and on feminists, including those who work with Deleuze, I attempt to sketch out a practice of difference that is positive and productive as it relates to women's 'new' musical composition. I draw on the concept of the event from Deleuze who understands it as a potentiality or possibility, or a moment of dynamic change, and I use it as a way to engage creatively and productively with the not-yet known.<sup>[10]</sup>

As Macarthur explains by taking Anne Boyd's music as an example, musical works can be "conceived in terms of events that are always already constituted within a system of relations". The movement of Boyd's music "is marked by change: her musical works are events that constantly pass through other events. This way of interpreting Boyd's music avoids thinking of it in terms of a pre-existent set of signifiers that belong to a specific musical referential system. Instead, we are encouraged to think of Boyd's music [...] according to its 'capacity to transform bodies, organs and territories'".<sup>[11]</sup>

According to Macarthur, this "shifts the focus from the structure and the aesthetics of the music to the multiple connections it makes in life beyond its birth by the composer".<sup>[12]</sup>

This paper relates to this perspective inspired by poststructuralist philosophy. In order to describe Pia Palme's artistic position, I will take the manifold relationships she establishes herself in her works as a point of departure for developing a broader view: In the first part, Pia Palme's allusion to the idea of the artist as a nomad will be related to postmodern concepts of identity. In particular, I will focus on her highly individual approach to various musical traditions. In the second part I will draw on Hélène Cixous' ideas of "écriture féminine" and Jean-François Lyotard's concept of postmodern narratives for the purpose of discussing Pia Palme's predilection for vocal expression and her feminist views. The third and fourth parts will analyse her interest in theatrical forms and her exploration of the creative process, respectively, with reference to the traditional conception of the musical work. In conclusion, I will summarize my findings in order to discuss briefly the question of how we can understand Austrian music and the female production thereof in the light of Pia Palme's works.

## I. Bridging Different Worlds and Inventing a Novel Tradition

[2] When we try to think about identity in an "open reality", we should not, as Frank Vogelsang has explained convincingly, define it as "a distinction of singular persons on their particular way of distinguishing them from others": "The prerequisite of identity is rather to acknowledge the relatedness to others, even if the ways of life may be characterised by different priorities".<sup>[13]</sup> Whereas the concept of identity is traditionally linked to the ideas of totality and individuality, it might be helpful to conceive of it as fragmented and dynamic: a continuous search that establishes multiple relationships and never comes to an end. Therefore, Frank Vogelsang chose the image of wandering as the point of departure for his study on identity.<sup>[14]</sup>

Feminist researchers have also developed concepts of identity that deny totality and fixations.<sup>[15]</sup> Rosi Braidotti, for example, explained her views on feminism and its possible forms today by coining the expression "nomadic subjects": For her, the nomad is "a figuration for the kind of subject who has relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity. This figuration expresses the desire for an identity made of transitions, successive shifts, and coordinated changes, without

and against an essential unity.”<sup>[16]</sup> Further, Braidotti argues that “the figuration of the nomad is a form of intervention on the debate between feminism and the postmodernist crisis of values and representations of the subject”.<sup>[17]</sup> For feminists, “the central issue is the interconnectedness between identity, subjectivity, and power”. Thus Braidotti suggests that feminists as well as other critical intellectuals should “cultivate a nomadic consciousness”:

This form of consciousness combines features that are usually perceived as opposing, namely the possession of a sense of identity that rests not on fixity but on contingency. The nomadic consciousness combines coherence with mobility. It aims to rethink the unity of the subject, without reference to humanistic beliefs, without dualistic oppositions, linking instead body and mind in a new set of intensive and often in transitive transitions.<sup>[18]</sup>

Drawing on Deleuze, Braidotti characterises nomadic shifts as a “creative sort of becoming; a performative metaphor that allows for otherwise unlikely encounters and unsuspected sources of interaction of experience and of knowledge.”<sup>[19]</sup>

Pia Palme’s œuvre contains many characteristic features of a nomadic consciousness of the kind described by Braidotti. The different fields the composer combines in her work are all somehow rooted in her specific biography. In her studies at the Technical University of Vienna (mathematics and projective geometry), the Conservatory of Vienna (recorder), and at the Naropa University at Boulder, Colorado (improvisation), she combined technical and artistic fields. As a composer Palme has always matched traditional instrumental playing with the use of topical electronic means. As an interpreter she performs her own works but also works written especially for her. These include pieces by other women composers whom she regards as particularly significant, such as the French composer Eliane Radigue. Pia Palme’s improvisations are characterised by an innovative use of the contrabass recorder as well as by the use of amplification and electronics.

As a composer, Palme works both in traditional and in experimental fields. For her, the combination of spontaneity with “skilful expression” is essential. Often she combines traditional composition, performance, and improvisation. Improvising was Palme’s point of departure, offering her the possibility to return to her inner self, as she explains:

I have also done improvisation retreats: closed myself in at a place, practicing solo improvisation only, following a set schedule for some days, without talking/playing otherwise and only concentrating on continuous improvised musical expression. By doing this I experienced various levels of emptying out and changing awareness [...].<sup>[20]</sup>

The contemplative background this quote highlights relates Pia Palme’s music to the work of John Cage. The impact of Cage’s heavy influence on new developments in the 1960s is still felt today and has yet to be sufficiently explored.<sup>[21]</sup> Pia Palme commented on another improvisation with contrabass recorder and electronics recorded live in Berlin in 2012 as follows: “I really like this idea of coming to a venue completely empty, without stuff on my computer, and leaving it empty again, a nomad of sound”.<sup>[22]</sup>

Many of her performances are dedicated to women composers.

“Homage to Hildegard”, for example, is a series of improvisations recorded during a retreat at a mountain hermitage. In general, the location where the music is performed and composed is of particular importance to her. “The music was recorded on the name day of composer Hildegard von Bingen during a clear and cold night in 2010. There was no (human) audience present,” she explained.<sup>[23]</sup>

By creating meditative music through topical technical means, Palme merges contemplative and rational currents. Further, she refers to both the history of Western music and to the Buddhist world. With every new project she establishes new perspectives and collaborations. One of her recent solo projects, “Turquoise Passages” for contrabass recorder, voice, microphones, and electronics, resulted from a stay in Tehran, where she was composer in residence at the Teahouse Pavilion of the Austrian Embassy. The piece is conceived as a work in progress. Consisting of a series of sketches, it is based on a text the composer wrote during her residency. “The text [...] gives texture to the music”, she explained.<sup>[24]</sup>

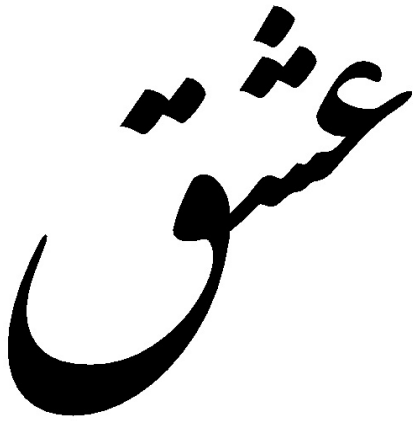
Reflecting on her Iranian impressions, Palme integrates some motifs that highlight important aspects of her artistic position: 1. With her music she opens up a space for reflection beyond all stylistic limits where disclosure and hiding go hand in hand. 2. The multilayered artistic processes she designs are open in order to make emancipation possible. 3. One of the most interesting characteristic features of Palme’s pieces is that they merge activity and a kind of more passive openness. Thus, performers who participate in her projects can find and shape a space for their own creativity. 4. For political reasons, women occupy a particular place in Pia Palme’s works and are given prominent attention.

[3] By transforming the composer’s impressions into words, the text paints a subjective scenario which serves as a basis and structural guideline for the music. Filling the more abstract verbal scenario with sensual sound, the music at the same time illustrates the composer’s search for a piece. An important characteristic feature of “Turquoise Passages” is that the music merges with the breath of the performer. Thus, the sound is extremely close to the body, creating a very intimate atmosphere. However, rooted in the personal experience which is the source of the work, this nearness is modified by electronic means. Background and foreground, distance and proximity interact, alternate, and complement each other. Interrupted by interrogative vocal and instrumental gestures at some moments, silence contributes to the thought-provoking dimension of the piece: music contemplating the process of music’s creation.

### **Audio Sample 1: “Turquoise Passages”**

<https://soundcloud.com/palmeworks/turquoise-passages-sketch-i>

“ESQH Close-up”, composed in 2011 for oboe da caccia solo, combines Western traditions of baroque music with inspirations from Persian calligraphy: “The handwriting and spelling (transcription) of the old Farsi word eshq has inspired the concept and structure of this contemporary solo piece for this unique baroque instrument”, the composer explains. “Eshq (or eshgh, as it is sometimes transcribed) means love; it is an old and poetic word, and often used in a mystic sense, much like the old German word ‘minne’. The famous Iranian poet Hafez (1325–1389), for example, wrote a lot about it. The letters of the transcription eshgh provided tonal material for the composition.”<sup>[25]</sup>



**Figure 1: eshq (Farsi)**

In this piece, experimentation changes the form of expression. Continuous new beginnings characterise the music. By adopting a speaking character, the instrumental sound becomes human. An atmosphere of listening to the fading sound constitutes the end.

**Audio Sample 2: “ESHQ Close-up”**

<https://soundcloud.com/palmeworks/turquoise-passages-sketch-i>

## II. Voices and Politics: Vocal Music in Search of the Inaudible

When we deal with Pia Palme’s œuvre, one of the questions that arise is how art can be political today. According to Braidotti, “postmodern nomadic feminism argues that you do not have to be settled in a substantive vision of the subject in order to be political”.<sup>[26]</sup> Rather, “political agency has to do with the capacity to expose the illusion of ontological foundations”: “What is political is precisely this awareness of the fractured, intrinsically power-based constitution of the subject and the active quest for possibilities of resistance to hegemonic formations.”<sup>[27]</sup> Braidotti highlights that “the nomadic subject functions as a relay team: s/he connects, circulates, moves on; s/he does not form identifications but keeps on coming back at regular intervals. [...] Nomadic politics is a matter of bonding, of coalitions, of interconnections.”<sup>[28]</sup>

In Palme’s work, the fact becomes clearly visible that “drawing a flow of connections need not be an act of appropriation”, as Braidotti puts it, but “marks transitions between communicating states and experiences”. The political convictions which determine the composer’s cultural and political engagement also characterise her pieces, even if her œuvre cannot be reduced to it. If she does not write her own texts, Palme chooses texts by authors whose works reflect her own artistic position in a complementary way. Many of her colleagues do not want to be addressed as women artists. Palme, by contrast, creates her works deliberately from the perspective of a female composer. This implies among other things a specific feminist view. Considering this political background, it is not surprising that artistically shaping the human voice is one of her main interests, because composing for voice provides the opportunity to deliver a message and to relate music precisely to a political topic. In addition, the text serves as an inspiration for



musical invention. Regarded as a source of concrete sound material, texts performed by different voices offer a huge variety of bodily expressions. By combining and making different voices audible, the composer takes part in the “collective project of feminism, which implies the acknowledgment and recognition of the voices of other women”.<sup>[29]</sup>

Palme collaborated several times with the American writer Anne Waldman, who is also very well known for her impressive poetry reading. Palme shares her belief in the importance of voice and performance. In FEMINAFESTO, from “Kill or Cure” published in 1994, Waldman writes:

Perhaps women have the advantage of producing a radically disruptive and subversive kind of writing right now because they are experiencing the current imbalances and contradictions that drive them to it. [...] She – the practitioner – wishes to explore and dance with everything in the culture which is unsung, mute, and controversial so that she may subvert the existing systems that repress and misunderstand feminine ‘difference.’<sup>[30]</sup>

Similar to Palme’s approach, Waldman combines Buddhist tenets and different sources of physicality. Her poetics can be characterised as an inclusive approach based on the idea of openness, for her art is a process including present and past voices simultaneously. Therefore, she perceives her poetry as a deep novel experience for the reader: “a sustained experience, a voyage, a magnificent dream, something that would take you in myriad directions simultaneously, and you could draw on all of these other voices and you could pay homage to ancestors and other languages – a poem that would include everything and yet dwell in the interstices of imagination and action.”<sup>[31]</sup>

The composer and the poet also share similar views as far as the form of artistic cooperation is concerned: Both have confidence in their collaborators. Pia Palme loves open concepts that allow everybody to deal with the chosen material in his or her own way. Anne Waldman, in turn, trusts the composer, who chooses different passages of Waldman’s texts and uses them freely, from a musical standpoint only. She even allows major changes in form and semantics which result from these musically conceived procedures.

[4] Palme’s use of texts is characterised by the idea of making hidden voices audible. In her pieces, processes of deconstruction and fragmentation become a prerequisite for disclosure. Pia Palme’s vocal music is marked by her interest in innovative technical developments. At the same time, the pieces also include historical dimensions. Between 2009 and 2012 she wrote several works for a historical speaking machine created by the Austrian writer and inventor Wolfgang Ritter von Kempelen (1734-1804), who became world famous for the invention of a chess-playing automaton. “KEMPELEN’S RING”, a composition for mobile phone, Kempelen’s speaking machine, fragmented sub bass recorder, microphones, electronics, and male voices was composed in 2012. Palme characterised the piece as a “Cyborg/Minuten/Oper für ein Mobiltelefon als Multitasking-Hauptdarsteller”:

The mobile phone is given the voice of a baroque speaking machine, which develops vocalises over a continuo consisting of a scratching noise and divergent spectres of noise. Noise from the inner parts of the sub bass recorder is combined with modulators and electronics. Samples recorded with the help of Kempelen’s speaking machine join in.<sup>[32]</sup>

Echoing a few words of Waldman’s text for “BARE BRANCHES”, written in the same year, – “version of absent world”, “locked”, and “trapped” – “KEMPELEN’S RING” can be understood as a meditation on the phenomena of presence and absence. Thus, it relates past, present, and future



on both a semantic and an empirical level.

Another composition entitled “DER KÜHNERE ENTSCHLUSS”, written in 2011, was commissioned for the “Klangspuren Tirol” festival; it combines voice, oboe da caccia, and electronics with Kempelen’s speaking machine. In this piece Palme explored three divergent layers of speech, including military language. The piece is based on contemporary texts by Margret Kreidl and Hansjörg Zauner, and on a historical source: “Exerzierreglement für die k.u.k. Fusstruppen”, dating from 1911. This book belonged to Palme’s grandfather, an officer in the Austro-Hungarian Imperial Army.

The music is organised in several layers: At the beginning a creaking noise is heard, providing the background for the oboe and the voice. The text, full of military metaphors, paints a scenario of assault. Parallel to the musical development, the words become more and more dramatized. The culmination is followed by an abrupt break and calmer passages. Conflict and battle are the main topics discussed by the voice, which pleads for courage: “In zweifelhaften Fällen ist der kühnere Entschluss der bessere.” It is the idea of the body as a machine which is explored sensually in the music. The speaking machine and the oboe become increasingly humanised and are freed more and more from the norms of a classical style. Vocal gestures of dislike or aversion become audible, as do animal-like sounds traditionally excluded from the artistic field. At the end, a sensual siren represents the verbal signal “Sturm”.

Verses such as “Ich arbeite mit Brüchen”, “Das ist etwas ganz anderes als Stille”, or “Ich möchte nicht wie ein Vogel singen” seem to comment on the audible situation. Thus, the text can be understood as an artistic self-reflection, too, as a comment of the composer on her own working process.

### **Audio Sample 3: “DER KÜHNERE ENTSCHLUSS”**

<https://soundcloud.com/palmeworks/der-k-hnere-entschluss-1>

“EXHIBIT #ONE”, composed in 2009 for the IMA Institute founded by the Austrian composer Elisabeth Schimana, features a reconstructed historical speaking machine and microphones, voice, and live electronics. In this piece, a process of emancipation takes place. A fragmentary text by Bernadette Schiefer sketches the scenario. <sup>[33]</sup>

The text addresses the listener directly. Single words contrast with sounds; a narration develops. Growing rhythmical density contributes to this development. Noise and breath constitute an animated sound. The continuous background sounds seem machine-like. Savage sounds emerge in front of a melancholic fading background generated electronically. Some sounds of suffocation evoke horror and disgust. Foreground and background alternate abruptly like cuts in a film. The atmosphere is radical and expressive, yet the sounds are gentle and soft. The piece appears to be alive like an animal.

### **Audio Sample. 4: “EXHIBIT #ONE”**

<https://soundcloud.com/palmeworks/exhibit-1>

Unusual forms of presentation and communication created by novel technical means have characterised many of Pia Palme’s vocal pieces from the beginning. A relatively early example is

“VARIETIES” for mixed choir and two solo voices (mezzo soprano and baritone), composed in 2009.<sup>[34]</sup> The title alludes to the compositional and performative process of the work: a vast field of sounds is generated from a single sonic source. The composer applies audio scores as a performance concept for a choir of 100 people in a spatial setting. The setting for the performance at the MAK museum Vienna was created by Pia Palme in collaboration with the Gartenbauschule Schönbrunn. The year 2009 was the international year of the aubergine; thus, the scenery for the performance was designed by the spatial Ikebana master Irene Pichlhöfer as an installation made of 700 kg of aubergines comprising 80 old varieties. The libretto is based on texts by Sophie Reyer and Oswald Egger written in coproduction. In order to parallel the idea of propagation from a source which determines the musical process, both authors followed a specific procedure: each verse by Egger was answered by a line by Reyer.



**Figure 2: “VARIETIES” at MAK, Vienna  
(copyright by Gabriela Koch)**



**Figure 3: “VARIETIES” at MAK, Vienna  
(copyright by Gabriela Koch)**

[5] The main compositional concept of the piece was to create the parts for a mixed choir out of two vocal solo parts with the help of audio scores during the performance. The sound passes via headphones from the soloists to the lead singers, and within the choir from one singer to the next. There is no need for a conductor. While singing their notated parts independently, the two soloists follow a timeline. A male and female singer equipped with headphones lead the choir. Microphones transmit the solo voices into the headsets of the lead singers. Everybody is asked to perform exactly what he or she hears as accurately as possible. “Instead of reading music,

singers perform by ear”, Pia Palme stressed. Audio scores have been used for film music since the 1920s. In the realm of new music, however, they are used relatively rarely, Palme explained. This mode of learning and performing involves specific challenges for the musicians, because the flow of the piece should never be interrupted. As a consequence, “parts are uncontrollably eroded and modulated (like through electronic means), but here it happens through people trying to perform as accurately as possible by ear”, Palme wrote. As the composer prescribed, “soloists should be able to listen to the choir at least during rehearsal, to be able to react to it: as their parts generate the piece, they should be aware of how the choir picks up their voices.”<sup>[35]</sup> In addition, the sound is shaped by the spatial arrangement of the choir. Men and women are lined up facing each other according to the composer’s plan, which includes the audience as an active part:

The soloists should stand at a maximum distance from the choir (if possible, not even in view of the choir – around a corner, for example). The distance between the soloists and the body of the choir opens up space for the audience to move in or stand still at will. The acoustic pattern changes with the position of the listener.<sup>[36]</sup>

### **Audio Sample 5: “VARIETIES”**

<https://soundcloud.com/palmeworks/varieties-remix>

Structural ideas are the point of departure for Pia Palme’s works, which usually begin with conceptual studies and spatial sketches. The composer establishes relationships to traditions via genres and instrumentation, adapting them to the 21<sup>st</sup> century by adding new technical means and putting them into a new context. As far as the polyphonic structure of her works and her predilection for thinking in voices are concerned, she takes Johann Sebastian Bach as one of her central ideals.<sup>[37]</sup>

Another important aspect of Palme’s pieces is the transformation of emotional experiences resulting from recent events into sound. In this respect she can be compared to Maria Lassnig, who talked of bodily experiences she wanted to express in her paintings.<sup>[38]</sup> With “BARE BRANCHES”, composed in 2012, Palme refers to a recent political event: the forced abortion of female fetuses in China. Based on a text by Anne Waldman, who refers to a sociological study exploring the impact of this policy on Chinese society,<sup>[39]</sup> the piece aims at making missing voices audible in an emotional way. In order to achieve this goal, “BARE BRANCHES” continues the old tradition of the requiem. In the piece the composer used vocal material spoken by women in different places in the world. The harmonies resulted from a spectral analysis of songs recorded at an Indian cloister for nuns.<sup>[40]</sup> The piece is conceived in three parts. At the beginning, noise and breathing are heard. Long notes constitute the background for separate, softly whispered vowels, which alternate with more elaborate coloraturas. In the course of the piece, the voices merge into an overall sound, a choir is built up, and the music intensifies. Against this background, which recalls traditional church music, litany-like melodies evolve. Electronics contribute to an increasingly bizarre atmosphere and the piece becomes continuously dramatic. Whispers, single vowels, and other phonemes illustrate growing excitement. Falling gestures signal sadness and lament. The harmonies recall traditional choral settings dominated partly by fifths. By contrast, more dissonant intervals such as seconds produce a modern character. Sometimes solo voices emerge, contributing emotional sounds and non-verbal questions. The third part is characterised by a spoken text accompanied by metallic sounds. Gradually, voices join in. A choral setting

recalls old music, while polyphonic textures come to the fore. The vocal sound remains as a central element at the end; slowly, it is transformed into breath. Few phonemes and syllables can be heard. The sound is static and at the same time fluent. Whereas the music seems near, the spoken text as a separate layer remains in the background, as if heard from a distance. Short solos appear as ruptures.

**Audio Sample 6: “BARE BRANCHES” (part three)**

[https://soundcloud.com/palmeworks/bare-branches\\_part3](https://soundcloud.com/palmeworks/bare-branches_part3)

Pia Palme’s artistic efforts to make inaudible voices audible and to integrate contrasting voices into her pieces relate her œuvre to the postmodern philosophy of Jean-François Lyotard. For him, art’s contribution to justice consists of creating a multitude of small narratives, thus putting an end to the domination of a single grand narrative and its fatal tendency to silence all others. Furthermore, by drawing attention to diversity, difference, and silence, art helps unheard voices to obtain attention. Therefore, art provokes a different attitude towards the past than the one our modern technical words suggests: Whereas in our daily life memory is often nothing more than seemingly pure information about the past, artistic commemoration comprises the idea of an irretrievable loss manifesting itself in the artistic language itself. Consequently, fragmentation and silence become basic characteristic features of the artistic event.<sup>[41]</sup>

### III. Theatre and Installations: Art Beyond Traditional Limits

[6] Lyotard thought of small narratives as subversive elements. Conceiving Western society as a libidinous economy, he believed the limits of the body should ultimately be abandoned in order to overcome capitalism. It is again art that might accomplish such a radical vision. In feminist theory, “a radical rejection of essentialism” is connected with an “emphasis on embodiment”. “One speaks as a woman in order to empower women, to activate sociosymbolic changes in their condition: this is a radically essentialist position”, writes Rosi Braidotti.<sup>[42]</sup> For her, “the body or the embodiment of the subject is to be understood as neither a biological nor a sociological category but rather as a point of overlapping between the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological”.<sup>[43]</sup>

In Palme’s œuvre, the creation of intermediate spaces where different forms of expression, technical means, and voices meet transgresses the traditional boundaries of the musical work. In Braidotti’s case we can speak of an “affirmation of fluid boundaries” and “a sort of collective becoming polyglot”.<sup>[44]</sup> But for Palme it is the body which plays a crucial role in this process. Therefore, her art can also be related to the feminist philosophy of Hélène Cixous, who created the notion of “écriture féminine”: a sort of bodily poetic expression that integrates multiple voices. Politically, it is Cixous’ objective to “eradicate death and affirm life”, as Verena Andermatt Conley puts it:

Cixous is concerned with a desire of intensity that would replace a desire of appropriation based on the death of one of the partners. This summit of desire, of height – close to Bataille’s notion of sovereignty which, beyond a simple coincidence of opposites, displaces Hegelian mastery – inscribes itself in the functioning of a *writing* that exceeds the logos. [...] Sovereignty has to be read outside of hierarchies, as that which rids itself of quotidian preoccupations, obstacles, closures, possibilities of reversal, on the side of spending, the gift, and birth.<sup>[45]</sup>

In contrast to many pieces of electronic music, Palme’s works are only possible as live performances. The autonomous parts of all the contributors play a crucial role in the constitution of the whole piece. Therefore, her œuvre is an invitation to call into question the traditional role of both composer and interpreter. In her works the interpreter’s responsibility is much greater than in traditionally conceived pieces, while the composer has to adopt a more collaborative role.

An important characteristic feature of her works results from her experience with improvisation. Spontaneity plays a crucial role in that it adds a certain feeling of time that is different from a time organisation based mainly on serial structures or computer-generated algorithmic patterns. Relying on spontaneity involves taking a certain risk, as whether the dramaturgical concept is successfully put into effect depends on the special occasion and the quality of each performance.

Together with the dramatic character inherent in Palme’s music, the indispensable bodily presence of the musicians – an essential feature of her pieces – contributes to the theatrical character of many of her compositions. Many of her works are theatrical projects. Opera has been at the heart of her interests since 2013. As a starting point for her project “ABSTRIAL”, the composer criticises traditional opera as performed today for its lack of reality and contemporaneity:

I perceive operas performed at the major opera houses today as perpetuating social rituals rooted in Western cultures of the later 19th century. Not only today’s music is neglected here, but today’s society as well. [...] In traditional opera settings, the audience is drawn into a dislocated ‘sphere of magic’ – using a quote from composer Lachenmann about the industry of classical music.<sup>[46]</sup>

By creating “ABSTRIAL”, the group of collaborators desired a shift from this museum-like routine: a processual collaborative piece rooted in everyday life.

The group of artists who collaborated to create ABSTRIAL wanted to stage an opera which is part of today’s reality. [...] Every person in the piece shares the same reality, the same world, the same process of transient existence, as every human being present during the performance. There is no separate story/reality/play or dream or magic, which this piece wants to create. Everything is directly visible/audible: raising dough and falling/breaking glass, an audience and performers. The opera ABSTRIAL constitutes a synchronous event to everyday life: a con-temporary opera.<sup>[47]</sup>

The concept includes a living installation by Ivan Fantini using yeast dough, which changes constantly. By doing so, it adds an unpredictable quasi-natural element to the setting: “The stage lives synchronously with the audience, changes and decays, while the performers change, and the music arises and fades away”, is how the composer described the idea, again attempting to relate art and life in every single given moment.

With this integrative concept, Pia Palme wants to go back to the roots. It is baroque opera which provides the model: rather abstract plots, no spectacular action on stage. The communication of emotional changes in the characters dominates the action. Contrary to the 19<sup>th</sup> century notion of autonomous art, it is also important to her that the opera was embedded in a certain social

practice:

The performance of an opera – stage, audience, the entire setup of the social and artistic ritual of an early baroque theatre performance – mirrored society as it was. As Octavio Paz argues, society met itself and staged itself in/during a Baroque feast. Society looked at itself in a mirror. As we know, the Baroque audience participated in the ritual by eating, drinking, talking and listening. Everything was part of one big staging, an all-embracing performance.<sup>[48]</sup>

[7] In “ABSTRUAL” – the title is an artificial word comprising the terms “abstract” and “material” – an artificial space is created electronically by Electric Indigo. Various actions develop simultaneously in this setting, guided by different principles, such as audio scores, traditional notation, or improvisation. Expressing manifold emotional experiences, the protagonists’ movements on stage start, evolve, continue, and end only to begin again. As such, they correspond to the repetition of divergent musical patterns and processes. Both dance and voice manifest a desperate and unbreakable will to express themselves. It is the solo voice which links the artistic actions to the surrounding world. Verbal quotations add a political context. In addition, highly emotional passages characterised by unarticulated sounds appear. In the end, they result in classical singing, thus highlighting the emotional basis of classical expression. Pia Palme’s double bass recorder adds an instrumental voice carrying out another subjective version of the shared emancipatory process. The choir alludes to different musical styles. High staccato passages, for instance, recall the typical coloratura style of vocal singing. The more the piece evolves, the more dramatic elements join in. The scenic setting is dominated by huge shadows of the protagonists on the wall and the vivid dough, the fermentation process of which causes the glasses to fall on the ground and break. Undomesticated and unidentifiable sounds emerge. The torch in the darkness evokes the image of a search. Whispering is associated with the spread of secret news. An impressive climax is created by electronic means: the sound of breaking glass crashing from the ceiling into the whole room like a storm from the outside.

### **Audio Sample 7: “ABSTRUAL” (excerpt)**

<https://vimeo.com/66038518>

Pia Palme’s thoughts about the piece reflect the whole process, expressing both the composer’s and at the same time the participating musician’s experiences.<sup>[49]</sup>

The verses reveal some of Palme’s main artistic occupations: her interest in the creation of spaces located somewhere between inside and outside, her intention to bridge the gap between scientific and emotional worldviews, and her interest in processes of creation. In addition, this text shows a certain idea of time which is also central to Pia Palme’s music: It is the present moment in which past, present, and future coincide, creating a novel intensity.

Many of Palme’s most recent scenic works establish relations between sound, plastic, and visual arts. As a consequence, music adopts the shape of a multimedia sculpture. It is the baroque notion of the work which, according to the composer, provides freedom for experimentation. In 2013 she wrote a composition for voice, feathers and a paper sculpture, percussion, live electronics, and a baroque ensemble (a=415 Hz) with flauto traverso, harpsichord, and viola da gamba. Based on a libretto by Pia Palme with texts from Margret Kreidl’s “SCHLAFEN WEINEN” (2002) and Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), it also contributes to establishing a female musical tradition since the piece includes a deconstructed version of the “Prelude” in G-



minor from *Pieces de Clavecin* (1687) by Elisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre.<sup>[50]</sup>

The piece's communicative structure is characterised by the alternating parts of the musicians. A large paper sculpture dominates the scene. Recalling the traditional posture of an opera singer, it alludes to opera on the visual level, too. Pia Palme made the sculpture herself "by wrapping a mannequin puppet with moulded layers of simple wrapping-paper". As she explained, it serves as an instrument as well: "The singer stands behind the sculpture and uses it as a versatile percussion instrument, to be treated with precisely timed movements notated in the score. [...] The live electronic setup is partially controlled by feathers moved over light sensors".<sup>[51]</sup>



**Figure 4: "BUT STILL ATTACHED TO LIFE AT ALL FOUR CORNERS",  
December 31, 2013 (premiere)  
(copyright Markus Gradwohl)**

The title "BUT STILL ATTACHED TO LIFE AT ALL FOUR CORNERS" alludes to a line from Virginia Woolf's text and highlights Palme's conviction that even an artistic phenomenon as artificial as opera has to be rooted in daily life. The piece uses traditional singing and language. With the expansion into the field of visual art, the composer follows ways she has already tested in numerous collaborations with different artists. However, the specific experimental theatrical character is generated by the noises of paper.

Another recent work combining traditional instruments with sound art and visual art is "GIB SIE WIEDER. a warning commentary on resonance I" for viola d'amore, electronics, a sounding object, and contrabass recorder, composed in 2014. Once again there is a female tradition



contained in the title. “Gib sie wieder” (“Give it back”) is a quotation from a German folk song published in 1824 under the title “Warnung” (“Warning”): the text advises the fox to release the stolen goose in order not to attract the huntsman with his deadly gun.<sup>[52]</sup> The song is still sung today by Austrian children. The main musical idea of Palme’s piece is to explore the phenomenon of resonance. For her it is combined with a feminist approach critically investigating the Western musical tradition. As the composer explained, the viola d’amore was associated with typical feminine features:

Over centuries, qualities which were traditionally perceived as feminine – such as sympathy and resonance – have been assigned to the instrument. Therefore, its neck was often decorated with a carved female head. The instrument was frequently used in connection with feminine contexts or main female characters by (mostly male) composers such as Leoš Janáček, or in Bernard Herrmann’s film music.<sup>[53]</sup>

[8] At this crucial point, Palme intends to interfere – from her standpoint as a “contemporary composer and feminist” – by installing a novel form of sympathetic resonance in the composition: In order to guide the viola player, audio scores are used in addition to the written score. In the last two parts of the four-part composition, these aural inputs are also transmitted to the audience. Feathers, paper, and a wooden box serve as sounding objects. As they also contribute to the setting on stage with all their aesthetic qualities, a transgression to visual art takes place. Scenic and musical elements merge in a unique way. By amplifying the resonant strings of the viola d’amore and transducing them into the wooden box, Palme creates an integrative sound. The sound of the viola blends with the box’s sound, but it is the resonant strings of the viola that form the basis for the amplification. Consequently, the instrument’s sound seems to evolve in an intimate space created by itself. The atmosphere resulting from this process is a particularly sensual and soft one. In the composition’s second part the viola player’s hands have to act completely separately, guided partly by the audio score. In part three a text guides the player. The words are also audible to the listeners. In this part the contrabass recorder joins in. The text written by Pia Palme during the composing process was whispered by a vocalist for the recording. It deals with the phenomenon of resonance. Whispered words merge with soft resonating sounds and rhythmic noise produced by the bow. At certain moments, the text is also spoken rhythmically. The soft dynamics contribute to the sensual atmosphere. It is an inner world of resonance that seems to open up, dramatically full of emotions and colours, lively and soft at the same time. At the end, the voice acts as a soloist, whereas the viola remains silent.

### **Audio Sample 8: “GIB SIE WIEDER. a warning commentary on resonance I”**

<https://soundcloud.com/palmeworks/gib-sie-wieder-her-a-warning-1>

The text reflects the composer’s thoughts during the process of creating the piece. It can thus be regarded as a self-reflection in sound the composer shares with the public. Picking up the notion of “forced resonance”, the text recapitulates questions which occurred to her during the composition process. This adds a level of verbal communication to the piece. Metaphorically, the questions raised in the text deal with the state of freedom and free will within society.<sup>[54]</sup>

In addition, the title adds a specific semantic dimension to the piece. As the piece alludes to an old but still well-known nursery song it can also be understood as a souvenir of something forgotten and lost that should be recalled and experienced in a novel, contemporary way. Communication takes place with the help of a specific sound space that is at the same time

overwhelming and soft. Nevertheless, it includes room for reflection. Through pauses as well as a specific shape of time, freedom is created for both musicians and listeners, thus enabling words and sounds to reach their public.

Palme composed another version of this piece for harp and electronics in the same year, “GIB SIE WIEDER. a warning commentary on resonance II”. The piece is conceived as a mixture of inside and outside performance: a recording of feedback sounds and noises, voice, and harp alternate and merge with a live performance. The live harp is tuned in a completely different microtonal scordatura than the recorded one. Each of the harpists uses an individual score. In addition, there is an overall concept that sketches a process of transforming noise into sound and vice versa, as the composer explained: “While the ‘outside’ part moves from noise to sound, the ‘inner’ part develops in the opposite direction: from pitched sound (more precisely: feedback sounds) to noisy parts.”<sup>[55]</sup> Palme’s objective is for the two harps to merge into one sonic object. Again, resonance is a major means of shaping the atmosphere. Two speakers are placed directly on the soundboard of the harp on stage, causing the electronic track to be filtered by the resonance of the harp. Thus, resonance and live performance interfere acoustically with each other. As Palme explained, the goose feathers used for playing the harp during the recording and the live performances “play with the image conveyed by the song, the goose wanting to be free”. Furthermore, they recall ancient writing and composition traditions as well as the sound of the harpsichord’s strings, which are plucked by feathers. Altogether, for Palme the feather is “a tool of creative expression”. The sound of the recorded harp is characterised by the composer as a kind of “trapped voice” and stands for the concept of a “remote feminine presence”, underlining the social implications of the work’s plan. “Patterns of gender interactions pervade musical performance and the history of instruments, as well as music as such. In this piece, I work and play with this background noise from a feminist composer’s point of view.”<sup>[56]</sup>

**Audio Sample 9: “GIB SIE WIEDER. a warning commentary on resonance II”  
(electronic track, inside the harp)**

<https://soundcloud.com/palmeworks/inside-the-harp-gib-sie-wieder>

## IV. Self-Reflection and Exploration of the Creative Process

[9] Pia Palme’s pieces not only establish various relationships to fellow artists and divergent artistic traditions. Moreover, they initiate a critical reflection on the concept of the musical work itself. During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the notion of musical work has become one of the most disputed aesthetic terms. As Richard Klein recently argued, even if the idea of the work as an ontological entity fixed once and for all in the score is, without any doubt, outdated today, it would nevertheless be much too simple to regard the term as obsolete. Rather, it is the task of musicologists today to conceive of the work in a novel way by taking into account discourses based on cultural and media history.<sup>[57]</sup> Palme’s pieces contribute to this task in an artistic manner. First, they demonstrate that a work of art can be understood as a sort of writing, the elements of which are not only abstract but also vivid and corporeal. Second, by combining traditional and avant-gardist elements her pieces sometimes even bridge generations and

centuries as well as different geographical traditions. Yet most importantly, Palme's œuvre makes it clear that the work of art is a dynamic event fed by several sources. Thus, for the composer, participating in the creation of a work always involves a search for the unknown. The exploration of the creative process, from her standpoint, is a form of self-experience. As already described above, Palme wrote texts contemplating the creative process in several of her works. These activities culminate in "LIP OF THE REAL", in which exploration and composition of the stream of thought is the focus of the artist's interest. The piece's first version for mezzo-soprano, throat microphone and PTT button, live electronics, and percussion was composed in 2012. The composer characterised the piece, which is based on German and English texts by Margret Kreidl, Pia Palme, and Anne Waldman, as "a contemporary solo for voice". Conceived as extensions of the voice, electronics and percussion create a sound space around the vocalist. The vocal score contains four staves. Each mirrors a specific aspect of the musician's thought activity. According to the composer, this setting should express movements of the creative mind on a structural level, corresponding to the different layers of consciousness and awareness constituting the activity of the mind. "Every staff has a different tempo and textural content", she explicated.<sup>[58]</sup> Whereas actual singing is only used on the bottom of the system, the upper parts employ technical means to make silent inner voices audible. Softly uttered single words constitute the part of the "Inner Voice", whereas the "watching activity" is located at the top of the system, depicted with the help of the text written by Pia Palme. It is read with a closed mouth and transmitted in fragments by the throat microphone. The part of the "Secret Voice" mediates between inner and outer activities. It contains the greatest amount of text.

From the listener's perspective, the different layers of verbal expression and breath constitute divergent forms of nearness and distance. Distinct articulation bridges distances. Murmuring voices, by contrast, appear to give insight in otherwise inaudible inner spaces. Soft-spoken words evoke the impression of secret participation and confidence. Whereas on the one hand different expressive sound spaces are built up, on the other hand transformations take place. Voice, instruments, and electronics become indistinguishable; vocal expressions constitute rhythmic pulsations. In the continuously changing electronically and instrumentally generated space that constitutes the context for the solo voice, sound signals appear as a secret code. Scenic associations are evoked by the broken language as well as by abruptly entering powerful events which can be associated with natural forces. The drama resulting from the interference of these layers seems fragmented, broken, and unreadable. New sounds evoking inhuman as well as human worlds join traditional fields of expression.

### **Audio Sample 10: "LIP OF THE REAL"**

<https://soundcloud.com/palmeworks/lip-of-the-real-ii>

In an article on the second version of the piece, which is a part of her arts PhD, Palme reveals the background ideas of her concept in more detail. It is music by the baroque composer Georg Philipp Telemann that serves as a model for the innovative layout:

Prompted by the hidden polyphony of Telemann's solo pieces, I define a five-tiered system for the solo part on a scale from the internal monologue to extroverted vocality. I develop techniques such as using a throat-microphone to capture composed 'mental noise' or using a text as a timing device.<sup>[59]</sup>

As she explains, her objective is to reverse the noise/signal duality.

Voice extends into instrumental performance and is supported by a percussion part; via microphone and live-electronic improvisation, 'the noise of the mind' is exploded into a 'spatial basso continuo'. As an improvising performer, I interact with the meta-identity of composed parts, inviting disturbance as an ingredient of my compositional plan.<sup>[60]</sup>

As her statement shows, her activity as a composer is always influenced by her experience as a performer. According to Palme, observing the activity of the mind during a performance is a practical problem. By exploring the noise of the mind, she aims at interweaving contemplative concepts, scientific perspectives, and personal experience.

## Conclusion

[10] In her recently published book on Karlheinz Stockhausen, Ivanka Stoianova speaks of two divergent or complementary strategies that characterise 20<sup>th</sup> century music: a "strong" strategy relying on the closed oeuvre which corresponds to the Western written tradition on the one hand and a "weak" strategy based on improvisation and experimentation generating the open work on the other hand.<sup>[61]</sup> Pia Palme's oeuvre integrates both strategies. Her works are characterised by the alternation of fore- and background, inner and outer spaces; further by a tendency to create sounds combining opposite aspects of expression, such as civilisation and nature, norms and freedom, rationality and emotion; and finally, by a meditative dimension which is often related to the textual basis of her pieces and nevertheless does not exclude political thinking. By transforming vocal sounds into instrumental sounds and vice versa, Palme continues the course of the traditional post-war avant-garde. At the same time, however, by inserting contemplative and personal experiences, as well as scientific and political views, she creates a highly individual path. Palme fills well-known sounds and structures with topical emotional sense. Creating novel forms of expression and communication are two of her main objectives. Even when she continues a tradition, such as Ligeti's speech composition,<sup>[62]</sup> the expression she seeks is a new one: the voice of a new generation embodying a feminine, sometimes even a feminist, and pluralist position. Politically, Palme's work is a plea for collaboration and a human culture without limits, including men and women from all over the world. Her works are utopian and real at the same time, for they exist as practical performances and thus testify to the feasibility of the idea of collaboration and successful communication. For her, music is a tool for experimentation, construction, shared experience, and reflection. It establishes a counter-world which is at the same time rooted in our everyday world and manifests itself as shared action. Processes of construction and destruction, visible and invisible structures manifest themselves in her works. Internal and external processes come together, overlap, or develop in a parallel manner. It is by technical means that they become sensual experiences. According to Pia Palme, music provides emotional insight. Thus, making music is for her a cognitive act. Her search for expression frees itself from the poles of subjectivity and objectivity together with the tendency to separate new and old music. Her works are not representation – neither expression of inner emotion nor pure expression of the musical material. Her music incorporates all these aspects to different degrees. Thus it contributes to a novel understanding of expression and a new worldview in which subjective and objective moments merge. With her concept, the composer distances herself from classifications and contemporary currents such as electronic music, new music, or sound art.<sup>[63]</sup> Operating at traditional limits and calling them into question seems to be a necessary part of her artistic personality. It is exactly this characteristic feature that makes her join those experimental

female artists whose works still wait to be explored.

Pia Palme characterises herself as a listener.<sup>[64]</sup> When asked about the Austrian aspects in her works she mentions her childhood experiences hearing different sound worlds overlap: Raised in Sievering, a part of the 19<sup>th</sup> district of Vienna, she always heard voices, music, and, later in the evening, spontaneous singing coming from the Heurigen (taverns) next to her parents' house.<sup>[65]</sup> However, listening, for her, implies not only outside soundscapes but also inner voices and all those missing in society's choir. This aspect too, as she explains, is connected to her childhood observations in post-war Vienna in the 1950s.<sup>[66]</sup> There was a lack of communication concerning the war; this heavily influenced the atmosphere from the child Pia's viewpoint. Another particularly powerful impact on the child was the observation that many mansions in Sievering were empty because they had belonged to Jews forced to abandon them and flee, murdered or expelled by the Nazi regime. Yet there was not much information available; everything was covered by a cloak of silence. Pia Palme's interest in unheard and unarticulated voices results not least from these early impressions.

Palme's artistic world is a sensitive and reflective one. Whereas many of her contemporaries stick to a quite old-fashioned idea of authorship still featuring the composer as a genius,<sup>[67]</sup> her artistic concepts are precise and at the same time open for perspectives and contributions by others. It is this quality that relates her approach to other experimental artists, such as Olga Neuwirth,<sup>[68]</sup> and contributes to the interest her pieces raise. Further, her innovative notion of authorship engenders the international, global character of her work.

It is exactly for these reasons that Palme's art not only relates to the thoughts of feminists such as Rosi Braidotti or Hélène Cixous, but further develops their ideas within a specific musical framework. "As a figuration of contemporary subjectivity", Rosi Braidotti writes,

the nomad is a postmetaphysical, intensive, multiple entity, functioning in a net of interconnections. S/he cannot be reduced to a linear, teleological form of subjectivity but is rather the site of multiple connections. S/he is embodied, and therefore cultural; as an artefact, s/he is a technological compound of human and post-human; s/he is complex, endowed with multiple capacities for interconnectedness in the impersonal mode. S/he is a cyborg, but equipped also with an unconscious. S/he is [...] endowed with a multicultural perspective: S/he is abstract and perfectly, operationally real.<sup>[69]</sup>

[11] As I have demonstrated, Pia Palme brings an international community of contemporary artists together with her projects. In addition, she contributes to a tradition in which women composers figure prominently, too.<sup>[70]</sup> It is in this sense that the label "Austrian" and the term "woman composer" might be useful: signifying a field of influences that generates an individual artistic view. This view is the basis for Pia Palme's transdisciplinary work, which crosses boundaries "without concern for the vertical distinctions around which they have been organised".<sup>[71]</sup> Politically, Palme follows a path that Braidotti had in mind when conceiving of nomad as a feminist paradigm establishing "a sort of counter-memory, or a space of resistance": According to Braidotti, "the many voices of women in the text are also a way of emphasizing and celebrating the subtlety and theoretical relevance of women's thought."<sup>[72]</sup> The nomadic consciousness in Braidotti's view/mind is highly subversive: "Feminists – or other critical intellectuals as nomadic subject – are those who have forgotten to forget injustice and symbolic poverty: their memory is activated against the stream; they enact a rebellion of subjugated knowledges."<sup>[73]</sup>

For Braidotti, nomadic consciousness "consists in not taking any kind of identity as permanent":

“The nomad is only passing through; s/he makes those necessarily situated connections that can help her/him to survive, but s/he never takes on fully the limits of one national, fixed identity.”<sup>[74]</sup> In a similar sense, the Austrian writer Ingeborg Bachmann interpreted the historical term “House of Austria”, designating the Habsburg dynasty, in a novel way: as an international community of artists that establish a new, human tradition by focusing on a cosmopolitan idea of home, which is at the same time individual and unsteady.<sup>[75]</sup>

Pia Palme’s music provides a platform for many voices. In also including forgotten, neglected, or distinguished voices, her music adopts a dimension of commemoration. By creating a cosmopolitan perspective, she is deconstructing the term Austrian as a national or local classification. In addition, by working in places such as the Cosmos Theatre or organising festivals such as *e\_may* she contributes actively to the shape of contemporary Austrian culture. “Austrian” is no relevant category relating to a particular restricted present space, but it may be a point of departure. Communicating musically in a novel way, playing together without limits, is the challenge and the demand. Nationalist perspectives are deconstructed in favour of a global view. In creating relations, Pia Palme makes invisible traditions visible. When she highlights the impact of feminine music by referring to works by women artists of the past and the present, her aim is a change in evaluation. Female contributions should become visible from an individual perspective and thus become part of a musical communication over time and space. Understood in such a sense, the terms “female” and “Austrian” are less constructed than deconstructed: An outdated view of identity is replaced by a more international and even global perspective. Thus, Palme’s notion of identity provokes novel approaches that contrast with the mainstream, seemingly neutral discourses in new music which are still characterised by the tendency to exclude female contributions.<sup>[76]</sup> Further, an examination of her œuvre challenges well-established views on the music of the post-war avant-garde highly dominated by German perspectives. Publications on developments which took place at centres such as Donaueschingen and Darmstadt still have not been complemented by more decentred approaches.<sup>[77]</sup> Therefore, a deconstructed “Austrian” perspective might aid in questioning this nationally based view and instigate further studies from different viewpoints, leading to a more global and thus novel viewpoint.<sup>[78]</sup> “The feminist nomadic journey goes on, by necessity”, writes Rosi Braidotti, encouraging women “to repossess the multi-layered structure of their subjectivity as the site or historical sedimentation of meanings and representations that must be worked through”: “Not unlike Walter Benjamin’s angel of history, nomadic feminist thinkers already have a foot in the next century, while keeping in sight the very past from which they are struggling to emerge.”<sup>[79]</sup>

## References

1. Pia Palme, “Schillernde Zwischenwelten”, in *ÖMZ* 8 (2009), 45–46. ↑
2. Cf. <http://e-may.org>, accessed March 3, 2017. ↑
3. Whereas sound art has often been associated with the artistic exploration of experimental sounds, such as sounds of nature, some recent scholarly contributions to the field focus on the importance of sound in traditional compositions, such as the lied, or on explicitly critical feminist contributions to contemporary music. See, amongst others, Volker Staub, “WINDWITNESSING: Klangkunst und Klang-Natur-Forschung von Leif Brush”, in Hiekel, Jörn Peter (ed.), *Vernetzungen, Neue Musik im Spannungsfeld von Wissenschaft und Technik* (Mainz: Schott, 2009), 202–228; Wolfgang-Andreas Schultz, “Klangkomposition. Zwischen Naturlaut und Vision”, in Wolfgang-Andreas Schultz, *Avantgarde – Trauma*



– *Spiritualität. Vorstudien zu einer neuen Musikästhetik* (Mainz: Schott, 2014), 72–83; Anne Holzmüller, *Lyrik als Klangkunst. Klanggestaltung in Goethes Nachtliedern und ihren Vertonungen von Reichardt bis Wolf* (Rombach: Freiburg, 2015); Linda Ioanna Kouvaras, *Loading the Silence: Australian Sound Art in the Post-Digital-Age* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013). ↑

4. Cf. “Entkonditionierungs-Versuche. Pia Palme, Mitbegründerin des ab Donnerstag stattfindenden Festivals e\_may, im Porträt”, in *Der Standard*, May 11, 2011, <http://derstandard.at/1304551620416/Entkonditionierungs-Versuche>, accessed April 4, 2015. ↑
5. Cf. Pia Palme, “LIP OF THE REAL version II: Composing the noise of mind”, in *CeReNeM Journal* 4 (2014), [http://piapalme.at/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/CeReNeM\\_Journal\\_Palme.pdf](http://piapalme.at/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/CeReNeM_Journal_Palme.pdf), accessed April 4, 2015. ↑
6. See, for an overview, Florian Heesch, Katrin Losleben (eds.), *Musik und Gender. Ein Reader* (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Böhlau, 2012). ↑
7. Melanie Unseld, *Biographie und Musikgeschichte: Wandlungen biographischer Konzepte in Musikkultur und Musikhistoriographie* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2014). ↑
8. Sally Macarthur, *Feminist Aesthetics in Music* (Westport, Conn., et al.: Greenwood Press, 2002). ↑
9. Sally Macarthur, *Towards a Twenty-First Century Feminist Politics of Music* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010). ↑
10. Sally Macarthur, “Difference, Becoming and Event in Women’s Music: Anne Boyd’s Ganba”, in Kordula Knaus, Susanne Kogler (eds.), *Autorschaft, Genie, Geschlecht. Musikalische Schaffensprozesse von der Frühen Neuzeit bis zur Gegenwart* (Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau, 2013), 209–226, 211. ↑
11. *Ibid.*, 223. ↑
12. *Ibid.* ↑
13. Frank Vogelsang, *Identität in einer offenen Wirklichkeit. Eine Spurensuche im Anschluss an Merleau-Ponty, Ricoeur und Waldenfels* (Freiburg, Munich: Alber, 2014), 15. ↑
14. *Ibid.*, 18–20 and 24–27. ↑
15. Concerning gender and identity, see, amongst others, Christina von Braun, Inge Stephan (eds.), *Gender@Wissen. Ein Handbuch der Gender-Theorien* (Vienna, Cologne: UTB, 2013). ↑
16. Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 22. ↑
17. *Ibid.*, 28. ↑
18. *Ibid.*, 31. ↑
19. *Ibid.*, 6. ↑
20. Pia Palme, “Some Thoughts about Improvising”, <http://piapalme.at/improvisation>, accessed April 4, 2015. ↑
21. The existing studies mostly focus on Karl Heinz Stockhausen’s works and works by Cage himself. Whereas Stockhausen’s intuitive music is explored mainly for its impact on “Licht”, Cage’s works are often portrayed as a cosmos of their own. From an artistic viewpoint, Dieter Schnebel has referred to Cage continuously. Cf. Thomas Ulrich, *Neue Musik aus religiösem Geist. Theologisches Denken im Werk von Karlheinz Stockhausen und John Cage* (Saarbrücken: Pfau, 2006), and Dieter Schnebel, *Anschläge – Ausschläge. Texte zur Neuen Musik* (Munich, Vienna: Hanser, 1993). ↑
22. Palme, “Some thoughts about improvising”. ↑
23. *Ibid.* ↑
24. Pia Palme, “Towards a New Solo-Piece: Turquoise Passages”, <http://piapalme.at/works/turquoise-passage-series-of-sketches>, accessed April 4, 2015: “Ein-/treten / den



Kopf freimachen / versteckt / nicht mehr versteckt / verborgen / nicht mehr verborgen / verschleiert / nicht mehr verschleiert / [...] / She says: / Are you subject or object as you step into the same river twice? / [...] / in denselben Fluss nicht zweimal stürzen / Wer? / Raumzerstörung sagt sie ist unbegreiflich / Frau / Frau". ("Step inside/uncover the head/ hidden /not hidden anymore/concealed/not concealed anymore / veiled/not veiled anymore [...] /She says:/Are you subject or object as you step into the same river twice? [...] /not to fall into the same river twice /Who? /The destruction of space, she says, is beyond comprehension / Woman /Woman".) ↑

25. Pia Palme, "ESHQ close-up", <http://piapalme.at/works/eshq-close-up/>, accessed April 4, 2015. ↑
26. Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 34. ↑
27. Ibid., 35. ↑
28. Ibid. ↑
29. Ibid., 37. ↑
30. Anne Waldman, "Feminafesto", in *Kill Or Cure* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994).  
<http://www.poetspath.com/transmissions/messages/waldman.html>, accessed April 4, 2015. ↑
31. Anne Waldman, <http://www.poetspath.com/waldman.html>, accessed April 4, 2015. ↑
32. Pia Palme, "KEMPELEN'S RING", <http://piapalme.at/works/kempelens-ring/>, accessed April 4, 2015, transl. Susanne Kogler: "Dem Mobiltelefon wird die Stimme einer barocken Sprechmaschine verliehen, die über einem Continuo aus kratzenden Klängen und Rauschspektren Vokalisieren entfaltet. Noise aus dem Inneren einer Subbassblockflöte wird mit Ringmodulatoren und Elektronik kombiniert. Darüber tönen Samples, die mit der Sprechmaschine von Johann Wolfgang Ritter von Kempelen aufgenommen wurden." ↑
33. Pia Palme, "EXHIBIT #ONE", <http://piapalme.at/works/exhibit-1-2009/>, accessed April 4, 2015: "Die Frau geht mit dem Koffer aus dem Haus. Die Frau hat ihre Kindheit mit dem Koffer aus dem Haus gebracht. In ihrem Koffer ist ihre Kindheit, und was aus der Kindheit übrig blieb. Du hast gedacht, ich bin eine Puppe, aber ich war lebendig wie Fisch. Wo ist mein Ich. Ich habe mein Kinder-Ich im Garten begraben und spreche nicht mehr. Niemand schüttelt die Wörter aus meinem Mund. Komm, Baum, bau ein Haus in mein Nest. Komm, Stille, schau mich an. Wir sitzen am Boden und schneiden die zerbrochenen Träume in zwei. Am Klavier spielt Langfinger und rutscht über die Tasten. Im Vorhang hat sich Herr Wolke versteckt. Angst steht auf den Kellerstufen. Ein braves Mädchen schwieg. Ein braves Mädchen spielte mit den übriggebliebenen Illusionen. Jemand dachte, ich wäre eine Puppe, aber ich war so lebendig wie Fisch." ("The woman leaves the house, carrying her suitcase. The woman removed her childhood from the house with the suitcase. Her childhood and everything left from it is packed into her suitcase. You thought I was a puppet, but I was as vivid as a fish. Where is my self. I buried my childish self in the garden and do not speak anymore. Nobody throws the words out of my mouth. Come, tree, build a house in my nest. Come, silence, look at me. We sit on the ground and are cut into pieces, like broken dreams. Pilferer sits at the piano stroking the keys. Mister Cloud has hidden within the curtain. Angst stands on the stairs leading to the cellar. A good girl staying silent. A good girl playing with the illusions that were left behind. Somebody thought I was a puppet, but I was as vivid as a fish".) ↑
34. On her website, Palme provides materials concerning pieces she has composed since 2008. The earliest works she is still acknowledging are solo pieces dating from 2006 and improvisations with the Austrian musician, composer, and DJ Susanne Kirchmayr alias "Electric Indigo". The main difference between older and more recent works concerns the form of notation. Whereas in earlier pieces Palme used merely graphic notation, today she is more and more interested in writing very detailed scores. ↑
35. Pia Palme, "VARIETIES", <http://piapalme.at/works/varieties-2009/>, accessed April 4, 2015. ↑
36. Ibid. ↑
37. Anja K. Arend, "Barocke Strukturen des Zeitgenössischen. Die Komponistin Pia Palme (Interview)", in *terz* 2 (2013), <http://www.terz.cc/magazin.php?z=2&id=341>, accessed April 4, 2015. ↑

38. "'Die Seele ist immer da.' Andrea Schurian im Gespräch mit Maria Lassnig", *Der Standard*, June 1, 2013. ↑
39. Valerie M. Hudson and Andrea M. den Boer, *Bare Branches. The Security Implications of Asia's Surplus Male Population* (London: MIT, 2004). ↑
40. Pia Palme, "BARE BRANCHES. Ein weltliches Requiem, um die Sehnsucht nach den fehlenden Millionen zu stillen", <http://piapalme.at/works/bare-branches-texts/>, accessed April 8, 2015. ↑
41. For Lyotard's postmodern aesthetics and its relevance for the research on contemporary music, see Susanne Kogler, *Adorno versus Lyotard. Moderne und postmoderne Ästhetik* (Freiburg: Alber, 2014). ↑
42. Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 4. ↑
43. Ibid. ↑
44. Ibid., 6 and 36. ↑
45. Verena Andermatt Conley, *Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 15-16. ↑
46. Pia Palme, "ABSTRIAL. A radical contemporary opera – a collaborative work", <http://piapalme.at/works/abstrial/>, accessed April 4, 2015. ↑
47. Ibid. ↑
48. Ibid. ↑
49. Palme, "ABSTRIAL": "Stimmen / Ein Mann singt. /In meiner Vorstellung. /Auf einer Bühne. /Zwischen/Innen und Außen. /Zwischen Raum. Zwischen/Geist und Materie. /Sind Gefühle. /Ein Fluss von – Energie: sagt die Quantenphysik? /Wie entsteht Materie? Wie entsteht ein Mensch? /Fallende, brechende Gläser: Aufnahmen machen. Raummikrofon, Kontaktmikrofon. /Auswählen, filtern, dehnen, verschieben. /Zerfallen und wieder entstehen. Immer wieder. /Ich denke an Henry Purcell. /Ich denke an Domenico da Piacenza (danke, Paola!) /Ich denke an Aristoteles. /φαντασματα/Koloraturen? /Stop! Sagt Domenico. /Alle Gedanken der Welt. /Alle Gefühle der Welt. /Alle Erinnerungen einer Komponistin. /Collapse in a moment. /Du drückst Gefühle aus: ein Junge, ein junger Mann, ein erwachsener Mann fühlt seine Umgebung, sich selbst. /Woman as witness. /Eine farbige Stimme. /Zuhören. /Sich selbst zuhören. /Ein System mit drei Notenzeilen. /Kopfhörer, Textbuch. Vielbeschäftigt. /Meine Kontrabassblockflöte. /Allein." ("Voices / A man sings. /In my imagination./On stage./ Between inside and outside./ Space between. Between/Mind and matter./Feelings./ A river of – energy: says quantum physics? /How does matter come into existence? How does a human being come into existence? /Glasses falling, breaking: make field recordings. Spatial microphone, contact microphone./ Selecting, filtering, stretching, shifting./Fall to pieces and rise. Again and again./ I think of Henry Purcell./ I think of Domenico da Piacenza (thanks, Paola!) I think of Aristoteles. /φαντασματα/Coloraturas?/Stop! Says Domenico./ All thoughts of the world. All feelings of the world./ All memories of a female composer./ *Collapse in a moment.*/ You express feelings : a boy, a young man, a grown up man feels his surroundings, himself. / *Woman as witness.*/ A coloured voice./Listen./ Listen to oneself./ A system with three lines for notes./ Headphones, libretto. Very busy./ My contrabass flute./Alone.") ↑
50. For the importance of this female composer in her times as well as for music history, see Mary Cyr, *Style and Performance for Bowed String Instruments in French Baroque Music* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 171-186; Mary Cyr, *Essays on the Performance of Baroque Music. Opera and Chamber Music in France and England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), chapters 1 to 3; David Schulenberg, *Music of the Baroque* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2008), 243-247; Catherine Cessac, *Elisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre. Une femme compositeur sous le règne de Louis XIV* (Arles: Actes SUD, 1995). ↑
51. Pia Palme, "BUT STILL ATTACHED TO LIFE AT ALL FOUR CORNERS", <http://piapalme.at/works/but-still-attached-to/>, accessed April 4, 2015 ↑
52. See Ernst Anschütz, *Musikalisches Schulgesangbuch; Erster [!] Heft* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1824), 38,

<http://diglib.hab.de/drucke/un-17-1b/start.htm?image=00048>, accessed December 28, 2015. ↑

53. Pia Palme, "GIB SIE WIEDER. a warning commentary on resonance I", <http://piapalme.at/works/gib-sie-wieder-her-2014/>, accessed March 9, 2017 ↑
54. Ibid.: "Can resonance exist by itself / can sound /exist by itself /oder: sind beide nicht denkbar /folglich nicht existent /ohne mich /denkende /hörende /mitfühlende /my sympathy /creates sound /kann eine saite entscheiden /widerstand zu leisten /is resonance /always forced /mit zu schwingen /oder nicht /mit zu schwingen /stets erzwungen /sound without sympathy /cannot sound / oder kann klang /ist zu hören /ohne /mit schwingen /möglich /aus freiem willen /is sound /a function of space /is there freedom /to resonate /or not to resonate /it does not need / my sympathy /your sympathy /out of free will." ("Can resonance exist by itself /can sound / exist by itself/ or: are both unthinkable/consequently, do not exist/without me/thinking/listening/sympathising/my sympathy/creates sound/can a string decide/to resist/is resonance/ always forced/to resonate/ or not/to resonate/ always forced/sound without sympathy/cannot sound/ or can sound/is heard/without/re-sonate/possible/out of free will/is sound/a function of space is there freedom/to resonate/or not to resonate/it does not need/my sympathy/out of free will.") ↑
55. Pia Palme, "GIB SIE WIEDER a warning commentary on resonance II", [http://piapalme.at/works/gib\\_-sie\\_wieder-palme-2014/](http://piapalme.at/works/gib_-sie_wieder-palme-2014/), accessed April 4, 2015. ↑
56. Ibid. ↑
57. Richard Klein, *Musikphilosophie zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 2014), 162. ↑
58. Pia Palme, "LIP OF THE REAL", <http://piapalme.at/works/lip-of-the-real/>, accessed April 4, 2015. ↑
59. Cf. Pia Palme, "LIP OF THE REAL version II: Composing the noise of mind", in *CeReNeM Journal* 4 (2014), [http://piapalme.at/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/CeReNeM\\_Journal\\_Palme.pdf](http://piapalme.at/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/CeReNeM_Journal_Palme.pdf), accessed April 4, 2015. ↑
60. Ibid. ↑
61. Cf. Ivanka Stoianova, *Karlheinz Stockhausen: Je suis les sons* (Paris: Beauchesne, 2014), 238. ↑
62. Pia Palme mentioned the importance of Ligeti for her work in a conversation with the author in February 2015. ↑
63. Cf. note 2. ↑
64. Cf. Liza Lim, "Put right ear to glass and listen", in *terz* 2 (2013), <http://www.terz.cc/magazin.php?z=2&id=350>, accessed April 4, 2015. ↑
65. See Anja K. Arend, "Barocke Strukturen des Zeitgenössischen. Die Komponistin Pia Palme (Interview)", in *terz* 2 (2013), <http://www.terz.cc/magazin.php?z=2&id=341>, accessed April 4, 2015. ↑
66. Pia Palme mentioned the importance of these childhood impressions for her work in a conversation with the author in February 2015. ↑
67. Concerning authorship, gender, and music, see, amongst others, Knaus, Kogler (eds.), *Autorschaft – Genie – Geschlecht*. ↑
68. Cf. Olga Neuwirth, *zwischen den Stühlen. a Twilight-Song auf der Suche nach dem fernen Klang*, ed. Stefan Drees (Salzburg: Pustet, 2008). ↑
69. Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 36. ↑
70. Concerning the lacking female tradition, see Katharina Pewny, *Ihre Welt bedeuten. Feminismus, Theater, Repräsentationen*, Königstein: Helmer, 2002. ↑
71. Braidotti, 36. ↑
72. Ibid., 38. ↑

73. Ibid., 25. ↑
74. Ibid. ↑
75. Cf., amongst others, Hajnalka Nagy, "Der Friedhof und das (Toten)Haus Österreich. Raumpoetik bei Ingeborg Bachmann", in *Gelebte Milieus und virtuelle Räume. Der Raum in der Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaft*, ed. Klára Berzeviczy, Zsuzsa Bognár, and Péter Lökös (Berlin: Frank & Timme 2009), 209–224. ↑
76. As recent publications show, the mainstream view on 20<sup>th</sup> century music is still dominated by books focussing on men only. As far as the English-speaking world is concerned, Alex Ross's much-read study includes only one female composer. German publications show a similar tendency. Cf. Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise. Listening to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2007). ↑
77. A rare exception is the study by Gottfried Scholz, *Österreichische Musik der Gegenwart. Eine Anthologie zur Schallplattenreihe des österreichischen Musikkates* (Vienna: Doblinger, 1993). As he writes in the preface, Scholz intends for the anthology "to help illustrate the stylistic diversity of Austrian music of our time. Thus, it deliberately acts as a counterpoint to many publications on 20th-century music, which tend to neglect Austrians' part after Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern" (8). ↑
78. Concerning the recent interest in global viewpoints, see also Reinhard Strohm, *Towards a Global History of Music. International Research Programme 2013–2016. Balzan Prize in Musicology 2012*, <http://www.music.ox.ac.uk/about/people/academic-staff/university-lecturers-and-college-fellows/reinhard-strohm>, accessed April 4, 2015, and *Musik und Globalisierung. Zwischen kultureller Homogenisierung und kultureller Differenz. Symposion an der Kunstuniversität Graz, 17.–18.10.2006*, <http://musiktheorie.kug.ac.at/en/veranstaltungsarchiv/2006-musik-und-globalisierung.html>, accessed April 4, 2015. ↑
79. Braidotti, 39. ↑