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Kyudo and Music Searching for commonalities¹

The *Mozarteum* University, which is a university that focuses on musical training, has offered the seminar *Kyudo / Japanese Archery* since the summer semester of 2009 as an optional subject for all fields of study. The idea behind this grew out of the recognition of a fundamental deficit: a musician's job is mostly sedentary. It was the intention of the rector at the time to provide our students with the opportunity to become acquainted with specific forms of bodywork as a balance for their job-related, one-sided posture. The university therefore decided to include *Alexander Technique*, body methods and exercises based on *Moshé Feldenkrais*, *yoga*, and also *kyudo* in the educational programme as optional subjects. In addition to the aspect of offering sport as a balance, this aims to enable a specific enhancement of the students' physical awareness.

At the kyudojo in Salzburg, the shomen style is taught according to the guidelines of the *All Nippon Kyudo Federation* (ANKF), and it is primarily singers and instrumentalists who practise here. The fact that *musicians* learn about Japanese archery motivates a closer examination of the connections between the two components due to the uniqueness of the situation – as we know of no other comparable Japanese constellation at a university level. Experience from previous years has shown that many of the participating students have postulated common characteristics between kyudo and music, but they have been unable to give reasons for this. The references have

¹ This text is an abridged version of the master's thesis by Moe Serizawa (cf. M. Serizawa, *Kyudo und Musik. Die Suche nach Gemeinsamkeiten*, Universität Mozarteum Salzburg 2016), although certain aspects from the thesis are discussed in more depth here. It is written for readers who are familiar with the essentials of Japanese archery. For this reason, not all the Japanese terms used in this text are explained.

remained vague and lukewarm. We therefore see it as our responsibility to develop a theoretical basis.

The most important prerequisite for a comparison seems to be a change in the European perception of music: interpreted as an art form, for many centuries in Europe music was defined as *Tonkunst* (musical art). However, diversification in material and the methods of composition associated with this that played a role in the production of art music in the 20th century gave rise to a change in this perception, with music being increasingly seen as *Zeitkunst* (temporal art). It seems that music had to become *Zeitkunst* in the theory of modernism pertaining to it in order to enable those phenomena that were no longer able to be grasped with the concept of *Tonkunst* alone to still remain understandable as potentially musical. A perspective that developed from the specific material and the techniques derived from this thus once again allowed the former concept of *Tonkunst* to be viewed with greater precision: this, too, is bound to *Zeitkunst* in its essence, even if the organization of the pitches with their individual system formations conceal this perspective in historical reflection. In a nutshell: the *medium* of music is the *elapsing time*; this is where the compositional events are articulated in all epochs of European evolution, independent of style and idiom. To summarize: music is specific, aesthetic *action in time* that has individual prerequisites in each case. These are quickly identified: taken acoustically, music is concerned with oscillations of the air, sounding and non-sounding. Differentiation between these sound impressions and natural sounds, or the sounds of today's industrial world, requires conscious positing which lends the musical work of art a specific phenomenological framework. Not every sound in the world is a work of art per se; its appearance must display a certain form. The term *fremdbestimmte Zeitstrecke* (hetero-determined time interval) is crucial here.²

On the one hand, this distinction enables a comparison of various forms of music in different cultural environments, whereas on the other hand it opens up a perspective in which other arts can 'musicalize' themselves, so

² This term is understood to mean the duration of an offering as specified by a composer, the time which must be invested by the audience in order to be able to experience the work of art *in its entirety*.

to speak: theatre, film and dance are also artistic media which stage their action within time and whose manner of representation is structured by these aforementioned *fremdbestimmte Zeitstrecken*. If you follow this train of thought, a comparison with music and Japanese archery presents itself: in kyudo, as in other budo disciplines³, the entire sequence of movements is structured into normalized subsections, which in archery are called *hassetsu*.⁴ These eight stages of shooting are passed on and explained in every kyudo textbook. The structure of their sequence is described in the *Kyudo Manual*:

“In the performance of the shooting, this division into eight stages [...] should be regarded from the start to the finish as one complete cycle, in which there is no separation. The eight stages of the shooting can be likened to a bamboo pole that has eight joints, which on the one hand can be considered as eight separate joints, and on the other hand as interrelated to each other and united in the one pole.”⁵

This means that on the one hand the sequence of the individual stages must form a unit, and on the other hand these stages should be clearly distinguishable from one another in their sequence. It is a *chain* of individual events that are detached from each other which displays internal coherence. The essence of the *hassetsu* within their sequence is specifically their *lack of interchangeability*: each stage forms one of the fundamentals of the following stages. In this way, *development* is created within the overall flow that today finds its destination in *Zanshin*, the final *hassetsu*.⁶

If you compare this concept with a composition from the field of European art music, it can be seen that the sequence of the *hassetsu* is similar to a certain type of musical composition: music in which the chain of its events forms an *interrelationship* and in which the arrangement of the individual elements involved can be understood as a condensing process of development. It is not for no reason that in certain historical situations of musical design a manner of thinking in climaxes has established itself,

³ Besides archery, these include judo (the *gentle way*) – which is well known in our part of the world, and also shorinji kempo (the art of unarmed self-defence), karatedo, kendo and iaido (sword fencing and sword combat), aikido (*the way of harmony*; also an art of unarmed self-defence), sumo, naginata (pole weapon combat) and also jukendo (bayonet fencing).

⁴ Cf. All Nippon Kyudo Federation/ANKF (Ed.), *Kyudo Manual*, Vol. 1, Principles of Shooting (Shaho), revised edition, translated by Liam O’Brian, Tokyo 1994, 59-73.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ The final *hassetsu*, *Zanshin* (the remaining mind and remaining body), was only developed in modern kyudo. Cf. *Kyudo Manual*, 59.

climaxes that have assumed the function of segmentation in an overall process. In this way, the *kind* of happening structures the duration of the *fremdbestimmte Zeitstrecke*; it thus influences the proportions of form in a composition and ultimately also plays a certain role with regard to the potential duration of a piece. This means that the internal circumstances in a composition must be constituted in such a way that the time flow necessary for its presentation seems plausible and justified: music that *somehow or other* provides sound to accompany the timeline that is in itself insignificant was therefore not perceived as *art* because it is very likely to lack a connection with this type of music. A different, opposing design strategy therefore developed: the timeline required by music for its presentation had to gain its *energy* from the internal constellation of the composition with a view to the significance of what was being presented. In the theory of composition from the late-18th century until around 1950, this concept was part of the *definition* of music.⁷ This is not the right place to verify such a historically evolved question of music theory. Nevertheless, the concept of musically coherent action within time was taken very seriously in the field of composition, and we wish to accept this as a fact with an eye to the way of the bow.

So far in our considerations of the similarities between music and Japanese archery we have merely looked at the structure of the actual shooting process. However, kyudo presents a specific extension of this constellation which integrates the qualities of *performance*⁸ and differentiates this kind of archery from all others. We are referring to the *taihai* and *sharei* forms, i.e. the forms of ceremonial shooting alone and in a group. The importance of this element for modern kyudo is shown by the fact that a substantial part of the *Kyudo Manual* focuses on the basics, on the precise description of the individual positions and motions (*kihontai*) and also on the correct procedure of the *sharei* forms. The *Manual* also emphasizes that

⁷ For a long time, this definition was not criticized in music theory because music – comprehended as an art product – was understood in this way throughout many epochs.

⁸ We have decided to use the term *performance* in addition to the Japanese terms in connection with the presentational part of kyudo (*kihontai* in the *sharei* forms), which has quite clear elements of a theatrical performance. This term aims to cover presentation, display, and similar meanings. The musical equivalent would be the second manifestation of the musical work of art, its enactment in sound.

practising these forms should not be neglected and expressly warns against concentrating on purely technically oriented shooting.⁹ By contrast, the ceremonies and their performance are considered by the editors to be a necessary part of Japanese archery which is consequently on an *equal footing* and which must contribute to a civilized shooting technique. For our perspective this means that not just the actual shooting procedure but also the performance with its individual stages – from entering the shooting area (shajo) to leaving it again – signifies a further level for the presentation of a *musical version* of the medium kyudo.

The taihai form – understood here to be a component of modern kyudo – is a basis for collective shooting. It belongs to the performance repertoire of modern kyudo which attempts to unite the diversities in historical schools of archery via standardization of ceremonial forms¹⁰: in a group mostly with five archers (*enbu no dosa*), beginners practise a version which is customary for preliminary shooting in a seminar or in an examination, and also in daily exercises.¹¹ Advanced kyudojin¹² also practise the forms *mochi mato sharei* and *hitotsu mato sharei*.¹³ We can see that the list of ceremonial forms in modern kyudo is very short. If you think of this in terms of musical scores, the performance ‘repertoire’ is very limited. And the individual procedures are extremely repetitive.

An observer must surely have the impression that they are always seeing the same thing, in terms of both the shooting procedure and the performance. If we remain with the music metaphor, our observer would only have one possibility for interpretation: several archers performing one of the sharei forms together interpret – one after another – *the same* musical composition. And they keep *repeating* the performance of these few ‘pieces of music’ in their exercises again and again, structured by the continual repetition of the *kata* in archery (hassetsu). However, the radical minimization of forms and concentration on the individual stages in the shooting procedure reveal a curious phenomenon: it is certainly the case that with a certain amount of practice, it is possible in this constellation to recognize the

⁹ *Kyudo Manual*, 27.

¹⁰ Cf. *Kyudo Manual*, 76f.

¹¹ Cf. *Kyudo Manual*, 106f.

¹² Japanese people who follow the ‘way of the bow’.

¹³ Cf. *Kyudo Manual*, 100ff.; also 96ff. Both forms are only studied from the 5th or 6th dan onwards.

subtleties and originalities that each archer wishes to express in their shooting and their performance – just as this is possible when listening and comparing different interpretations of a single piece of music. At the same time, Japanese archery requires the coordination of timing (*maai*) and the correct reaction to the movements of the other participants: no archer is allowed to appear as a ‘soloist’ in taihai and sharei. On the contrary, the group that presents one of the forms together should appear as a *harmonious unit* whose aim is to present the specified procedures as *floating* that is appropriate to the ‘score’.

This is reminiscent of skills that are particularly needed when playing in chamber music groups. Performing taihai has elements of a chamber music performance – e.g. that of a string *quintet*.¹⁴ In chamber music it is also important to follow the score precisely on the one hand, and on the other hand to communicate the *substance*, i.e. what is meant behind the composition, to listeners in its enactment in sound invoked by the work’s notation. This is one of the many conceivable *interpretations* of the form whose basis is the writing (notation) as a starting point for all musical production. The ability of all those involved to cooperate is important here: in order to achieve a clear representation of the musical work of art, musicians must react to one another and cooperate as the work requires in its enactment in sound. In a nutshell: in music it is a sign of great personal development when musicians no longer merely reproduce the notes correctly, but begin to make *music* with their own interpretation; when they practically become emancipated from the notation and rise above it sensorily. Being able to realize this dissolution of boundaries in a concert is associated in Europe with ‘civilized behaviour of the musician’.

It is precisely this factor that features in kyudo as well; the following quote discusses the *potential for development* in the *kihontai* of the sharei forms:

“What this means in practice is that at first one should acquire *Shin* through diligent practice that respects the correct standards. Then, when the posture has attained stability and is without flaw, naturally *Shin* will become the movement of *Gyo*. Likewise, following on from

¹⁴ This metaphor refers to a group that performs taihai (*enbu no dosa*).

Gyo, there will be a manifestation of So, the highest state of naturalness in form and movement.”¹⁵

The following specification of the above comments – the *Kyudo Manual* explains the *fundamentals* of the kihontai here – could be directly geared towards the interpretation work of musicians:

“In the beginning stages of training, *we have to do every movement keeping to the fundamentals, and although it is better to allow the movements to be rough rather than too controlled, we should still aim to hold to essential points.* As we become more proficient in the movements, they will become less rough and lose hesitancy, gaining fluidity and naturalness. In copying the movements of a more experienced archer, we should not just mindlessly ape the movements, or the form will be without substance.”¹⁶

The same is true when performing pieces of music: it is no use just copying, for example, the agogic nuances of famous colleagues. Instead, each performer must find their own way of presenting the form and substance of the composition during a concert performance. The structure of *shin, gyo* and so is also found in work on musical interpretation. For this reason it would certainly be appropriate to speak of not just a way of the bow, but also of a *do* in connection with the performance of music. This constellation forces us to consider once again in comparison the actual *creative* and also the *re-creative* contributions to these arts. They seem to us to be key attributes for differentiation between the Western and Eastern perception of art.

One noticeable difference between kyudo and the *creative production* of music must also be mentioned here: in Western works of *Tonkunst*, the form of each piece is reinvented and developed by the composer. Creators of music in Europe usually present their achievements in written form, in scores or using other methods of notation. This is followed by the second manifestation of the musical work of art, its enactment in sound, in a particular way. This manifestation is with some justification called *interpretation* because it *explains* a certain model. The European musical work of art finds itself in constant discourse on the quality of these interpretations; thus it lives in its historicity.

¹⁵ *Kyudo Manual*, 29.

¹⁶ *Kyudo Manual*, 31 (emphasized in italics in the source).

In Japanese archery we find a diametral quality: today's forms of performance (*taihai* and *sharei*) were only – as explained earlier – harmonized in recent times, after 1945, by certain master archers¹⁷ for compelling reasons. Be that as it may, the actual 'artistic' work of Japanese archers is in the area of *presentation* – ceremonial shooting in a group. Kyudo is therefore primarily concerned with musical interpretation on the platform and stage, and actually has nothing to do with devising substance: composing.

Let us now proceed to the relationship between the people who are carrying out the actions and the tools that they use. During their training, singers and instrumentalists form a close connection with their instruments. Without this factor, just with respect to the playing technique, the tasks that are faced in the performance of musical works could not be mastered. Musicians have to be aware of their instruments' peculiarities and practise tirelessly while becoming proficient; they have to train their body and be able to maintain their level of training as well. The same is true of Japanese archers:

The concept of a *union of body, mind and bow* (*sanmi-ittai*) is mentioned first in the *Manual* in the description of the principles of shooting (*shaho*). The desired union itself has three prerequisites in kyudo:

- 1) Immaculate and perfect condition of will and mind,
- 2) Stable physical form and
- 3) Precision in the use of the bow.¹⁸

All of these three points also allow a musician to be able to *repeat* a studied and proven concept for the performance of a musical work. Concentration is required for this, as is the best posture – in the interests of economic functioning – and also a certain precision in the handling of the instrument. The idea that a musician obviously 'blends' with their instrument while they are playing as a result of this structure would be welcomed by any singing

¹⁷ Cf. *Kyudo Manual*, 134f. The members of the founding committee, who were responsible for the content of the manual, are named here.

¹⁸ *Kyudo Manual*, 24: "The Three Essentials – Stability of Body, Stability of Spirit (and Mind), Stability in Using the Bow – United as One Body."

and instrumental teacher, as this is the factor that serves as a basis for the mastership of making music.

In conclusion, we would like to address a few points that should show the extent to which focusing on kyudo is useful for musicians and supports their development:

Many singers and instrumentalists suffer from stage fright or some form of anxiety in concerts. It can be difficult and take a lot of effort to keep this nervousness under control for performances: it is a predicament that affects the musical profession in particular. Experience has shown that the conditions in a kyudojo, where each archer is watched by the other kyudojin, help to gain a calm approach to the problem. Archers become accustomed slowly, little by little, to presenting something – namely the development of their archery skills, in front of others and so they glide relatively unobtrusively and subtly into the precise situation that may cause problems on the concert platform. They perceive themselves quite naturally as novice archers who are not yet expected to display a particular stage of development. This enables them to experience a *performance* as something that can certainly be relished. For example, we have met several archers for whom the specific *exhibition* of their personality, which is so peculiar to the way of the bow, has given them the greatest amount of fun when shooting. We also know archers who managed to handle their stage fright with the help of this experience. The fact that watching and being watched is a part of the whole activity is shown by a counterexample: some students have abandoned the way of the bow because they found it too unpleasant to be observed by the other archers.

Following on from this, we would like to mention a circumstance that draws attention once again to the *socially* organized components of kyudo: apart from in archery, the budo disciplines always take place *between* people, between individual opponents. This makes sense, for example in sword combat (*kendo*), because sword fighters need an adversary to whom they can relate. The art of the sword fighter is one of action and reaction, in which

recognizing the right moment – when one passes into the other – is of importance. Although this significant moment of change is also experienced in kyudo – i.e. in *Hanare*, releasing the arrow, in archery the whole situation tends to be far more abstract because the kyudojin has no opponent, just a target (*mato*) which at best symbolizes an opponent.¹⁹ The actual social factor in Japanese archery takes place at a different level: due to the circumstance that the archers – regardless of their expertise – are able to watch from afar and control neither during shooting nor during the performance, they essentially have to rely on the help of others.²⁰ The way of the bow homes in on a specific kind of *shared experience* – a peculiar common activity – which must find its expression at the aforementioned level of performance. According to the *Manual*, the purpose of this exercise is to present *shin*, *zen* and *bi*²¹, which cannot be harnessed for any social utility today. In this perspective, in a European context as well, kyudo proves itself to be an independent form of *practising art*. This approach, compared with the various manifestations of European music, has nothing to do with the criteria of ‘function’ and ‘application’. Refreshingly, present-day Japanese archery is entirely *l’art pour l’art*. Only the future will show us whether art that is without the claim of being directly useful to humankind can still be useful in some unknown way. However, a certain kind of usefulness might be taken from the fact that this perspective is ‘reflected-out’ by the way of the bow.

Experience at the kyudojo in Salzburg over recent years has shown that singers and wind instrumentalists can produce a stable *dozukuri* relatively easily. In our view, this has to do with the fact that on the one hand they learn to internalize the necessary form of *breathing* for their specific tonal production during training, and on the other hand – after they have become aware of this circumstance – they can also use this skill in other areas: in kyudo, value is placed on correct *ikiai* and it is an important part of the

¹⁹ Some archers believe that the target is a *mirror*.

²⁰ It is sensible for the corrective outer view to be provided by an experienced archer (*sensei*).

²¹ Cf. *Kyudo Manual*, 19f. The principles of practising with the bow are explained in a prominent place in the *Manual* (page 8), directly after the foreword: „1) to study the principles of shooting (*Shaho*) and art of shooting (*Shagi*), 2) to apply the formalized movements (*Taihai*) based on etiquette (*Rei*), 3) to improve the level of shooting (*Shakaku*) and shooting dignity (*Shahin*) and 4) the necessity to strive for perfection as a human being.“

technique of Japanese archery.²² Only the combination of stretching the body and the breathing that assists this can create an overall situation in which the body is entirely balanced, and which benefits successful shooting. Nonetheless, the following circumstance was still surprising to us because it shows that physical skills that are practised in Japanese archery can also be applied to other areas: we received several illuminating responses in connection with this from professors who were above all from the area of string instrument teaching. They had noticed that students who had learned about kyudo over a relatively long period of time (3 to 4 semesters) developed *body tension* that was beneficial to their playing.²³ The circumstance referred to here is reminiscent of an established pillar of musical training: even today, *singing* is mandatory for *all* students of a music university. The reason for this is that even in instrumental training that does not directly rely on *breath support* for its tonal production (string, percussion, plucked and keyboard instruments), the breathing factor should remain recognizable, should be able to be remembered, when working on presentation. This is important because it is a good basis for organic phrasing – the structuring of a musical work into individual groups of bars. Regular singing is also practised at the *Mozarteum* University, because a feeling for *Atembogen* (phrasal breathing) is only developed in the actual process of singing. For a long time this played a leading role as the foundation in the development of European art music, and active musicians therefore gain considerable advantages by becoming more closely acquainted with it. This is also an important issue in kyudo, besides supported breathing and the resulting body tone. The question of efficient breathing technique thus forms a link between archery and music-making. Perfecting this skill concerns the essence of both arts.

Finally, one further aspect is important to us in connection with the development of archery throughout history: the bow has always had various significations in Japan. On the one hand it was important for hunting and

²² Cf. *Kyudo Manual*, 30.

²³ Although we did not receive any such statements from the area of percussion, plucked and keyboard instruments, we assume that the discussion of the relationship between breathing and body tone that is specific to kyudo will also be useful for these fields of study.

fighting in battle, but on the other hand it was also awarded a spiritual function. It is remarkable, however, that in situations such as contests, the behaviour between the individual archers was determined in specific behavioural practices. The oldest source of these is the text *Reiki shagi*, which also appears in the most prominent position in the *Kyudo Manual* – together with the technical guidance (*shaho kun*) by Master Junsei Yoshimi from the Edo era – as it were the motto of the whole project.²⁴ Over the centuries, this former approach developed into *etiquette* that is obligatory in all budo arts. This circumstance allowed a two-pronged perspective: firstly the form of encounter between the archers was regulated by a norm (dojo etiquette) and secondly this also opened up the opportunity for the individual archers to develop their personality (*michi to rei*).²⁵ In our view, only this allowed *kyujutsu* (i.e. the ability to shoot an arrow that meets its mark) to be passed on in a *kyudo*²⁶ – in a way of the bow that also integrates all other parts of the human existence. This second perspective is significant because its character forces *the practice of inner work*. The concept culminates in the requirement that we must develop into a *lady* and a “true gentleman (*kunshi*)”²⁷ who are both capable of moving in *all* social circles *without any conflict*. Such a skill ought to be of interest to all people at all times: musicians, too, who mostly work together in groups, benefit when they learn how not to allow disagreements to escalate but instead form teams that are able to cooperate.

Translated by Rosemary Bridger-Lippe

²⁴ Cf. *Kyudo Manual*, p. IX and XI. The *Reiki shagi* is part of the *Book of the Rites* that examines archery. It was written in approx. 200 BC by Den Dai and Schen Dai in China. The two cousins were influenced by Confucianism.

²⁵ *Kyudo Manual*, 17ff.

²⁶ This term was used for the first time in 1660 by Morikawa Kozan, a *Yamato-ryu* archer. However, it was more than 200 years before the term became commonplace. It now describes an existential exertion in which the battle against oneself has priority over the battle against others.

²⁷ *Kyudo Manual*, 20.