

# Bernd Alois Zimmermann's Philosophy of Time Revisited: At the Intersection of Philosophical, Literary, and Musical Spectrum\*

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**Abstract:** This paper reconsiders the first postwar generation composer Bernd Alois Zimmermann's notion of time from the perspective of the intersection of philosophical, literary, and musical spectrum to reveal the composer's latent aesthetics. Zimmermann studies in the 1980s defined his philosophy of time as being encapsulated in the concept of *spherical structured time* (*Kugelgestalt der Zeit*), which can make past, present, and future interchangeable and simultaneously disposed. This concept is incorporated in his late works in the form of collage, that is, *pluralistic compositional technique*. Previous studies mainly focus on the structural analysis of pluralistic compositional technique (collage), but calling such methodology into question, this paper scrutinizes its semantic value by disclosing that his philosophy of time creates a framework for criticism of society and human existence.

The first section examines his absorption of phenomenological time with a focus on *a perpetual present* (*eine ständige Gegenwart*). The task here is to clarify that his philosophy of time entails an element of ontology. Then referring to Zimmermann's writings on *Die Soldaten*, the second section reveals the influence of J. M. R. Lenz's 'open form' of drama. This verifies that his philosophy of time is a way of encouraging the listener to think critically about social absurdities. Based on the composer's historical awareness, the last section argues pluralism in Zimmermann's aesthetics represents historical pluralism.

**Keywords:** Bernd Alois Zimmermann's Aesthetics, Theories of Time, Existentialism, Temporality in Music, Historical Pluralism

## Introduction

Bernd Alois Zimmermann (1918-1970) is recognized as an important and representative composer of the first postwar (post WWII) generation, having primarily worked in Köln and Darmstadt, West Germany.<sup>1</sup> Following his death, Zimmermann scholarship through the 1980s focused exclusively on the man and his musical works, and even after the 1990s studies did not

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\* This paper is based on the Japanese version printed in *Bigaku* 73, No. 2 (2022): 85-96, published by the Japanese Society for Aesthetics. In this paper, all translations are the author's own except where otherwise indicated.

<sup>1</sup> The term "the first postwar generation" used in this paper includes a group of composers largely born around 1920 who personally experienced the Nazi era, meaning they were able to begin their full-fledged music careers only after 1945. In most accounts of the history of contemporary classical music they are positioned as the "third generation" classified by musical styles, dismissing them as peripheral composers. Applying "the first postwar generation" to this conventional classification, this paper attempts to show a new aspect of this generation's musical thought and political idea.

progress much.<sup>2</sup> However, the centennial anniversary of Zimmermann's birthday in 2018 revitalized the field through the compilation of a database of works, the collection of primary sources such as correspondences and articles, and the publication of collected works.<sup>3</sup> Among the composer's intellectual output, Zimmermann's philosophy of time has attracted particular attention from researchers. Led by Wulf Konold's 1986 criticism, studies have largely centered on the correlation between temporality and pluralism.<sup>4</sup> Temporality is consistently linked to philosophical influence, based on the composer's own statements, while pluralism—symbolized by his time concept, the 'spherical structured time' (*Kugelgestalt der Zeit*)—is commonly understood as the combination of musical styles from different times and spaces, thereby identifying it as collage. Within this prevailing perspective, Zimmermann's philosophy of time is often treated merely as a means of musical expression or a musical language. The correlation between temporality and pluralism is thus narrowly understood as a foundation for creating a musical form or structure. This problem has resulted in the neglect of the critical nature inherent in musical collage. Indeed, some studies have specifically addressed social criticism of some musical works by interpreting the meanings of the texts used.<sup>5</sup> However, such a study is wholly inadequate to elucidate the critical nature of musical collage and does not provide a clear explanation of the essence of collage's criticality in music. Based on the above problems in previous studies, this paper examines Zimmermann's perception and re-creation of time from the angle of the intersection of philosophy, literature, and music in his concept of time. The analysis aims to reveal that the critical nature of collage is fundamentally rooted in the fact that Zimmermann's philosophy of time is a deep-seated critique of society and human existence.

This paper is structured into three main sections. Section 1 delves into Zimmermann's reception of phenomenological time to establish the reality of a 'perpetual present' (*eine ständige*

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<sup>2</sup> Journalistic criticism and encyclopedia entries published during the composer's lifetime provided only very superficial information. However, in the 1970s, doctoral dissertations on Zimmermann's orchestral and piano works were published for the first time, and scholarly essays examining the composer's compositional philosophy began to appear. [See the reference: Wulf Konold, hrsg., *Zwischen den Generationen: Bericht über das Bernd-Alois-Zimmermann-Symposion* (Köln: Gustav Bosse, 1989)]. Additionally, in the 1980s monographic studies drawing on the composer and works were conducted. [See the reference: Wulf Konold, hrsg., *Bernd Alois Zimmermann: Der Komponist und sein Werk* (Köln: DuMont, 1986)]. At present time, however, a number of primary sources still remain unpublished, and philological research has not progressed significantly.

<sup>3</sup> For recent achievements in basic research, see below: Heribert Henrich, *Bernd Alois Zimmermann Werkverzeichnis. Verzeichnis der musikalischen Werke von Bernd Alois Zimmermann und ihrer Quellen* (Mainz: Schott Musik, 2014); Bettina Zimmermann, *Con Tutta Forza. Bernd Alois Zimmermann: Ein persönliches Portrait. Dokumente, Briefe, Fotos, Zeitungen*, hrsg. von Rainer Peters (Hofheim: Wolke Verlag, 2018); The collaborative project of Zimmermann-Archiv der Akademie der Künste von der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, Mainz.

<sup>4</sup> Konold, hrsg., *Zwischen den Generationen: Bericht über das Bernd-Alois-Zimmermann-Symposion*, S. 109-120, 121-134, 145-161, 205-218.

<sup>5</sup> Jörn-Peter Hiekel, *Bernd Alois Zimmermanns Requiem für einen jungen Dichter*, Beihefte zum Archiv für Musikwissenschaft (Franz Steiner Verlag, 1995), S. 379-431: J. P. Hiekel's study of Zimmermann's *Requiem for a Young Poet* provides a thorough analysis of the work from a modern historical perspective. He focuses on the speech representing the Third Reich that is reproduced in the final movement, "Dona novis pacem," describing this movement as a "panorama of World War II." However, this analysis focuses solely on the text and is insufficient for understanding the critical nature inherent in Zimmermann's collage technique as a whole, particularly in his later works.

*Gegenwart*). This involves the crucial task of re-evaluating his ‘spherical structured time’ through the lens of human ontology. Then, focusing on the influence of literature—particularly the ‘open form’ in the temporal and spatial sphere of the late 18th-century *Sturm und Drang* movement—, section 2 analyzes how ‘spherical structured time’ functions within the subject’s consciousness. Taking his opera *Die Soldaten* (the original edition in 1960 and revised edition in 1964) at the initial planning stage as a primary case study, this section suggests that his philosophy of time is shaped based on the ‘open form’ in temporal and spatial sphere. Crucially, it demonstrates that ‘spherical structured time’ operates not merely as a principle of musical composition but as a mechanism for fostering the critical thinking of the subject toward an absurd society.<sup>6</sup> Building upon the established relationship between ‘spherical structured time’ and social criticism (discussed in the previous sections), section 3 reconsiders the issue of pluralism, a concept traditionally viewed in Zimmermann scholarship as solely a problem of musical style or language. This analysis argues that the pluralism inherent in Zimmermann’s philosophy of time extends beyond mere technique, serving to ultimately underscore ‘historical pluralism’—the co-existence of multiple historical narratives, experiences, and social contradictions—thereby confirming the deep-seated political and critical nature of his aesthetics.

## 1. The State of Being a ‘perpetual present’ (*eine ständige Gegenwart*)

In *Intervall und Zeit* (1974), a collection of seminal essays written by Zimmermann, the concept of time is repeatedly mentioned. It is a thought-provoking collection essential for understanding the use of musical collage.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, as indicated by W. Gruhn, Zimmermann’s theoretical concepts regarding “time-philosophical representation (*die zeitphilosophischen Vorstellungen*)”<sup>8</sup> have not been clearly articulated. In numerous letters and reviews, he reiterates the term ‘spherical structured time’ metaphorically, making it difficult to precisely comprehend his compositional thoughts. Consequently, ‘spherical structured time,’ the emblematic concept of Zimmermann’s philosophy, has often been dismissed as “a metaphor, a bundle of problems rather than a firm and comprehensive insight.”<sup>9</sup> Scholarly focus has therefore emphasized its formal implications, reducing it to the problem of “the juxtaposition of different

<sup>6</sup> This paper examines the subject from the perspective of time and does not explicitly address space. However, it is important to note that numerous points concerning spatiality also exist here, as represented by ‘spherical structured time’ and as expressed by the ‘free form of space-time.’

<sup>7</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, „Komponist und Literat dazu. Die Schriften Bernd Alois Zimmermanns,“ *Frankfurt Allgemeine Zeitung*, 29. März 1975. [For the same text, see Carl Dahlhaus, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band 9, Rezensionen (Laaber Verlag, 2006), S. 380-381].

<sup>8</sup> Wilfried Gruhn, „Zeitkomposition bei Zimmermann. Anmerkung und Abschweifungen zum pluralistischen Kompositionsprinzip in den *Dialogen* (1960),“ in *Zwischen den Generationen: Bericht über das Bernd-Alois-Zimmermann-Symposion*, hrsg. von Wulf Konold, S. 109.

<sup>9</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, „„Kugelgestalt der Zeit“: Zu Bernd Alois Zimmermanns Musikphilosophie,“ *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band 8, 20. Jahrhunderts, II. Ästhetik (Laaber Verlag, 1978), S. 294; Tomoko Kozuki, “B. A. Zimmermann Kenkyu: Ongaku ni okeru Kukansei no Shomondai” [B. A. Zimmermann Study: Concerns on Spatiality in Music], *Ongakugaku* [*Journal of the Musicological Society of Japan*] Vol. 40, no. 2 (1995), p. 116.

acoustic materials” or “pluralistic acoustics.”<sup>10</sup> This section reconsiders Zimmermann's philosophy of time, which has been constrained by this short-sighted view. It aims to clarify how ‘spherical structured time’ is established and how the reality of the ‘perpetual present’ appears within it. To achieve this, the following discussion will explore the temporal theories of St. Augustine, Edmund Husserl, and Martin Heidegger, with reference to Zimmermann's known philosophical reading.

### 1.1. Phenomenological Time Received by Zimmermann: Time in the Human Psyche

In his article “Intervall und Zeit” (1957), Zimmermann explicitly rejected the notion of non-repeatable and irreversible time. Instead, he proposed the concept of the “unity of time (*die Einheit der Zeit*)”<sup>11</sup> from the perspective of temporal simultaneity, suggesting a unity of past, present, and future. He noted that music, as a temporal art, is fundamentally determined by “the order of the passage of time (*die Ordnung des zeitlichen Ablaufs*)” but that it simultaneously “contains a most serious contradiction.” This contradiction arises because, “based on a sophisticated construction of time, time itself is overcome and brought into an order that receives the condition of transcending time.”<sup>12</sup> This statement reveals Zimmermann's awareness of two distinct types of time in music: time recognized as chronological progression and time as a mechanism for transcending that progression. In his comprehensive study of various theories of time, ranging from pre-Socratic to modern philosophers, Zimmermann adopted Edmund Husserl's notion of ‘inner consciousness’ (*inneres Bewußtsein*)—particularly regarding the manifestation of time in music. He clearly distinguished between “actual time (*effektive Zeit*)” and “experiential time (*Erlebniszeit*).” The former is time that can be measured according to the laws of the universe; the latter is subjective ‘inner time’ that can be lived. He adopted the latter one as the starting point of his philosophy of time, marking it as distinct from measurable, external time.

However, Zimmermann's contemplation of time extends as far back as St. Augustine's theory of time. In a 1958 letter to the influential contemporary composer Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928-2007), Zimmermann emphasized Augustine's theory of time described in Book XI of his *Confessions*, for providing a fertile ground for modern philosophical thought on time.<sup>13</sup> In the first half of Book XI, Augustine contrasts God's immutable ‘eternity’ with the *generated and annihilated time* of human beings. He underscores the relationship between the two by “seeing the present as a bridge,”<sup>14</sup> an interpretation that posits the “the enpresenting Now (*das*

<sup>10</sup> Wulf Konold, “Bernd Alois Zimmermann no Sakkyoku: Tagensei to Jikanron” [Bernd Alois Zimmermann's Composition: Plurality and Temporality], trans. Seiji Choki, *Ongaku Geijutsu [Musical Arts]* Vol. 47, no. 5 (1988), p. 51.

<sup>11</sup> B. A. Zimmermann, „Intervall und Zeit,“ in *Intervall und Zeit* (Mainz: Schott, 1974), S. 11-12; B. A. Zimmermann, „Zu den »Soldaten«,“ in *Intervall und Zeit*, S. 96.

<sup>12</sup> Zimmermann, „Intervall und Zeit,“ S. 12.

<sup>13</sup> B. A. Zimmermann, Brief an Karlheinz Stockhausen (14. 3. 1958), in *Bernd Alois Zimmermann: Dokumente zu Leben und Werk*, hrsg. von Klaus Ebbeke (Akademie der Künste, 1989), S. 61-62.

<sup>14</sup> Kazutomo Tanogashira, “Augustinus no Kokuhaku ni okeru Jikan no Gainen: Kokoro no Genzaiteki na Hirogari tosite no Jikan wo megutte” [The Concept of Time in Augustine's *Confessions*: On Time as the Present Expansion of the Mind], *Geijutsu* no. 39 (2016), p. 65.

*gegenwärtige Jetzt*)” as continually passing by.<sup>15</sup> The premise of this theory is that in God’s time, only the present exists and is perceived, as the past and future are continually created by divine action. However, this perpetual state of “the enpresenting Now” is fundamentally possessed only by God the creator and is thus considered impermissible for human beings to fully grasp. In the second half of Book XI, Augustine presents a path for human beings seeking to mimic God’s experience of time. Humans can engage in the acts of “reminiscence” and “anticipation” through “sentiency which is the concentration of mind toward the present” in their own psyche.<sup>16</sup> This sentiency is indeed Zimmermann’s main concern. What Zimmermann is particularly interested in is “intuition” as the “concentration of the spirit on the present” occurring within the human psyche.

To put this [simultaneity and interchangeability of time in a musical dimension] in perspective, the thought of unity of time as unity of the past, present, and future—as Augustine established the foundation for unity of time in the essence of human soul that encompasses the ever passing moment in the expansion of itself and incorporates the past and future into the perpetual present—this very modern and at the same time very old idea acquires a new perspective in music as a *temporal art*, the art of temporal order. Such temporal order can be found in the perpetual present that all-encompassing basic structure of music bears, which we must set as the principle of order with every situation in a work.<sup>17</sup>

The aspect of the “perpetual present” in the human psyche was brought about by Augustine’s focus on the concentration of mind toward the present. Zimmermann actively engaged with this theory of time as a foundational principle of order in music. Drawing directly from his reception of Augustine’s temporal theory, Zimmermann developed the concept of ‘spherical structured time.’ This concept is grounded in the notion that the human subject can establish non-linear time. This perspective provides a new lens through which to view music—an art form that physically flows in a sequential temporal world—by proposing a psychically organized, multi-layered temporal experience.

## 1.2. ‘Temporalization’ (*Zeitigung*)

Furthermore, Zimmermann referred to the theories of time of Husserl and Heidegger, two philosophers who approached Augustine’s theory of time from a phenomenological perspective, and reinterpreted the exploration of inner time as an inquiry into existence. In the following, the theories of time constructed by Husserl and Heidegger, which Zimmermann partially adopted, will be examined based on their concepts of ‘temporalization,’ to derive the ontological meaning of his philosophy of time.

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<sup>15</sup> Walter Biemel, „Bernd Alois Zimmermann: Musik und Zeit,“ in *Bernd Alois Zimmermann: Dokumente und Interpretationen*, hrsg. von Wulf Konold (Köln: Wienand Verlag, 1986), S. 119.

<sup>16</sup> For details on Augustine’s theory of time, see Tanogashira’s article, op. cit., pp. 63-74.

<sup>17</sup> Zimmermann, „Intervall und Zeit,“ S. 11-12 (author’s translation).

In Husserl's theory of perceptual time, the 'continuum of retention' and 'protention' are constantly involved in the present moment. This relationship between "the enpresenting Now" and perception provided Zimmermann with a key insight into the nature of the temporal flow within the subject's consciousness. Specifically, he focused on the fact that the past, present and future are not merely successive but are also simultaneously interconnected. Zimmermann held that based on this "temporal order (*zeitliche Ordnung*)," a composer must structure the music to be heard both simultaneously and successively.<sup>18</sup> This compositional principle is essential because the mental reconstruction of the already-composed music in the subject's consciousness falls within the scope of perception; in Husserl's terms, this is known as 'presentification' (*Vergegenwärtigung*), which signifies reconstruction in the present. Zimmermann was precisely interested in this act of 'presentification' within the subject's consciousness. In Husserl's late theory, this concept is presented as 'temporalization' (*Zeitigung*), which is understood as the self's active self-composition through constant self-objectification—a reflective process of the self.

Drawing insight from Husserl's concept of 'experienced time' of the subject, Zimmermann further deepened his thoughts on the temporality of human existence, or *Dasein*, specifically focusing on 'temporalization' through the lens of Heidegger's *Being and Time*. He states that since Heidegger, "temporality," "historicity as the grasping of human existence's nature (*Wesensverfassung*)," and "the non-repeatability of decisions" determine "freedom open toward the future."<sup>19</sup> Here, "freedom open toward the future" is nothing less than "the freedom toward death (*Freiheit zum Tode*)." According to Heidegger, *Dasein* conceives of death as something that will arrive in the future. Only when *Dasein* confronts this 'possibility of death' does it seriously contemplate its own way of living. Because *death* is entirely one's own, *Dasein*—which had previously been dominated by 'the one' (*das Man*)—is separated from 'the one' by death, thus finally enabling it to regain its authentic self. In this context, Heidegger's concept of 'temporalization,' particularly its relation to human eschatological finitude, places its foundation in the future and serves to mature one's own time.<sup>20</sup> Zimmerman flexibly embraced the concept of "temporalization" from the two aforementioned philosophers, reinterpreting it as "generating the present from the harmony of past and future."<sup>21</sup>

The work resulting from reference to the theories of time of both philosophers is the anti-war opera *Die Soldaten*, which is a precise example of 'spherical structured time.' In Zimmermann's commentary on *Die Soldaten*, he mentions that the work "does not so much tell a story. Rather, a situation is depicted," and regards this situation as one in which "the past is threatened from the future (*von der Zukunft her die Vergangenheit bedroht*)."<sup>22</sup> Instead of "a story" that flows chronologically, it portrays precisely "a situation" that could occur at any time, as if "constantly moving back and forth between tomorrow, yesterday, and today."<sup>23</sup> He calls

<sup>18</sup> Ebd., S. 14.

<sup>19</sup> Ebd., S. 13.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1967 (c. 1927)), S. 326-328.

<sup>21</sup> Biemel, „Bernd Alois Zimmermann: Musik und Zeit,“ S. 119.

<sup>22</sup> Zimmermann, „Zu den »Soldaten«,“ S. 97.

<sup>23</sup> Ebd.

this form of time's existence 'spherical structured time,' and in this sphere, "it is possible for the past to be threatened from the future," and "the future takes root in the past as a threat, offering an image of the present. In the end, all of us will have to confront that image of the present."<sup>24</sup> He also states that "incorporating materials from the past" has "a meaning of transcending time by using a language that seems outdated by today's point of view."<sup>25</sup>

Zimmermann's philosophy of time, based on the theories of time of Husserl and Heidegger, is realized in music in the form of 'pluralistic compositional techniques': collage. Through this technique, listeners are guided to hear the old-fashioned and outdated language that appears in Zimmermann's music and to perceive it either as present or as something that could happen in the future. For Zimmermann, musical organization serves to "bring time to man as a comprehensive whole for his consciousness (*Bewußtsein*), transcending the phenomenal form of time as a temporal process within music."<sup>26</sup> This, in turn, contributes to "grasping the whole essence of man."<sup>27</sup> This approach appears to be a result of his absorption of Husserl's reflection on the self and Heidegger's concept of futuring. In this context, the concept of 'perpetual present' or 'All-present' (*All-Gegenwart*) expressed by Zimmermann not only projects the flow of consciousness itself but contains an ontological element regarding how an individual experiences the world.

## 2. Zimmermann's Reception of Literary Theory

To further support the point from the previous section—that Zimmermann's philosophy of time is deeply related to the temporality of the human mind and the "grasping the whole essence of man"—this section examines the function of 'spherical structured time' within the subject's consciousness. This analysis will draw upon Zimmermann's reception of literary theory, primarily referencing "Intervall und Zeit," as well as the following texts: "Lenz and the New Aspect of Opera,"<sup>28</sup> "Three Scenes from the Opera *Die Soldaten*,"<sup>29</sup> "On *Die Soldaten*,"<sup>30</sup> and "The Future of Opera."<sup>31</sup>

### 2.1. Time Theory in Literature—Critique of Language, Language Experiment, and Critical Thinking

Zimmermann employed collage, incorporating texts from numerous literary figures such as Dostoevsky, Pound, Bayer, Joyce, Camus, and Benn and many more, using fragments of their work in his compositions. While he did not explicitly state why he quoted the texts of various authors, it can be assumed that they have a certain commonality in that they sought to bring about

<sup>24</sup> Ebd.

<sup>25</sup> Ebd.

<sup>26</sup> Zimmermann, „Intervall und Zeit,“ S. 14.

<sup>27</sup> Ebd., S. 13.

<sup>28</sup> B. A. Zimmermann, „Lenz und neue Aspekte der Oper,“ *Blätter und Bilder. Zeitschrift für Dichtung, Musik und Malerei*, Heft 9 (1960), S.39-44.

<sup>29</sup> B. A. Zimmermann, „Drei Szenen aus der Oper »Die Soldaten«,“ in *Intervall und Zeit*, S. 93-95.

<sup>30</sup> Zimmermann, „Zu den »Soldaten«,“ S. 95-98.

<sup>31</sup> B. A. Zimmermann, „Zukunft der Opera,“ (1965) in *Intervall und Zeit*, S. 38-46.

social and political change through language critique or language experiments. This suggests that Zimmermann's engagement with literature is strongly connected to his perspective on society and social issues. In regard to this, this paper specifically scrutinizes the theories of time developed by three figures whom Zimmermann frequently mentioned in connection with his own philosophy of time: Joyce, Pound, and a representative poet and playwright of the *Sturm und Drang* period in the late 18th century, Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz (1751-1792). A shared thread runs through the theories of time held by these three authors. This commonality, which links non-linear time with the subject's critical thinking, aligns precisely with the goal Zimmermann was pursuing.

In a 1956 letter to the conductor Eigel Krüttge, Zimmermann wrote that he had gained new musical ideas from the 'stream of consciousness' found in Joyce's *Ulysses*.<sup>32</sup> These new musical ideas he referred to are specifically equivalent to 'spherical structured time.' The technique used in *Ulysses* is well known to be a surrealist technique that transcends the constraints of space-time and visualizes the world of the subconscious. Zimmermann also quoted Joyce's words "the simultaneous dance of hours" and found a continuity between this concept and the liberation of time present in Lenz's theories of dramaturgy.<sup>33</sup> This connection can be understood as the destruction of conventional time.

Zimmermann's understanding of Lenz's free form of space-time—a structure that unfolds various events between characters without adhering to a strict linear progression—stems from Lenz's drama theory, *Notes on the Theater (Anmerkungen übers Theater, 1774)*. Zimmermann noted that Lenz's abandonment of the classical three unities in theater represented the destruction of linear time and space (which typically move in the fixed order of past, present, and future). He denotes that this destruction literally led to the concept of 'spherical structured time,' where the three time layers become interchangeable.<sup>34</sup> As will be discussed later in more detail, the opera *Die Soldaten*, which was created from such an idea, features characters moving back and forth between ten different locations and allows their actions to be freely overlapped in time. Regarding this free form of space-time, Zimmermann states that "as the swing of the pendulum widens, the time interval narrows."<sup>35</sup> This is nothing other than a metaphor for the moment of "involving the past and future into a perpetual present," a concept discussed in the previous section.<sup>36</sup>

The concept of being involved in this "perpetual present" can be grasped through the imagism of another literary figure central to Zimmermann's theory of time: Ezra Pound. Zimmermann often cited a passage from Pound's literary criticism, *The Spirit of Romance*, concerning European romance literature: "Midnight is on the pillars of Hercules, and the morning in Jerusalem. All ages are contemporaneous [...] The future is evoked in the minds of a few

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<sup>32</sup> B. A. Zimmermann, Brief an Eigel Krüttge (1. 11. 1956), in *Bernd Alois Zimmermann: Dokumente zu Leben und Werk*, S. 114.

<sup>33</sup> Zimmermann, „Zu den »Soldaten«,“ S. 96.

<sup>34</sup> Ebd.

<sup>35</sup> Zimmermann, „Lenz und neue Aspekte der Oper,“ S.39-44.

<sup>36</sup> Zimmermann, „Intervall und Zeit,“ S. 12.

men.”<sup>37</sup> As this quotation shows, the core of Pound’s imagism is perceiving time synchronically. It means that “to present an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time” is to “liberate from the limitations of time and space.”<sup>38</sup> The images that appear suddenly in an instant, while discontinuous, appear constantly, stimulating our perception and influencing our cognitive process. In this respect, Pound’s theory of the image is also considered to be connected to Lenz’s free form of space-time, as will be discussed later.

In Zimmermann’s aesthetics, the establishment of non-linear time and the formation of the horizon of the present—found within the concept of the ‘instant’—were recognized in the time theories of Joyce and Pound, as well as the free form of space-time proposed by Lenz. The free form of space-time advocated by Lenz requires the listener to re-contextualize each musical event in the order of past, present, and future in order to grasp the relationship between musical events unfolding successively and simultaneously. Zimmermann termed this re-contextualization “the unity of an inner dramatic act.”<sup>39</sup> He believed this act led the audience (or listener) to think and act critically. This critical engagement is achieved through the re-contextualization of the intersection of space-time concerning the reality of an absurd society and a human world full of contradictions, which are reflected through the free form of space-time in theater (and music).

## 2.2. Temporality and Critique (*Kritik*) in *Die Soldaten*

As mentioned above, Zimmermann embodied the logic of the ‘stream of consciousness,’ ‘free form of space-time,’ and ‘imagism’ in his opera *Die Soldaten*. This opera is an adaptation of the namesake comedy *Die Soldaten* (1775) written by Lenz. Zimmermann stresses that his interest lay not in the comedy’s plot but in the aforementioned free form of space-time. In other words, a Lenzian idiom of arranging various events in a spiral manner can also be found in this operatic work. He explains that his opera does not depict a “destiny (*Schicksal*)” normally determined by divine will. Instead, it portrays a “typical situation (*Umstand*)” that encompasses “what is determined by social status, social circumstances, and the fateful constellation of the characters (*die schicksalhafte Konstellation*).” He further notes that this typical situation is one in which “we humans are exposed to inescapable events that we may encounter in any era.”<sup>40</sup>

What Zimmermann calls “critique” is related not only to the past but also to the future, and it creates a reference point right at the present moment. For example, even if the material used in a work originates from the past, it carries a present significance and can simultaneously indicate an expectation and a wish for the future. Through this “interchangeability” or “simultaneity” of the three temporal aspects, subjective thinking is required of us to critically view the absurd situations in human society that we have not yet faced or have already faced. It therefore seems that Zimmermann’s philosophy of time, which has “time interchangeability” or “time simultaneity” as its core, has his own historical consciousness latent within it.

This type of historical consciousness is clearly evident in Zimmermann’s work, *Requiem für*

<sup>37</sup> Zimmermann, „Intervall und Zeit,“ S. 12; B. A. Zimmermann, „Vom Handwerk des Komponisten,“ in *Intervall und Zeit*, S. 33.

<sup>38</sup> Ezra Pound, “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste,” *Poetry* Vol. 1, no. 6 (Mar 1913), pp. 200-201.

<sup>39</sup> Zimmermann, „Lenz und neue Aspekte der Oper,“ S.39-44.

<sup>40</sup> Zimmermann, „Drei Szenen aus der Oper »Die Soldaten«,“ S. 93.

*einen jungen Dichter* (1967-1969). In this piece, the young poet is not a specific individual but:

Rather, represents the young poet as a concept. This concept encompasses the young poet's diverse relationships, spanning the last fifty years, with the factors that determine the spiritual, cultural, historical, and linguistic situation of the poet and, consequently, our own situation—that is, the situation of Europe from 1920 to 1970.<sup>41</sup>

By incorporating everything from the soundscape of the Nazi era to the sounds of resistance from the 1960s, Zimmermann recalls the past and presents it as something actual. He views this past as something that could also occur in the future. The specific targets of his criticism are universal matters that humanity can confront at any time, such as conflicts of race and class, and violent coercion.

This idea is also reflected in *Die Soldaten*. The opera illustrates, from multiple angles, the situation of people who have entered into some kind of relationship with an unspecified number of soldiers. The stories of each character, which unfold in different spaces and times, are arranged both sequentially and simultaneously, yet they converge toward a single central point. In line with this structure, Zimmermann musically arranges various tempi, rhythms, and meters in contrast. He also reframes existing music within a dramatic context. A highly characteristic feature is that existing musical materials such as Bach's chorales and Gregorian chants are not used in the traditional ways of quotation, like parody or imitation often seen in past music. Instead, they are used as a kind of symbol that hints at future events, always within a dramatic context.

For instance, in the opera's prelude, the iconic melody of the Gregorian chant "Dies irae"—"The day of wrath, that day will dissolve the world into ashes (*Dies irae, dies illa, solvet saeculum in favilla*)"—is assigned to 41 string instruments and performed at slightly different timepoints.<sup>42</sup> Given its history, the "Dies irae" melody has often been borrowed to announce the end of the world. In this specific passage, a percussion gong is added to represent *death* sounds together with the instruction "extremely low." Considering the tradition of musical borrowing, this citation of *death* must be interpreted as a hint at a tragic future. Zimmermann, however, transforms the "Dies irae" melody until the end of the opera by deconstructing and reconstructing its fragments. This transformed melody reappears in the intermezzo between the first and second scenes of the second act. Here, it is played by the organ pedals in a manner that mixes and cuts the melody's fragments.<sup>43</sup> Immediately after the organ melody ends, a trumpet introduces the melody of Bach's chorale BWV 667, "Come, Holy Spirit, the Creator (*Veni Creator Spiritus*)."<sup>44</sup> In the conventional reception of musical borrowing, the Bach's chorale has been understood to symbolize salvation. This raises the critical question of the meaning of this juxtaposition of "Dies irae" and the Bach's chorale. Acknowledging that "Dies irae" itself functions as a moral lesson—urging one to live life seriously by announcing the end of the world—this combination of last

<sup>41</sup> Zimmermann, *Intervall und Zeit*, S. 116 (author's translation).

<sup>42</sup> Bernd Alois Zimmermann, *Die Soldaten* (Mainz: Schott Music GmbH & Co., 1975), S. 35, mm. 126-129.

<sup>43</sup> Ebd., S. 242-244, mm. 21-32.

<sup>44</sup> Ebd., S. 244-245, mm. 33-39 (Trumpet Section).

judgment and salvation can be accepted as a warning for the future. It can be considered as expressing a reflection on the unchangeable past and present, coupled with a wish for the future that has not yet materialized. In other words, it embodies a situation that constantly threatens the human past and present, but which cannot alter the destined future of the world's end.

### 3. Reconsideration of 'Pluralism' (*Pluralismus*)

The discussion thus far has demonstrated that Zimmermann's philosophy of time provides a critical framework for examining the essential nature of humanity and the absurdity of human society. This raises the question of whether, beyond its structural function, the 'pluralistic compositional technique' (i.e., collage, introduced in Section 1) also illustrates the plurality of history and serves a critical function in terms of content.

Zimmermann explicitly clarifies his 'pluralistic compositional technique,' stating that it is "by no means a mixing of styles, as is often mistakenly assumed," but rather deeply concerned with "an inner image under the above-mentioned conditions [the condition of fitting multiple time layers and experience layers into a proportional structure by calculation]."<sup>45</sup> This definitive statement functions as a critique of two common misinterpretations of the technique as merely a mixing of multiple styles. Specifically, it serves as a reflection on (1) the superficial structural analysis focused on the mixing of tonal and atonal music and, consequently, (2) the tendency to easily equate Zimmermann's 'pluralistic compositional technique' with polystylism. For Zimmermann, this 'pluralistic' collage is executed with a detailed plan and intention, a method that effectively eliminated any accidental elements. His approach contrasts sharply with postmodern collage, which often features a playfulness that disassembles the whole. Instead, Zimmermann's collage is imbued with "the intentional content (*die inhaltliche Intention*)."<sup>46</sup>

Here, the deliberate link between Zimmermann's "intentional content" and "plurality" is crucial to understanding his compositional aesthetic. In a 1968 interview, Zimmermann highlighted the philosophical foundation of the term "pluralistic," stating that it originates from a concept meaning the "simultaneous existence of many layers (*gleichzeitiges Vorhandensein vieler Schichten*)."<sup>47</sup> He further noted its widespread sociological application in discussions concerning the "problem of the distribution of power." From this perspective, it appears that his aim is to replace the linear conception of history—composed of various events—with a 'spherical structured time,' thereby constantly bringing universal problems of human society into the present. In his 1968 essay "On the Craft of the Composer (*Vom Handwerk des Komponisten*)," Zimmermann elaborated on pluralistic thinking, emphasizing its importance as a "social process (*gesellschaftlicher Prozess*)," in which various "memories," "ideals," and "experiences" converge to form "a political statement (*politische Stellungnahme*)."<sup>48</sup> In this sense, his

<sup>45</sup> Zimmermann, „Vom Handwerk des Komponisten,“ S. 36.

<sup>46</sup> Angelus Seipt, „Pluralistisches Musiktheater—Zur Oper *Die Soldaten*,“ in *Bernd Alois Zimmermann: Dokumente und Interpretationen*, S. 134.

<sup>47</sup> B. A. Zimmermann, „Interview mit Jens Wendland,“ in *Bernd Alois Zimmermann: Dokumente zu Leben und Werk*, S. 95.

<sup>48</sup> Zimmermann, „Vom Handwerk des Komponisten,“ S. 31-37.

“intentional content” serves to historically illustrate the relationship between art, human beings, and society, actively working to foster critical thinking toward society.

The concept of “intentional content” as a social and political statement is clearly demonstrated in Zimmermann's *Trumpet Concerto* (1954), which is based on the American Negro spiritual *Nobody knows the trouble I have seen*—a melody that became widespread around the mid-19th century. In his commentary on the piece, he writes:

The work was written in an atmosphere of strong fanatical racism (which unfortunately still exists today) and, in the fusion of three compositional principles that appear very heterogeneous in style, it tries to show the way to a kind of fraternal connection.<sup>49</sup>

The fusion of three different styles, namely the chorale prelude form, free variation form of the thematically linked twelve-tone technique, and an altered jazz style of the solo part, can be interpreted as a representation of a “fraternal connection.” This stylistic collage is unified by the Negro spiritual itself, which employs a pentatonic scale and serves as the primary motif of the piece. This spiritual, which originally criticizes slavery and oppression, functions as a *cantus firmus* that connects all three forms. Zimmermann thereby transplanted this “intentional content”—the spiritual's message of protest and longing for freedom—into a 20th-century compositional context, specifically utilizing the language of neo-classicism, twelve-tone technique, and jazz.

The relationship between collage and “intentional content” was evident early in Zimmermann's career, with his *Trumpet Concerto* (1954) anticipating the core substance of his later philosophy of time. Following this work, Zimmermann dedicated the late 1950s to the mid-1960s to reflecting upon his own philosophy of time, which was grounded in the theories of time found in philosophy and literature. It was in the late 1960s that his inclination toward “intentional content” became more clearly pronounced. This critical development is externally validated by scholarly reception, such as A. Dümling's 2018 critique on German radio of the monumental *Requiem für einen jungen Dichter*. Dümling's analysis distinguished Zimmermann's “pluralistic musical thinking (*ein pluralistisches Musikdenken*)” from that of his contemporaries, asserting that it was “distinguished from contemporary composers Karlheinz Stockhausen and Pierre Boulez, who followed abstract compositional principles in their new works,” due to its inherent “political commitment (*ein politisches Engagement*).”<sup>50</sup> This kind of critique affirms the presence of “intentional content” within Zimmermann's ‘pluralistic compositional technique.’ Ultimately, the plurality symbolized by Zimmermann's philosophy of time can be seen as representing the plurality of history itself.

## Conclusion

<sup>49</sup> Zimmermann, *Intervall und Zeit*, S. 91 (author's translation).

<sup>50</sup> Albrecht Dümling, „Werke zwischen Utopie und Wirklichkeit,“ 100. Geburtstag von Bernd Alois Zimmermann, *Deutschlandfunk*, Nov 21, 2018.

This paper has examined Bernd Alois Zimmermann's concept of time from the perspective of the intersection of the philosophical, literary, and musical domains. The analysis moves beyond traditional style or idiom analysis to focus on the critical nature inherent in his philosophy of time. Following the publication of his pivotal essay "Intervall und Zeit" in 1957, Zimmermann dedicated several years to developing the concept of time. He utilized Augustine's theory of time and 20th-century phenomenology as critical reference points, aiming to grasp temporality in music by superimposing it onto the temporality of the human psyche. The resulting concept of the 'perpetual present' held multiple, layered philosophical meanings for Zimmermann: it represented the state of time in the subject's soul (Augustine); it appeared as the presentified past and future (Husserl); it questioned the fundamental meaning of existence (Heidegger). From this composite philosophical insight, Zimmermann modeled 'spherical structured time' upon the inner time of the human psyche. This model demonstrated the possibility for reflection on human existence by compelling the subject to confront the image of the present moment. To realize this intricate theory in music, Zimmermann took particular note of the critical thinking that emerges in the subject through the mental reconstruction of a destroyed 'actual time.' This approach was informed by the free form of space-time seen in the late 18th-century literary movement. Crucially, the function of this free form of space-time—to promote critical thinking toward an absurd society—was fundamental in shaping Zimmermann's entire philosophy of time. Ultimately, Zimmermann's philosophy of time, as he repeatedly emphasized, constitutes a critique of universal human problems related to race, class, oppression, and freedom. This framework provides a critical lens for viewing the absurd situations that can be encountered in any era.

To musically embody his social critique, Zimmermann refined collage as a 'pluralistic compositional technique' based on the multi-layered nature of the present. The fundamental purpose of this technique is to inspire critical reflection on the current situation. Through the historical decontextualization of musical styles, the listener is actively required to build and grasp a new meaning for themselves. This critical substance is rooted in two intellectual currents: the literary revolution that criticized the social trends of the 18th century Enlightenment, and modern philosophy that criticized modern rationalism.

### **Acknowledgment**

This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 19J14482, 24KJ1030.