

# 1 | Introduction

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Poetry isn't really an open system; it's a combination of odd institutions, personal networks, hoary traditions, talent and blind luck. It's both an art and a guild, in other words.<sup>1</sup>

... Even though from a *theoretical* point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a *methodological* point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context.<sup>2</sup>

This book investigates how Arvo Pärt's music has been received; namely, how his music has formed pathways of meaning through its constituents – the listeners, the musicians, and the institutions that have performed, promoted, and published it. Said another way, this book is concerned with how Pärt's music has impacted people's lives. The following authors are invested in the nature of that impact, its forms, and the mechanisms that drive it. Beyond the rhetoric of “holy minimalism” that has accompanied much of Pärt's reception since the mid-1980s, they seek to enrich the conversation, to broaden its methods and the terms of its disputes.

Much like Arjun Appadurai's elegant formulation of “things-in-motion,” Pärt's music has created pathways but these pathways have been emphatically more than patterns of commodification. I should reiterate this point, not because readers need to be reminded that music forcefully resists being defined as an object, but because the project of critiquing the reception of a living composer is a delicate one; for example, conversations about money and spirituality appear to belie decades of vigorously anti-materialistic reasoning of Pärt and his closest advocates. The authors of this collection not only understand that the business of culture and the aspirations of artists have long been at odds; they are also fascinated by it. While Pärt's compositions are arguably the product of a singular creative act, subject to its own goals and meanings, this book sets out to determine how Pärt's music has occupied social landscapes, rapidly and contingently. By identifying some of these conditions, this book examines the ideology of the vested interests at

<sup>1</sup> David Orr, “You, Too, Could Write a Poem,” *New York Times Book Review*, 21 November 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Arjun Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value.” In *The Social Life of Things*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 5.

work in its promotion, dissemination, influence, and evaluation. Often this examination includes formal analysis of how Pärt's music works, but our primary questions are best answered through an understanding of how his music is used.

How exactly to consider Pärt's reception yields strategies as diverse as the situations they aim to illuminate. Recall for a moment the trajectory of contemporary Beethoven reception studies established in the 1970s, with approaches that focused synchronically on unchanging themes and proposed characteristic identities for the composer's music (Eggebrecht), that developed into historical analyses of related nineteenth-century criticism (Wallace) or, later still, that assessed the "heroic" and its cultural value (Burnham). More recently, this interest has included the appropriation of the composer in popular culture (Broyles).<sup>3</sup> I mention Beethoven studies not only because it has served as a proving ground for other reception topics, but also because its strategists have also, ironically, contributed to the industry of canon building, a phenomenon that is increasingly relevant to Pärt studies and one to which I will return.

Suffice to say we have now, within a burgeoning field of Pärt reception, a gratifying number of strategic possibilities – approaches more to the middle of Roland Barthes's original claim that the text was exclusively a "tissue of quotations" from the innumerable centers of culture.<sup>4</sup> At the risk of engineering our cake and eating it too, the authors here embrace Barthes's proposition of multiple origins and connotative values but they also consider the distinctive qualities of texts like scores or recordings. When possible, the following studies associate these formal qualities with a set of identifiable cultural, psychological or phenomenal factors. These factors may influence the responses of particular communities, such as film-goers (Cizmick on empathy and Sholl on resemblance) or concert-goers (Dolp on cultural programming) and establish the frameworks within which individual acts of perception take place. In the listener-oriented studies, authors have considered determinate groups of listeners; defined sometimes by individual identity (Heller on ethnography) and at other times phenomenologically through their modes of listening. In order

<sup>3</sup> H.H. Eggebrecht, *Zur Geschichte der Beethoven-Rezeption: Beethoven 1970* (Mainz: Verlag der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, 1972); Robin Wallace, *Beethoven's Critics: Aesthetic Dilemmas and Resolutions during the Composer's Lifetime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Michael Broyles, *Beethoven in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); Scott Burnham, *Beethoven Hero* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image – Music – Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

to set the stage for the variety of individual approaches in this book, I turn momentarily to an example of how Pärt's music has helped to formulate sonic ecologies.

The authors have engaged the common methodological tools of reception; ones that can be loosely grouped as theoretical approaches, receptions of the "text," histories of listening, and studies of media and aesthetic approaches.<sup>5</sup> For instance, some chapters utilize theories pertaining to historical context or the corporeal aspects of listening (May on phenomenological listening). Others dispute the textual relationship of Pärt's score to his interpreters and the production of editions (Shenton on performance), emphasize the sociohistorical contexts of listening practices (Maas on conditions of listening), as well as the politics of textual reception (Palmese on political resistance). The authors also suggest a variety of ways to understand the stability of Pärt's music as a "text." Collectively they challenge the impulse to determine his music; rather, they blur it and debate the issue of its perceived identity. As Philip Goldstein and James Machor have observed in their study of patterns in literary reception, although "fixed meanings recede in the face of social mediation, they do so only to certain boundaries." In our encounters with products of culture, we are constantly made aware that "we ourselves construct our experience and conclusions, and that we do so within the terms of our own expectations."<sup>6</sup>

To date, critical studies on Pärt have had to come to terms with several recurring tropes in his reception. In 2012, I conducted a preliminary study of how these tropes shaped his public persona in the marketplace.<sup>7</sup> The present collection is designed to significantly expand the conversation. Over the years, commentators have returned to tropes such as

- the polarizing divide created by Pärt's immigration in 1980;
- the championing of Pärt by Manfred Eicher;
- Pärt's positioning as a "holy minimalist" composer by popular media;
- the uncertain origins of the tintinnabuli technique and its resistances to formal analysis;
- the compatibility of his music for film;
- Pärt's reluctance to speak about his music.

<sup>5</sup> Philip Goldstein and James L. Machor, eds., *New Directions in American Reception Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Laura Dolp, "Arvo Pärt in the Marketplace." In *The Cambridge Companion to Arvo Pärt*, ed. Andrew Shenton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 177–192.

While Pärt's exile was clearly a monumental event, English-speaking audiences remained largely unaware of its creative significance before Paul Hillier's biography in the late 1990s. Hillier's book, in combination with the rhetorical cues established by Wolfgang Sandner in his commentary on Pärt's debut album in 1984 (*Tabula Rasa*), set the stage for the popular press, which amplified this divide into polarized ideas of East-West, oppressed-free, atonal-tintinnabuli, and politicized-apolitical. Any continuity in his compositional process or residual links between his environment in Vienna and Berlin and the one that he had left behind in Estonia were pushed to the background. A noticeable barrier in language and methodology also contributed to a divide between communities of thinkers about Pärt, with German and Estonian scholars on one side and English-speaking audiences on the other. More recently, it has been prohibitive to write critically about Pärt from within Estonia, resulting in a body of commentary in Estonian that is less likely to critique the ideology of post-Soviet Estonian cultural aspirations.

There have also been few attempts to interpret the composer's political convictions. In this volume, Michael Palmese examines Pärt's protracted and complicated relationship with the Soviet authorities and takes the opportunity to point out that major events in Pärt's career have, at times, been uniquely timed in reactive circumstances. For example, the spare aesthetics of ECM's marketing, an integral part of Pärt's commercial appeal in 1984, found a genuinely sympathetic audience in the United States. This audience was acutely aware of worsening foreign relations with the Soviet Union. Moreover ECM's "austerity" resonated with American economic uncertainties fueled in the early 1980s by a decade of profligate overconsumption.<sup>8</sup> Palmese considers this polarizing trope by identifying the issues for which Pärt has taken a political stand and proposes how they may be aligned with the composer's choice of subject and materials.

Manfred Eicher's impact on Pärt's reception is now widely acknowledged: through facilitating the composer's commercial distribution through ECM New Records, and also by establishing his public persona. The latter was accomplished through ECM's visual aesthetics and through written commentaries like that of Sandner, whose rhetoric on the liner notes for *Tabula Rasa* framed Pärt as mystical, unknowable, and prophetic. Popular media quickly bound Pärt's "mystical" music to a range of composers such as Henryk Górecki and John

<sup>8</sup> Paul Hillier, *Arvo Pärt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Andrew Shenton, "Introduction." *Ibid.*

Taverner under the banner of “holy minimalism,” with Pärt as the prophetic centerpiece.<sup>9</sup> Marketers and bloggers habitually characterized Pärt as a monk or romanticized prophet. In their critiques, the authors in this volume have stepped back from the original trope and critiqued the theme of universality that has often accompanied his music and its cultural dispersion.<sup>10</sup>

Early labeling of Pärt as a minimalist composer was fueled by the general implications of his tintinnabuli technique: its intuitive origins, its originality, and its reductive qualities. The simplicity of its structure resisted analytical exploration. Both Thomas Robinson and Leopold Brauneiss have tackled the issue through a variety of analytical approaches, including modes of style analysis (musical hermeneutics, Schenkerian analysis, set theory, triadic transformation) and strategies for understanding its multiplicity and process.<sup>11</sup> An equally important and enduring aspect of the tintinnabuli trope has been its spiritual implications, which Pärt has described as a dialogue between the “egoistic life of sin and suffering” (M-voice) and the “objective realm of forgiveness” (T-voice).<sup>12</sup> The studies here address the issue of spirituality and Pärt’s music with special attention to how his audience has issued its own reactions, often apart from any knowledge of its structural symbolism. Kythe Heller’s case study reframes the idea of spirituality by observing how Pärt’s music functions in communal listening for audiences not ordinarily associated with the demographics of conventional concert venues. Other chapters focus on highly mediated situations such as film, where the spiritual associations of Pärt’s music are significantly complicated and reimagined by filmic narrative. Together these studies critique the affective importance

<sup>9</sup> Dolp, “Arvo Pärt in the Marketplace.”; Wilfried Mellers, “Te Deum; Silouans Song; Magnificat; Berliner Messe by Arvo Pärt; Estonian Philharmonic,” *The Musical Times* 134 (1993): 714; Luke Benjamin Howard, “Motherhood, Billboard, and the Holocaust: Perceptions and Receptions of Gorecki’s Symphony No. 3,” *The Music Quarterly* 82 (1998), 131–159. The more acerbic of these early commentaries referred to Górecki and Pärt as the “God Squad”: Miriam Longino, “TV Preview The 37th Annual Grammy Awards,” *The Atlanta Journal – Constitution* (1995): N/4.

<sup>10</sup> Oliver Kautny, *Arvo Pärt zwischen Ost und West: Rezeptionsgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2002); *Arvo Pärt: Rezeption und Wirkung seiner Musik: Vorträge des Wuppertaler Symposiums 1999* (Osnabrück: Electronic Publishing, 2001); “‘Dem Himmel ein Stück näher . . .’ Der neoromantische Mythos ‘Arvo Pärt,’” *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 5 (2002), 24–27.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Robinson, “Analyzing Pärt.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Arvo Pärt*, ed. Andrew Shenton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 76–110; Leopold Brauneiss, “Musical Archetypes: The Basic Elements of the Tintinnabuli Style,” *Ibid.*, 49–75.

<sup>12</sup> In sum, tintinnabuli describes a single voice bifurcated identity. Nora Pärt has also described the interplay of the m-voice and t-voice as 1+1=1. Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*, 96; Wolfgang Sander, *Tabula rasa [liner notes]* [ECM 1275] (1984).

of his music to listeners from various traditions and suggest ways that this can be understood transnationally and across conventional sociopolitical borders. In this sense, we strive to expand the discourse about contemporary music and spirituality.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps one of the most important tropes of Pärt's reception is the extensive number of borrowings of his music for visual media since the early 1990s. Film and television are now major players in the composer's exposure and provide sometimes fraught examples of how moments of cinematic "spiritual intensity, nostalgia, tragedy, mortality, and remembering" build self-reinforcing vocabularies.<sup>14</sup> In addition to acknowledging the sheer volume of listeners and its commercial ramifications, we focus on a pair of dynamics: first, the capacity of Pärt's music to provoke empathy in its audience, and second, the tendency toward mimicry by film composers who are tasked with composing "Pärtian" music.

Finally, Pärt's reticence to speak about his music has been an enduring part of his relationship with the listening public. In the new millennial environment this dynamic has shifted, yielding more information about and by Pärt. His activities as a public figure, the cumulative and energizing force of his promotional base, and the publicity generated by the founding of the Arvo Pärt Centre outside of Tallinn in 2010 have generated a substantial number of interviews and statements distributed in a wide variety of media, from conventional print to established periodicals to web-based video clips.<sup>15</sup>

In many ways, this volume stands at the beginning of a new era of Anglophone research for Pärt reception. Its authors conclude that his impact has been multifaceted and charged in unexpected ways. We agree that many questions remain unanswered, including the issue of how Pärt's

<sup>13</sup> Jeffers Engelhardt, *Singing the Right Way: Orthodox Christians and Secular Enchantment in Estonia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Sander van Maas and Robert Sholl, eds., *Contemporary Music and Spirituality* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013); Robert Sholl, "Arvo Pärt and Spirituality." In *The Cambridge Companion to Arvo Pärt*, ed. Andrew Shenton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 140–158; Peter C. Bouteneff, *Arvo Pärt: Out of Silence* (Yonkers, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 2015); Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*, 3–7.

<sup>14</sup> Kaire Maimets-Volt, *Mediating the "Idea of One": Arvo Pärt's Pre-Existing Music in Film* (Tallinn: Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, 2009); Jeffers Engelhardt, "Arvo Pärt after 1980." In *The Cambridge Companion to Arvo Pärt*, ed. Andrew Shenton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 30.

<sup>15</sup> Restagno's Italian and Estonian editions contain additional material along with the interview. Enzo Restagno, ed., *Arvo Pärt in Conversation*, from its Italian original in 2004, it has been translated into Estonian 2005, German 2010, and French 2012 ed. (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2012).

oeuvre relates to the discourse of a contemporary “canon” and how this canon is in active negotiation with its personal, commercial, and political stakeholders. There is little doubt of the proliferation of his music in performances and recordings, which has grown exponentially over the last decade. Both Universal Edition and the Arvo Pärt Centre continue to maintain comprehensive lists of this activity. Other projects, like the Arvo Pärt Project at St. Vladimir’s Seminary, in New York State, have served the Centre’s goal to preserve the “creative heritage” of the composer within the Estonian cultural context by organizing performance events and publications with theological focus. Undoubtedly the formation of his legacy as a global cultural figure and a celebrated representative of Estonian culture is intricately bound with the founding of the Arvo Pärt Centre. With its promise of comprehensive archival materials and global assessments of Pärt’s activities, it provides a galvanizing resource for researchers, an active cultural center, as well as a focal point for national pride.<sup>16</sup>

To suggest ways that these more sweeping claims about Pärt’s reception above are embraced by the rest of the book, and to set the stage for its individual studies, I turn now to an event held in 2011 that drew Pärt’s music into a complicated and provocative exercise in urban listening.

## Pärt’s Ecologies

In September 2011 Pärt’s music played an unprecedented role as the centerpiece for a multisite urban art installation entitled “Stillspotting Manhattan: To a Great City” in New York City, an event that its curators described as a “confluence of music and architecture.”<sup>17</sup> His music had been drawn into service with contemporary art before, including

<sup>16</sup> Anthony Tommasini, “Mahler, Scaled Down and Clarified,” *The New York Times*, 6 November 2012; Vivien Schweitzer, “The Week Ahead: [Arts and Leisure Desk],” *Ibid.*, 4 November; Taylor Davis-Van Atta, ed., *Music & Literature No. 1: Pärt, Selby, Marcom* (Music & Literature Inc, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> The installation was one edition of a two-year multidisciplinary project entitled “stillspotting nyc” that identified five urban spaces where architects, artists, designers, composers, and philosophers collaborated in a series of public tours, events, and installations. It was curated by David Van der Leer, Assistant Curator of Architecture and Urban Studies, at the Guggenheim Museum. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, “Composer Arvo Pärt and Architects Snøhetta Collaborate for Guggenheim Exhibition in Lower Manhattan,” ed. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Press Office, 2011).

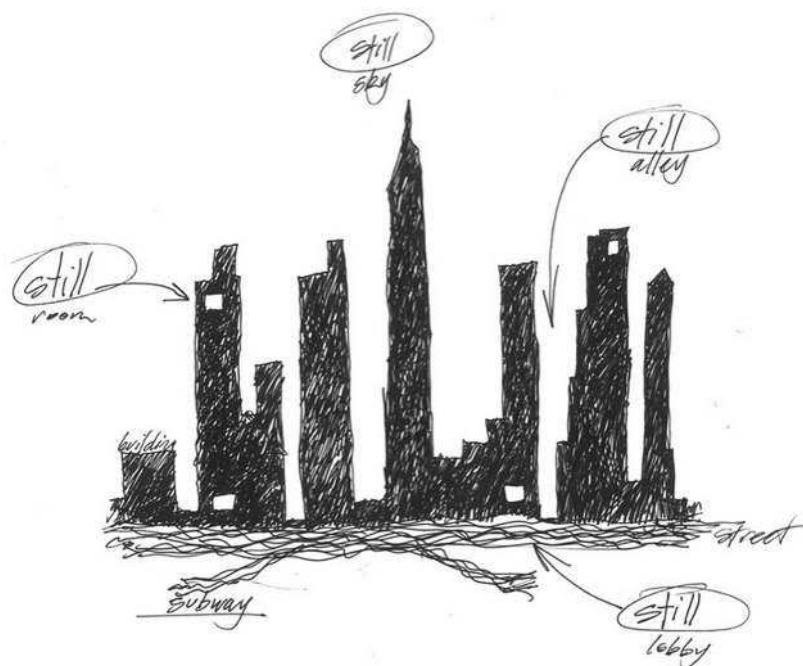


Figure 1.1 Concept sketch for “To a Great City,” Ink on Paper © 2011 by Snøhetta.

conventional exhibitions that drew parallels between his tintinnabuli music and the monodic potentials of visual form.<sup>18</sup> In these exhibitions and other Pärt-inspired collaborations, the potential for his music to offer formal analogies or to establish affective space found broader audiences. “Stillspotting Manhattan” was unique: it was visceral, it required physical effort to move between its sites, and it imposed the chaos of the city on the listening experience (Figure 1.1). In each of the installation sites, Pärt’s music was combined with temporary sculptural forms designed by the Oslo-based architectural firm Snøhetta to articulate each space. Several of these sites were not only iconic but also highly contested. The final location overlooked the former site of the World Trade Center Towers, in the vernacular known as “Ground Zero,” still under construction after the terrorist attacks a decade earlier. The curator of the project David Van der Leer deployed Pärt’s music in a manner commensurate with its earlier patterns of use, especially in film, and namely to critique both private

<sup>18</sup> Angela Madesani, “Ad lucem: arte contemporanea per Arvo Pärt,” ed. Patrizia Albé for *Studio La città* (Varese: Nomos, 2011), 53.



and public devastation. The project was a milestone in the sense that it forced Pärt's music, which was widely acknowledged for its spirit of contemplation and renouncement of ordinary activities, head to head with the physical manifestation of commerce and political power, as well as the psychologies of memorialization and urban identity.

In retrospect, "Stillspotting Manhattan" was a vibrant example of politicized urban space and the role of Pärt's music within it. The project offers a useful starting point for this volume since it formalized native modes of contemporary listening. Broadly put, it rehearsed the conditions of urban auditory culture, where music acts as a crucial agent in the dialectic between the desire for privacy and social isolation. This critical but understudied aspect in Pärt's reception is evidenced by how "Stillspotting" harnessed common strategies of listening through its mapping of symbolic territories of public and private space. The characteristics of the site were shaped by Van der Leer's choice of repertory and his strategies in auditory delivery. For instance, the private havens of "Stillspotting" were conditioned by exclusion (reminiscent of Michael Bull's concept of "habitation") where the sounds of the external world were excluded and replaced with electronically generated sounds, resulting in the distinction between private and public ecologies.<sup>19</sup> These characteristics make "Stillspotting" a model for one of the central claims of this book (that I also trace in my own chapter): namely that a noteworthy recurring use for Pärt's music includes demarcated physical space.

"Stillspotting" was a self-guided tour and its territory stretched from the adjoining Governors Island to the south, to several sites in lower Manhattan, including a garden labyrinth in Battery Park and a dramatic and proprietary view over Ground Zero. Upon arrival at the first site in Battery Park, participants were handed a flyer that contained brief curatorial remarks and practical information. Each of the locations featured identical large white weather balloons and Pärt's prerecorded music (Figure 1.2). The musical repertory was unique to each site (Table 1.1).

The idea of fostering single-pointed experience was the premise for each site, or "still spot," that was designed to set visitors apart from urban intensity.<sup>20</sup> In the written materials still spots were described as "soothing,"

<sup>19</sup> Michael Bull, *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience* (New York: Routledge, 2008). See also Michael Bull and Les Back, eds., *The Auditory Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2005).

<sup>20</sup> Early on Van der Leer asked Pärt a series of questions about the idea of one tone and its relation to perfection. If Pärt offered specific answers to these questions, they were not documented. Kaire Maimets-Volt, email correspondence, 15 August 2011. Documentation includes two

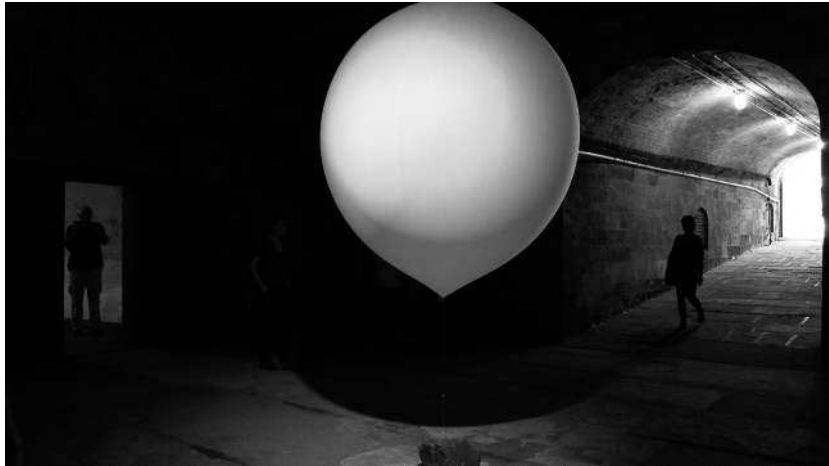


Figure 1.2 Magazine at Fort Jay, Snøhetta weather balloon, © 2011 by Sarah Deeds.

Table 1.1 “Stillspotting”: place, work, sound delivery

Location	Delivery	Work
Labyrinth at Battery Park (outside)	headphones	<i>Tabula Rasa</i> , 2nd movement, “Silentium” [2 solo violins, prepared piano, string orchestra]
Magazine at Fort Jay (underground) Governors Island	visible speakers	<i>My Heart's in the Highlands</i> [countertenor, organ]
Southeast Bastion, Fort Jay (outside) Governors Island	headphones	<i>Mein Weg</i> [strings, tubular bell in E, bass drum]
Woolworth Building (inside) 233 Broadway	hidden speakers	<i>In Principio</i> [mixed choir, orchestra]
World Trade Center 7 (inside) 250 Greenwich St	semi-visible speakers	<i>Hymn to a Great City</i> [two pianos]

“tranquil,” “focused,” “hidden” places of reflection, places that would transport visitors from the “hustle and bustle” of the street.<sup>21</sup> As a corollary to

email correspondences from Van der Leer; the first from Van der Leer to Pärt and his publisher, and the second including questions that were asked of both Arvo and Nora [no dates]. Maimets-Volt stated that to her knowledge Pärt had not given any answers to these questions and was not likely to.

<sup>21</sup> Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, “To a Great City by Arvo Pärt and Snøhetta: Sound Installations in Five Unexpected Spaces – from Underground Chambers to Landmark Skyscrapers [Self-guided tour, flyer],” ed. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Press Office, 2011).