ABSTRACT
In Halberstadt, a 639 year performance of John Cage’s ORGAN\textsuperscript{2}/ASLSP (1987) is taking place. With this performance, the initiators aim to investigate the direction ‘as slow as possible’ that John Cage gave for this musical piece in practice. ORGAN\textsuperscript{2}/ASLSP invites people to reconsider what we understand as music: is something still music if the length of the performance extends the length of human lives? The boundaries of performing a musical piece, from the role of the performer to that of the listener and music’s material settings, have to be questioned in order to formulate how slow ‘as slow as possible’ exactly is. In this article, I will examine how in Halberstadt a productive experimental situation has emerged to pose questions about the nature of musical performance. Recently, it has been argued that studies in the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS) on scientific laboratories may help to develop an understanding of the productivity of experimental arts practices. To research the performance in Halberstadt, I will employ the theoretical vocabulary that historian of science Hans-Jörg Rheinberger developed to understand the experimental systems in which scientific experiments are embedded. According to Rheinberger, experimental systems exist of three elements: epistemic things, technical objects, and researchers. By using these elements as a lens, I will investigate how the Halberstadt performance of ORGAN\textsuperscript{2}/ASLSP functions and how it brings into view questions that help us to reconsider the parameters of music.

KEYWORDS
Music; experimental system; science and technology studies; artistic research; John Cage

ILLUSTRATION 1: ORGAN\textsuperscript{2}/ASLSP IN THE BUCHARDI CHURCH, HALBERSTADT (PHOTOS TAKEN BY AUTHOR)
INTRODUCTION

Almost four years ago, in August 2013, I found myself in the German town of Halberstadt approaching a small building: the Buchardi church. Since 2001, this little church sets the scene for an extraordinary performance of John Cage’s \textit{ORGAN$^2$/ASLSP}. As soon as I entered the space, I got lost in the sound of a small organ — a haunting drone of tones, that I found to be peculiar, yet anything but unpleasant.\textsuperscript{1} If you would stumble upon the church and not read any of its signs, you would probably have no idea that what you just encountered is in fact a performance — a 639 year performance. The piece that is being performed in Halberstadt was written by the American composer John Cage. In 1985, he composed the first version of it, called \textit{ASLSP}, for piano. \textit{ASLSP} stands for As SLow aS Possible and consists of eight parts. According to the score, one of these parts should be omitted in performance, and at least one other should be repeated. Two years after the piano version of \textit{ASLSP}, the piece was rewritten for organ. It is this composition that is currently being performed in Halberstadt. The direction ‘as slow as possible’ did not pose too many problems when performing the piano version, because all the tones played on that instrument die fairly soon. When performed on organ, however, the tempo of the performance is no longer directly defined by the capabilities of the instrument, because the tone in the organ will not die by itself. On the contrary: it will be stable as long as you want it to be. \textit{ORGAN$^2$/ASLSP} invites people to reconsider what we understand as music: is something still music if the length of the performance extends the length of human lives? The boundaries of performing a musical piece, from the role of the performer to that of the listener and music’s material settings, have to be questioned in order to formulate any possible answer to John Cage’s direction ‘as slow as possible’.

In this article, I will examine how in Halberstadt a productive situation has emerged to pose questions about the nature of musical performance. Recently, several scholars studying artistic research have argued that studies in the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS) may help to develop an understanding of the productivity of experimental arts practices (Borgdorff 2012; Schwab 2013; Peters 2013; De Assis 2014). In STS, there is a research tradition that examines how natural scientists construct knowledge in their laboratories (e.g. Rheinberger 1997; Knorr Cetina 2001). In these laboratory studies, the experimental practices of scientists are analysed and taken apart: they consist of researchers, material settings, and ‘question-generators’. The latter is what makes the research productive: there is always something that is not yet known. In his study of the scientific laboratory, historian of science Hans-Jörg Rheinberger calls objects that function like question-generators ‘epistemic things’. These ungraspable entities are always part of ‘experimental systems’: material means that provide the right settings for questions to emerge

\textsuperscript{1} On the website of the project (http://www.aslsp.org), it is possible to hear how the performance is currently sounding.
(Rheinberger 1997). I will ask to what extent you can consider the Halberstadt performance of ORGAN2/ASLSP an experimental system. More importantly, I will ask what the questions are that become visible when using theoretical notions from STS for researching the arts. In order to answer these questions, I will analyse empirical material on the performance in Halberstadt that consists of archival material from the project and three semi-structured qualitative interviews I conducted with actors within the project: a member of the directory board, Karin Gastell, and two composers, initiators and artistic advisors prof. dr. Hans-Ola Ericsson and prof. dr. Christoph Bossert. In studying this material, I will use Rheinberger’s theory of epistemic things as a lens to understand the performance in Halberstadt as experimental situation. I will first turn my attention to the performance that is taking place in Halberstadt. Subsequently, I will provide some more background information on what ‘experimental systems’ exactly entail before we start to analyse ORGAN2/ASLSP as experimental system.

FROM HALBERSTADT TO THE SCIENTIFIC LABORATORY

Music is, as sociologist Howard Becker so clearly describes, “what a lot of people have done jointly” (1989, 282). In Halberstadt, this idea of music is set in future tense: ORGAN2/ASLSP is what a lot of people will do jointly. Becker might focus on music as a social process; the ‘performance’ in Halberstadt seems to test to what extent music can be a ‘planned’ social process. The performance in Halberstadt started in 2001, but the seeds for it were planted years earlier. In the late 1990s, several scholars and musicians met frequently and travelled to visit organs all over Europe. The aspect of ‘duration’ became a point of discussion and a variety of pieces of irregular lengths were played (Ericsson, Hans-Ola. 2015. Interview with author, 27 April.). In one of these meetings, they talked about ORGAN2/ASLSP and discussed that the piece could take a hundred years or even hundreds of years. Afterwards, some parts of Cage’s piano version ASLSP were played, and a whole version of ORGAN2/ASLSP was performed. After this performance, a discussion about the question what ‘as slow as possible’ could mean, formed a climax to all the experiences of the days before. The attendees got wound up in a discussion, which is described by composer Hans-Ola Ericsson:

Many ideas came to the table then: Could a performance take a day? Could a performance be as long as you can be awake, like a Guinness Book of Records thing? Or could it be the lifetime of a person, either short or long, maybe seventy or eighty years? Then I suggested that it could be the lifetime of an instrument, and when I suggested this it was a sort of ‘aha-experience’ that the piece could actually go on for the lifetime of an organ instrument (Ericsson, Hans-Ola. 2015. Interview with author, 27 April.).

2 I received documents from the archives of the project from the interviewees and from Harriett Watts, Rainer Neugebauer, and Klaus Röhring, who are also actively involved in the project.
In the years after this initial discussion, a group of musicians, musicologists, and theorists kept developing the idea further, searching for options to actually realize the performance they had in mind. When an option in Halberstadt was found, this instantly made sense to most people involved. Namely, Halberstadt was the hometown of the famous 1361 Blockwerk organ by Nicholas Faber. This organ, constructed in the town’s cathedral, is described by Praetorius as ‘revolutionary for its time’ as it was the first organ with a keyboard of twelve tones. The instrument marked a new phase in music and ringed in a new era for the organ as important actor in church music. The group decided to take this revolutionary organ as a direct starting point for the new performance of ORGAN²/ASLSP: in 1361 the Faber organ was built and in the year 2000 — 639 years later — the performance of ORGAN²/ASLSP would start, mirroring the same period of time into the future (Gastell, Karin. 2015. Interview with author, 20 April.).

From the very beginning, there are thus several interpreters involved in this performance: a board of three directors, a ‘Kuratorium’ (a board of trustees) consisting of people from Halberstadt, and a group of ‘artistic advisors’ among whom are several initiators of the project (Gastell, Karin. 2015. Interview with author, 20 April). Due to the length of the performance it will be necessary to have new people coming along and taking the lead of the project over. According to composer and initiator Jakob Ullmann, this is actually one of the most important aspects of the whole project, because this way “a laboratory of human tradition can be created: a place where in an exemplary way human history is seen as an essential part of human existence” (Ullmann 2010, 31). This analogy to the laboratory stuck with me, because what is going on in Halberstadt seems to have inherent experimental dimensions. Not only does it challenge the notion of the performer in music and the duration of a musical piece, it essentially questions the whole set of parameters music depends on: the role of time and space, the instrument, the listener, the role of the composer, everything has to be taken in consideration over and over again just to make sure that this 639-year-performance can exist.

In his work on artistic research, a type of research conducted in and through artistic practices, philosopher Henk Borgdorff draws a parallel between experiments in science and art by stating that John Cage’s assertion that an experiment is “simply an action the outcome of which is not foreseen” in fact also describes scientific experiments (Borgdorff 2012, 192). Borgdorff argues that is would be productive to look into social scientific laboratory studies to better understand how artworks can be a driving force in an experiment: “As long as artworks and their concepts remain vague, they generate a productive tension: in reaching out for the unknown, they become tools of research” (Borgdorff 2012, 193-194). Borgdorff, and several artistic research scholars with him, specifically points towards Hans-Jörg Rheinberger’s theory of epistemic things as a theoretical background that can potentially help to study of artistic practices as experimental
situations (e.g. Schwab 2013; De Assis 2014). The cradle of Rheinberger’s theory of epistemic things lies within the book *Toward a History of Epistemic Things: Synthesizing Proteins in the Test Tube* (1997). Right at the beginning of this book, Rheinberger situates himself, as a historian of science, within the ‘practice turn’ in social science, focussing on the role of practices, actions and interactions of humans and non-humans (e.g. Schatzki et al. 2001; Latour & Woolgar 1986). In particular, he looks at the “smallest integral working units of research”: experimental systems (Rheinberger 1997, 28). These experimental systems are the productive situations, often located in laboratories, in which scientists construct knowledge. According to Rheinberger, experimental systems consist of three elements: epistemic things, technical objects, and the researchers.

The first and most important element of an experimental system is the epistemic thing. This is what drives the experiment and makes it productive. Epistemic things enable new questions to be asked, but are also the most complicated concept Rheinberger presents. Due to their inherent uncertainty and vagueness, they are difficult to describe. Sociologist and STS scholar Karin Knorr Cetina tries to unpack the concept of the epistemic thing. She argues that “regular objects are like closed boxes, ready to use”, but epistemic things bear within them different qualities: they can unfold indefinitely and are in a permanent state of change in which they continually acquire new properties and change the ones they have (Knorr Cetina 2001, 190). Instead of routine procedures, such as riding a bike or cleaning the laboratory, epistemic things come in where there are still questions; they come in where there is no routine, or make the researchers question their own routines repeatedly so that the object becomes visible again. An epistemic thing can thus be any object of investigation that is at the centre of a research process and in the process of being materially defined (Knorr Cetina 2001, 90). Knorr Cetina argues that the “structure of wanting” in which epistemic things are situated implies a continually renewed interest, but that it also implies that this interest may turn elsewhere, that it just continues on a different track in a somewhat other direction (Knorr Cetina 2001, 195). Therefore, it could be argued that an epistemic thing will unfold indefinitely and never reaches a final form. The motivation of everyone and everything involved in an experimental system is to unravel these epistemic things as well as possible.

The other two elements of experimental systems, technical objects and researchers, are arranged around these epistemic things. First of all, according to Rheinberger, material settings are needed to facilitate the work on epistemic things. The experimental system always has to be located somewhere. The technical objects needed in a particular experiment can vary: from a desk and a computer, to research instruments, test tubes, or, as in Halberstadt, a musical instrument. Importantly, the technical conditions in which experiments take place hinder the outcomes of the experiment, whilst at the same time they provide the necessary context against which an
experiment can carry meaning. Without the technical objects, the epistemic thing could never be researched. For instance: music is performed by the technical means of an instrument, a cd, a radio, and so on. These technical objects both “embed the epistemic things, but also restrict and constrain them” (Rheinberger 1997, 30). Finally, there are the researchers that use these technical objects in these material settings. Although Rheinberger only implicitly mentions the human actors in experimental systems, they are an indispensable element. Each researcher comes with his or her own frame of reference, background, and skills. The people who are organizing the performance in Halberstadt aim at experimenting, trying, and doing, without a specific answer in mind. Along the way, they have to decide on the material settings of the performance and they have to deal with interpretations and different references to John Cage’s work. Although Rheinberger lays a stronger emphasis on the material network of the experimental system, I think it is important to first zoom in on the people arranging these material conditions.

A WEB OF ‘RESEARCHERS’

Sociologist and STS researcher Peter Peters notes that Rheinberger compares experimental systems to spider webs, as they are arrangements that enable us to “catch something” (Peters 2013, 98). But, to function as such, there first has to be a spider, or as in Halberstadt a whole network of spiders. “ORGAN²/ASLSP is an absolutely normal performance, but it is difficult because it is not one interpreter, there are quite a few”, says Karin Gastell (Gastell, Karin. 2015. Interview with author, 20 April.). Not only is there in this case not one interpreter of the score, there also is not one group of people that brings the experiment to a good end due to the duration of the performance. In this section, I will examine the continuously changing group of ‘researchers’: the people who are building up the material conditions for the performance to take place; the people who ask questions.

The first ‘spider’ in this web is composer John Cage. John Cage was always searching for relations within music: relations between body and sound, between sound and silence, and between speaking and non-speaking (Bossert, Christoph. 2015. Interview with author, 7 May.). Expressive music has been at the core of the Western tradition of music for ages: since Renaissance time, Baroque, Romanticism, there is a focus on “speaking music” and according to composer Christoph Bossert, Cage tried to formulate “as sharp as he could to have an alternative, to have the opposite of speaking music” (Bossert, Christoph. 2015. Interview with author, 7 May.). This open attitude towards music is something familiar in Cage’s body of work. By the early 1950s Cage’s experimentation had led him to eschew the dominance of harmony. Instead, he decided to explore other methods for constructing music: by welcoming noise, environmental
sound and prepared instruments into his works. Subsequently, he started trying to remove control by introducing chance procedures and liberating silence, most famously in 4′33″ (1952). As John Cage explains himself:

When I hear what we call music, it seems to me that someone is talking: talking about his feelings or his ideas about relationships. But when I hear the traffic, for instance here on Fifth Avenue, I do not have the feeling that anyone is talking. I have the feeling that sound is acting and I love the activity of sound. It gets longer and shorter, it gets higher and lower, it gets louder and softer, it does all those things and I am completely satisfied with that. I don’t need sound to talk to me (Cage 1992).

In many of his compositions, Cage questions the borders of music and the differences between sound and silence (see for instance Cage 1961; Cage 1967, Cage 1979). ORGAN^2/ASLSP is a good example of such a composition as it directly questions the duration of musical pieces in relation to our experience of music. Cage’s turn away from speaking (or expressive) music does however make interpretation more difficult. This is especially the case when there are several interpreters, some of which actually knew Cage personally.

In Halberstadt, the performance is being discussed regularly: the directory board organizes events and takes care of daily tasks, whilst the ‘Kuratorium’ is oriented towards Halberstadt and the artistic advisory group towards the philosophical dimensions of the project. Getting all the people aligned is often difficult because of “personal likes and dislikes” (Gastell, Karin. 2015. Interview with author, 20 April.). According to Karin Gastell, member of the directory board, there is a certain anxiety to make decisions that do not fit to John Cage or at least to people’s interpretation of John Cage (ibid.). The idea that they have to be ‘true to Cage’ can work restricting, because there is not one correct answer to be found — all there is to be found are more questions. The wish to make the performance an authentic interpretation of Cage seems to be an impossible and moreover unproductive aim. Composer Hans-Ola Ericsson stresses that in the score, Cage states that at least one part should be repeated, but of course that means that also five parts could be repeated, or all of them. So, technically, the performance could be repeated for another 639 years. It can go on until the organ is made to ashes (Ericsson, Hans-Ola. 2015. Interview with author, 27 April.). Exactly this opaque idea of the future that is inherent to ORGAN^2/ASLSP as composed by Cage is often forgotten. A focus on making the ‘right decisions’ is thus not only unproductive, but also not what Cage seemed to be interested in in the first place.

What does it mean for this performance to be managed by a changing team of ‘researchers’? Rheinberger claims that experimental systems are locally situated research-connections that grant

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3 John Cage was highly influenced by composer Erik Satie, artist Marcel Duchamp, the surrealists, and Zen-Buddhism. He wrote extensively about all his influencers, for instance in Silence (1961), A Year from Monday (1967), and Empty Words (1979).
coherence to the activities of a whole group of researchers, but simultaneously convey identity to the work of these researchers (Rheinberger 2004, 4). In a way, the researchers are then defined by the experimental system as well as the other way around. In the case of \textit{ORGAN}^2/\textit{ASLSP}, the local situation will not change, but the research-connections will change over time and thus will the experimental system. It is an essential idea that there is one generation now, who did the first part of the decision-making, but there will be a next generation, and then perhaps many afterwards who will not have the impression to be near to John Cage himself. This open structure even invites people from outside to engage with the project and to ask new questions they came up with themselves (cf. Maassen 2010). As such, the project does indeed function as a laboratory for human history. It questions the parameters of music, and especially the social interactions that are needed to make music exist. That the ‘spiders’ in the web of \textit{ORGAN}^2/\textit{ASLSP} have changed and will continue to change in the future, is something that directly influences the the material conditions of the performance.

\textbf{THE ORGAN AS TECHNICAL OBJECT}

Now that I have taken a deeper look into the rather complicated function of the researchers in the Halberstadt performance of \textit{ORGAN}^2/\textit{ASLSP}, it is time to discuss the ‘web’: the technical objects of the experimental system. In scientific experiments, the practices of the researchers and the material entities are inextricably interrelated according to Rheinberger (1997, 28). It is through the creation of material settings that new concepts can be developed and questions come to the fore. These material settings are also of unmistakable influence in Halberstadt as they shape this version of \textit{ORGAN}^2/\textit{ASLSP} and add some very specific dimensions to the performance: the 639 years, the Buchardi church and the instrument. In \textit{ORGAN}^2/\textit{ASLSP}, the organ that is built to play the piece is an interesting example of a technical object, as it changed a couple of times already and the current researchers are trying to create an instrument that fits as good as possible with the project.
Since the beginning of the project, five different organ concepts have been considered. The initial organ was designed by Gerard Wöhl and was sort of an organ sculpture, which looked a bit like a mushroom (Ericsson, Hans-Ola. 2015. Interview with author, 27 April.). Karin Gastell describes that this first organ was to be painted in bright colours and had three sides it could be played from. The organ itself stood on the ground and the three sides came together in the air with a twist. Then, on top, there was something like a ‘hat’ for the sound (see Illustration 2) (Gastell, Karin. 2015. Interview with author, 20 April). However, the organ was never build, as two music theorists, Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn, argued that the instrument had a too strong personality to fit the project: it was too much for John Cage (Gastell, Karin. 2015. Interview with author, 20 April.). Hans-Ola Ericsson notes that “it was too artistic somehow”, but also stresses that he thinks that there is nothing like a Cage organ (Ericsson, Hans-Ola. 2015. Interview with author, 27 April.). Yet the fact that the researchers do feel the urge to create an organ that ‘fits’ with John Cage, again brings into show the difficulty they have with relating the current performance back to John Cage’s initial ideas. Here too, the openness of the project is something that the researchers struggle with.

Ever since the first idea of the organ sculpture, several plans were passed, but all were too expensive to realize. Currently, a small and simple interim organ is to be seen in the Buchardi church (see Illustration 3), but another organ concept has already been designed. In this concept, the past, the present and the future are taken into account simultaneously: the ideas of Cage, founding members and future researchers are approached openly. This organ is a “dislocated
organ”: the pipes are spread through the space of the church and they only need some wind to function (Bossert, Christoph. 2015. Interview with author, 7 May.) (see Illustration 4). One of the advantages of this idea is that the instrument does not draw too much attention to itself:

You can walk, from one side of the church to another and so on. Instead of looking at a machine that creates the sound, we can now come into the sound. In a very literal way the organ is opened up in order to be able to deal with sound in a more direct way than through a large instrument (ibid.).

Not only does this dislocated organ no longer form a visual focus within the space, it is also open for future changes in interpretations because it has to be build up step by step. Founding members can make it look and sound like they want right now, but because the instrument is not as solid as the first concept, the next generation can easily change it: “they can change the places of pipes and paint it, whatever they want, so maybe this is the most honest way to build an organ, because it grows with the performance” (Gastell, Karin. 2015. Interview with author, 20 April.). Being flexible at the core, this organ addresses the problem of ‘fitting John Cage’ by not having a too strong personality of its own, while at the same time it addresses the problem of future generations of researchers by having an character that is open to (re-)interpretation. It replaces the focus on finding a correct interpretation of John Cage’s idea with a focus on doing and on trying. Paradoxically, it is through this open approach that Cage’s ideas might be taken into account after all: the fact that the decisions about the organ remain open and flexible for the future seems a very non-expressive way to make a performance last hundreds of years.

The organ playing $\text{ORGAN}^{\text{2/ASLSP}}$ in Halberstadt is not so much the epistemic thing in this performance. Rather, it is the technical means that make further research possible. It sets the stage for the experiment in a material way. Even the organization and experts around it realize that this very instrument might have a major influence on the music that is played and the experience that is created. The instrument then, like the technical objects Rheinberger describes, both “embeds” the performance, but also “restricts and constrains it” (1997, 30). The instrument is needed as it
provides a necessary context and the performance could not take place without it, yet at the same time it restricts different experiences. In Halberstadt they have been searching for a balance between these two opposites and they think they have found a solution as balanced and neutral as possible with the dislocated organ.

**EPISTEMIC THINGS: INTENTIONALLY NON-INTENTIONAL**

The organ, part of the material settings, functions more as a technical object than as the epistemic thing in itself. However, what is being performed, ORGAN²/ASLSP, can hardly be described as ‘material’, so what is it that we study then? Henk Borgdorff proposed that epistemic things can help to elucidate the role of the material artwork in artistic research projects, but it is worth considering where to look for epistemic things other than only in the materiality of art. For how does this work when an artwork is dependent on a score, description, or script, rather than on a solid artefact? Of course music should be approached differently than a work of visual art when talking about materiality. Many visual artworks exist in one stage: there is a process in which a material object is made and this object in its finished state is seen as the artwork. This is different for performative arts (from music to installation art). These arts can be seen as two-staged as they always exist of some sort of system of notation (e.g. a score, a text, building instructions) and the moments in which what is in these instructions is performed (van de Vall, 2015). The system of notation in these works thus fixes the features and the limits of permissible variation in each version. Art historian Liz Kotz adds that conceptual use of language in scores is not to be presented as a “withdrawal of visuality” and “dematerialization”, but rather as a model for a different kind of materiality, that of repletion, temporality, and delay, that can be found in performances and events (Kotz 2001, 83). The score of ORGAN²/ASLSP can be seen as an event score as it consists of a musical score and the instruction ‘as slow as possible’. Event scores open up even more possibilities than musical scores, because they (partly) consist of text: “these texts can be read as music scores, visual art, poetic texts, performance instructions, or proposals for some kind of action” (Kotz 2001, 56).

The Halberstadt performance of ORGAN²/ASLSP straight away poses some difficulties in this respect. Each performance of the piece is based on the score, but problems arise because of the vagueness of the text on the score. Philosopher Jérôme Dokic questions if you could in fact categorize John Cage’s work as two staged work. Usually, in musical works one could say that “a score, regardless of the system of notation used, defines the […] work of art” (Dokic 1998, 104). John Cage however, Dokic argues, often complicates this process as some elements in the composition are explicitly left open (Dokic 1998). The scores of Cage do not have the goal to specify the principles of his compositions in order to come to an ideal object that exists beyond its
performances. Instead, he leaves a lot of things open to interpretation. This observation is key when looking at ORGAN²/ASLSP.

ORGAN²/ASLSP was commissioned by the German composer Gerd Zacher, who did the first performance of the piece together with Cage. This initial performance took about half an hour and Zacher was convinced that the performance in Halberstadt was an absolute misinterpretation of John Cage’s work (Ericsson, Hans-Ola. 2015. Interview with author, 27 April.). He says that the title of the work, written as ASLSP, is a direct reference to James Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake*. Christoph Bossert explains:

In Joyce’s story, Finnegan wakes up in the morning, goes outside and looks at the sleeping town, and gives his greetings to it. When he starts to speak, a sound gets out of his mouth: ‘Soft morning, city! Lsp!’ What Gerd Zacher says is that these three letters, L, S, P, are a genius way to explain how sound is created by your voice. ‘LLL’ is a sound from the deepest point of your voice, ‘SSS’ brings the sound in your mouth, at your tongue and then there is an explosion that brings the sound to your lips: ‘PPP’! LSP then is a sound that escapes quickly; you create it as fast as possible. If you know this, AS LSP can not only mean as slow as possible, but also as fast as possible (Bossert, Christoph. 2015. Interview with author, 7 May).

Zacher’s criticism was that the Halberstadt project only followed the first meaning of the work and ignored the second. Bossert however argues that this other meaning is incorporated in the project as well, because each change of tones — the “Klangwechsel” — has become an event. During each Klangwechsel hundreds of people come together in Halberstadt to hear the changing sound as if the change is a performance in itself (see Illustration 5). These moments, according to Bossert, embody the other meaning Cage intended in ASLSP: at the moment of change the new pipe will be set at wind and then “woah, a new sound is coming” (Bossert, Christoph. 2015. Interview with author, 7 May.). In a short moment of time, one sound slips away and the other comes in: the pipe of the organ then functions as a mouth that lets the sound slip out.
The sound in the Halberstadt performance thus deals with the physical phenomenon of sound and silence. We are bound to think that music is about sound, but what John Cage stressed throughout his life was that music is just as much about silence, as it is about sound. The relations that take place — the small gasp of changing sound each Klangwechsel, the effect of the ringing drone of tones in combination with background ‘noise’, and what it means to relate sound to time and space — are fundamental to the performance in Halberstadt. Of course, Zacher could not prove the Halberstadt interpretation was ‘in-authentic’, and Bossert and other organisers could not prove Zacher was ‘wrong’, but I want to argue that is also not really the point. What is most striking about this whole discussion is not so much that there are people who feel that they have to be ‘true to Cage’; it is that this event makes insightful the gaps John Cage left in his compositions. He consciously created ironical paradoxes, which leave room for whoever wants to interpret his scores.

Dokic tries to tell apart two levels in an open score. On the first level, a musical object is described in generic terms — this level is responsible for the semi-closed character of the open work. At this level one finds in ORGAN²/ASLSP the lines of musical phrases to be played. On the second level, there are directions for action which are proposed and which concern the manner in which a specific performance of the work can be derived starting from the generic description. However, in the case of ORGAN²/ASLSP, this is complicated by the paradox that Cage provided. Professor in theatre studies Erica Fischer-Lichte notes that Cage’s notion of performance is defined by a “very lack of intentionality and planning; openness for what could occur; the impossibility of control; coincidence, transience, and perpetual transformation without any outside intervention” (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 124). Yet it could also be argued that Cage actually
did the absolute opposite. In his work he creates a paradox about intentionality: he intentionally plans ‘openness’ in his compositions, which then in turn seem to be non-intentional and seem to have an open structure. His scores are thus intentionally non-intentional, forcing the people in Halberstadt to interpret the gaps in his instructions anew with each generation that passes by.

CONCLUSION

So, the openness of the score might enable experimental practices, but then why is it so important that the piece is performed, that it is materialized? What does this add to the thought within the score itself? Most of all, a score fundamentally bears within it that is has to be performed, and because there is no one way to perform a piece, this is where new questions come in. Especially in a score with the almost philosophical direction ‘as slow as possible’ questions have to be considered in order to perform it. In a way, the setting in Halberstadt takes the score, which is a starting point for many questions about what we do and do not perceive as music, and provides the performative framework in which ORGAN²/ASLSP can truly be studied and reconsidered over and over again: it provides an experimental system. In the beginning of this paper I asked whether one could consider ORGAN²/ASLSP an experimental system and if so, what the STS approach would actually add when studying a case from the arts.

First, let’s consider the performance with Rheinberger’s vocabulary once again. Perhaps the epistemic thing in ORGAN²/ASLSP is not so much ‘the material artwork itself’ as Borgdorff (Borgdorff 2012, 193) argues, because it seems impossible to pin down the artwork in this case. Rather, the open character of the work and the intentional holes that are left by John Cage allow one to ask questions. The fact that it is difficult to formulate what these holes precisely entail, only underlines their vagueness and their similarity to Rheinberger’s epistemic things. As I noted in beginning of this article, Knorr Cetina argues that instead of in routine procedures, epistemic things come in where there are still questions. They make researchers question their own routines repeatedly. It seems that the epistemic thing of ORGAN²/ASLSP in Halberstadt lies within the openness of the score as intentionally created by John Cage: this openness generates questions and complicates the process of performing the musical piece considerably. Cage’s score, like epistemic things in natural science laboratories, lacks “the wholeness, solidity, and the thing-like character” of objects in our everyday lives, and therefore it enables us to reconsider the parameters of music that have become routinized (Knorr Cetina 2001, 190). According to Rheinberger’s words, to let this productive epistemic thing come to the fore a network of people has to search for the ‘right’ material settings. As we have seen, in Halberstadt these settings concern, among other things: the time, the instrument, and the interpretation of Cage’s ideas. Importantly, these settings will evolve over time as the network will change as well. The people
currently working on the project consciously keep the openness of the future in mind: for instance, the organ has to be open and adjustable, because new generations need to be able to approach the performance differently. The materializing of the score thus constantly activates a network of people to search for ideal conditions and to question these conditions or “routines”. To answer the question ‘how slow is as slow as possible?’ they continuously have to deal with new questions that keep coming up in realizing the project.

To answer the research question I posed: Rheinberger’s concepts help to accept the openness of an artistic project like this one. Instead of struggling with undefinable questions that relate back to the past, such as how to be ‘true to Cage’ or play the piece as authentic as possible, it can effectively bring into view current problems and new questions. An STS vocabulary can thus help to understand an artistic practice in a pragmatic way. Rather than merely focussing on the history of a project, Rheinberger’s theory forces you to focus on an unknown future. This emphasis on the future is something that fits seamlessly with the performance in Halberstadt. Essentially, music is always traveling and developing through time, even a piece of Bach will travel through records, performances, instruments and other material means in order to keep existing, but in Halberstadt they flip this idea into the future. They set the material means and assume that the music will travel into the future. Understanding the performance as experimental system thus helps to see it not as a tribute to John Cage, but as an experiment in which the social activities on which music is based are tested.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to Christoph Bossert, Hans-Ola Ericsson, and Karin Gastell whom I had the pleasure to interview. They provided me with answers, insights and documents regarding the artistic practices in Halberstadt. Furthermore, I would like to thank Peter Peters for his indispensable comments on earlier versions of this essay, and finally Hans Fidom for driving me all the way to Halberstadt in 2013 and putting ORGAN²/ASLSP on my mind in the first place.

REFERENCES


ILLUSTRATIONS


