

expectation

There is a relationship between patterned sounds and notions of 'music'.

Melody is essentially tonal pattern recognition and rhythm is temporal pattern recognition. The Western canon settled on a limited range of patterns, timbres, notes, octaves, metres, time signatures and rhythms that disciples of Schaefer, Stockhausen and Cage have been steadily dismantling ever since.

Even the basic repetition of elements or a reliance on concrete sound are, for musicians like Ralf Wehowsky, devious simplifications. Parameters are there to be tweaked. Sound is there to be transformed. Patterns are there to be ruptured.

The structures of pop, folk and classical music are based on memory capacity and audible frequencies. These can be challenged by melodies that don't repeat for twelve bars or sounds that threaten to become inaudible.

Music's arbitrary rules can sometimes, of course, be helpful: like a good joke, compositions can lead us along an expected sequence before springing surprise. The great pioneers of bebop engaged in a frenetic conversation with standards, phrases and unwritten rules of the past – their genius relied partly on the audience's shared understanding of acceptable forms and the musician's ability to reconfigure them.

An isolated sound can also be surprising – not simply in terms of its unexpected presence, but in terms of its unexpected timbre. Some sounds are unusual. Frustrated expectation forces us to confront our unconscious expectations – in other words, our ideology.

It can be as simple as challenging our ear to hear differently or as profound as asking us to re-examine our moral framework. Nietzsche's ethical crisis was spurred by an unexpected horse being flogged in the middle of the road. His ideology of anti-compassion shattered by the force of new data.