An “Art of the Fugue” of Film Scoring

Hanns Eisler’s Rockefeller Foundation-Funded Film Music Project (1940-1942)

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On Monday, August 5, 1940, the celebrated playwright Clifford Odets noted in his diary, which was to be published posthumously under the title *The Time is Ripe*:

Hanns Eisler, wife, and technical assistant are going to California to do some work on a Rockefeller Foundation Project. In the afternoon I went up to a private projection room and saw some of Hanns’s work, a musical score fitted to a series of nature shots. His plan is to fit every variety of stock shot, so making a sort of ‘Art of the Fugue’ of musical accompaniment.¹

This concise diary entry provides an insightful glimpse into the work of an ambitious project in its early, albeit already busy and productive, stage. In the center is Hanns Eisler, forty-two at the time, a gifted composer and able mind, who could already look back on an eventful life. The son of a philosopher of several encyclopedic endeavors fame², Eisler studied composition with Arnold Schönberg when the latter was developing his far-reaching twelve-tone technique. Eisler was a quick study and receptive to the ideas and techniques of his teacher. Nonetheless, his early works have a characteristic ironic tone that betrays a critical distance to the aesthetics of the Second Viennese School. In fact, Eisler increasingly took exception to his teacher’s art for art’s sake stance. This culminated in 1926 in an often-cited quarrel with Schönberg, who reproached his student for his disloyalty. The discord marked a turning point in the early career of Eisler, who had moved from his home town of Vienna to Berlin the year before. Henceforth, he endeavored to compose music for a social cause, namely for the class struggle and overcoming capitalism. Whereas Eisler had been awarded the prestigious Art Prize of the City of Vienna in 1925 for avant-garde work following Schönberg’s footsteps, he subsequently acquired an international reputation also as a composer of proletarian music. As Eisler wrote in his curriculum vitae for the Rockefeller Foundation

In 1930, Eisler’s musical contribution to the controversial play *Die Maßnahme* (*The Measures Taken*) marked the beginning of a lifelong collaboration and friendship with the poet and playwright Bertolt Brecht.

Eisler’s political viewpoint and engagement as well as his Jewish ancestry forced him into exile following the Nazis’ assumption of power in 1933. In the sense of Brecht’s aphorism “changing countries more often than shoes,” Eisler spent the ensuing years on an Odyssey in which he lent his musical skills largely to anti-fascist political action and to film production. In 1938, after shorter stays in Austria, France, Netherlands, Denmark, England, the United States, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, and Spain, he eventually sought permanent refuge from Nazi persecution and settled in New York at the invitation of Alvin Johnson, the indefatigable director of the New School for Social Research (NSSR), to teach courses in music composition as well as music theory and history.

The second person Clifford Odets mentions in the above-cited diary entry is Eisler’s second wife, Louise Eisler, née von Gosztony, a writer whose budding career was cut off by the Nazis’ seizure of power. The third person Odets mentions is Eisler’s technical assistant, the twenty-five year old sound engineer and editor Harry Robin. Odets became acquainted with Robin during the rehearsals of his recent play *Night Music*, for which Eisler composed the incidental music.

The “private projection room” Odets writes of, where he and Eisler went to view some of the composer’s Rockefeller Film Music Project (FMP) work, was in the Preview Theater at 1600 Broadway, which appears to have been a top address for independent and innovative film production at that time. Before eventually moving to Los Angeles in the spring of 1942, Eisler would go to this studio whenever the FMP necessitated the screening of film material or the use of a Moviola.

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4. The same building close to Times Square continues to be in use for various film, video, and recording studios even today.
The “series of nature shots” that Odets reports to have seen in the projection room of the Preview Theater make up the motion picture *White Flood*, an educational short on the silent and powerful force of glaciers.\(^5\) *White Flood* was the fourth of seven films produced by the nonprofit company Frontier Films and, besides *History and Romance of Transportation*, the only non-political one.\(^6\) Eisler delivered a score for this documentary as part of a reciprocal arrangement: whereas he obtained suitable film material for his musical experiments, Frontier Films saved the related costs, for Eisler used the budget of the FMP for the production of the musical soundtrack.\(^7\)

Odets’s depiction of Eisler’s work at the end of his diary entry as an “‘Art of the Fugue’ of musical accompaniment” captures with aphoristic precision a main idea of the FMP: the production of a variety of sound films and film sequences, each of which can each serve as a model for film scoring—just as the pieces in the *Art of the Fugue* by Johann Sebastian Bach can serve as a compendium of contrapuntal techniques. Thus, as an “Art of the Fugue” of film scoring, the artistic results of the FMP can be appreciated for their aesthetic qualities, analyzed for their film scoring techniques, and utilized for further study. Moreover, Odets’s suggestion of an analogy to Bach’s *Art of the Fugue* is visionary in regards to how Eisler’s film experiments might continue to function as an inspiring contribution to the art and craft of film scoring, even if its conditions have changed.

The FMP was approved at a meeting of the executive committee of the RF on January 19, 1940. The approval entailed a grant of $20,160 over the two-year period from February 1, 1940 to January 31, 1942. It was appropriated to the NSSR, on behalf of which the FMP had been proposed by Alvin Johnson. The purpose of the grant was, as stated in the minutes of the RF for January 19, 1940, “to enable ... Eisler at the [NSSR] to devote the next

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\(^5\) Released 1940 by Frontier Films; directors, script: Lionel Berman, David Wolff, Robert Strebbins; photography: William O. Field, Jr., Sherman Pratt; narrator: Colfax Sanderson.


\(^7\) For Eisler’s score for *White Flood*, see Tobias Faßhauer, “Hanns Eisler’s Chamber Symphony op. 69 as Film Music for *White Flood* (1940),” in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* XVIII/4 (1998),
two years to [experiments] which would indicate possibilities of music in film productions for the most part new and as yet untried." The need for such an undertaking was brought about by the erratic development of the field of motion picture music—a field that was usually regarded as playing a mere subsidiary role in film production and not given its due attention, as Eisler would argue. Consequently, there was a “gap between the highly evolved technique of the motion picture and the generally far less advanced techniques of motion-picture music.” To explore and suggest ways of bridging this gap, the experimental work of the FMP was planned to comprise four half-yearly experimental demonstrations. As John Marshall, then Assistant Director of the Humanities Division (HD) of the RF and largely responsible for “orchestrating the Division’s support for new forms of mass media,” summarized the proposal of the FMP:

Eisler’s plan is to select for purposes of demonstration short sequences from existing films ..., for which he will prepare and record on film alternative musical accompaniment. He will present the results of his work to small audiences of film makers in New York and in Hollywood, together with reports explaining his procedure. In this way, ... Eisler will deal with four types of problem, each culminating in a final report: (1) the possibilities of utilizing new types of musical material in film production [, also problems of musical form]; (2) problems of instrumentation; (3) problems of blending music and sound effect [and dialogue]; (4) the more general problem of music in relation to the content of the film—rudimentary esthetics of film music.

Besides these specific fields of problem, the four demonstrations would also comprise all principle film types, it was later announced by the NSSR in a template for press release:

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509-519; see also Tobias Faßhauer, “Hanns Eisler’s Kammersymphonie als Filmmusik zu White Flood (1940),” in Musik & Ästhetik VIII/31 (2004).

8 Minutes of January 19, 1940, RAC Music Filming 1939-1941.


10 In the same year 1940, John Marshall became Associate Director of the HD, a position that he held until he retired in 1970.


“Documentary films, animated cartoons, as well as feature films will be represented.”

After their completion, the practical results of the FMP, altogether about 80 minutes of sound film, were expected to be deposited in the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) Film Library, which had been set up with funds from the RF some five years before. As its Curator Iris Barry, John Marshall and Eisler agreed, the library would “make prints ... available to qualified film makers and students of the film at a nominal charge.”

That is, the MoMA Film Library would integrate the practical results of the FMP into its regular program of preservation and circulation.

However, Eisler was not content with merely elaborating and explaining exemplary film music demonstrations. He was also interested in ascertaining the unbiased audience reactions at these demonstrations. For this purpose, he proposed using the “questionnaire method ... with an audience carefully selected from various groups in accordance with most recent practice in sampling.”

Eisler intended to present the evaluation of the respective questionnaires in each of his biannual reports.

The amount of the grant, $20,160, was accounted for by the following yearly items: $3,000 for Eisler’s salary, which was commensurate with the yearly salary of a married professor at the NSSR; $1,440 for his technical assistant, Harry Robin, conceived as a continuation of his stipend as a RF fellow in film production; $5,000 for the costs of two half-yearly demonstrations; $250 each for traveling expenses and the reproduction of reports; and a yearly contingent of $500 for the measurement of audience reaction, with the provision that beforehand Eisler was “to find means to characterize audience reactions.”

Since Harry Robin’s RF fellowship would last until July, 1940, it was arranged that he would “be assigned for work with ... Eisler until the termination of his fellowship ... with the consequent reduction of $720 in the first year’s budget.”

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13 Template for press release, February 21, 1940, NSSR Publicity Files (Agnes de Lima), Raymond Fogelman Library, New School University.
14 Minutes of January 19, 1940, op. cit.
15 Proposal of the FMP, op. cit.
16 Letter from John Marshall to Alvin Johnson, January 10, 1940, RAC Music Filming 1939-1941. With this letter Marshall already submitted the itemization of the grant he intended to recommend at the next meeting of the RF executive committee so that Johnson could “ascertain if it [was] acceptable from the point of view of the School.”
17 Minutes of January 19, 1940, op. cit.
Given the context of this paper, the conception of the FMP has been deliberately illustrated by means of John Marshall’s recommendation for sponsorship rather than through Eisler’s proposal submitted by the NSSR, in order to highlight the specific expectations that RF officials might have had regarding the FMP. However, this conception also corresponds to the actual prehistory of the FMP, for its materialization was to a large extent indebted to Marshall’s vision, engagement, and perseverance. It was Marshall whom young Joseph Losey, the future famous film director, first sounded out about the possibility of RF support for Eisler. Joseph Losey was in contact with John Marshall since he had worked for an educational film project carried out under the auspices of the Commission of Human Relations (CHR) of the Progressive Education Association and funded by a grant from the General Education Board (GEB), for which Marshall served as an assistant to its vice-president, David Stevens. Losey had met Eisler in 1935 during his visit to Moscow and later commissioned him to score *Pete Roleum and His Cousins*, Losey’s first film, which was a stop-motion puppet two-reeler commissioned by the petroleum industry for screenings at the New York world’s fair in 1939 and 1940.

Marshall would certainly have been able to nip in the bud any hope of a grant for Eisler by laconically referring to the RF policy of not providing support for individual composers, or even film composers, however skillful they might be. Instead, Losey could inform Alvin Johnson on September 26, 1939: “Hanns’ work on films, and so forth, will not qualify him as a scholar, but I believe the research he is doing for you might. Mr. Marshall also thought so.” Johnson then got himself in contact with Marshall. He suggested that the research Eisler could do under a grant from the RF would be on a book on modern music, for which Eisler was contracted by the Oxford University Press. However,  

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20 Released 1939 by Petroleum Industries Exhibition Inc.; producer, director: Joseph Losey; script: Joseph Losey, Kenneth White; photography: Harold Muller (Technicolor); animation: Charley Bowers; puppets devised by: Louis Bunin; set: Howard Bay.
22 On the basis of this suggestion of Johnson, it has generally been assumed that in 1939, Eisler was “armed with a commission from Oxford University Press for a book on music in movies,” which was a decisive factor why he won “a grant ... from the [RF].” (Graham McCann, “New Introduction,” in Theodor
apparently in a personal meeting, Marshall convinced Johnson that Eisler’s research on film music would rather correspond to the objective of the RF and thus have better prospects of support. Consequently, Johnson urged Eisler to work out a “Research Program on the Relation between Music and Films,” which he submitted to Marshall on November 1, 1939, along with a brief survey of “Eisler’s Work as Composer for the Films.”

Despite a few utopian elements, such as the production of “a number of opera shorts, perhaps using animated cartoons and puppets,” Marshall was very impressed by this research program. In fact, as he confided to his superior David Stevens, Director of the HD of the RF, he was “impressed to the extent of asking why we shouldn’t make a small grant-in-aid to the [NSSR] ... If Eisler is as good as he sounds, such a small investment now, possibly followed up ... by some support over a longer period of time, might prove a surprisingly good investment.”

Thus, it was Marshall who first contemplated if Eisler’s research would not only qualify for “aid to a deposed scholar,” but rather for a full project of the NSSR. After consul-

Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films*, op. cit., xxxiii). Both assumptions, however, are ill-founded. In fact, while Johnson did bring up the contract with the Oxford University Press to portray Eisler as a scholar deserving support, the eventual FMP did not correspond to the book Eisler had originally been contracted to deliver. As Philip Vaudrin, Editor at the Oxford University Press in New York, wrote to Eisler on February 23, 1940: “I was delighted to see in the *Times* this morning that you have received the grant from the [RF]. At the same time, however, I must confess to a slight disappointment, since this does of course postpone your writing of the book you are to do for us.” (Stiftung Archiv der Akademie der Künste, Berlin (hereafter SAdK), Hanns Eisler Archive (hereafter HEA) 4183). To bridge this gap between Eisler’s research and the book he was commissioned, it was eventually arranged to redefine the topic of the book. As Vaudrin recorded the revised arrangement with Eisler: “The research project on the relation between films and music, which you are carrying out under a Rockefeller grant, will be the basis for a general book on the same subject, and we agree to accept this as a substitute for the book you are at present under contract with us to write.” (SAdK, HEA 4183).

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26 Inter-office note from John Marshall to David Stevens, November 2, 1939, RAC Music Filming 1939-1941.
27 Ibid.
28 See also the letter from John Marshall to Alvin Johnson, November 13, 1939, RAC Music Filming 1939-1941: “I may add—though perhaps for you alone—that our present feeling is that, if anything could be considered for Eisler, it should be more on the basis of the intrinsic interest and value of his work than as assistance for a deposed scholar.” Letter from John Marshall to Alvin Johnson, November 26, 1939, RAC Music Filming 1939-1941: “Evidently this looks ... like something which might develop into a small project.”
tation with David Stevens, Marshall arranged for Eisler to call on him in order to discuss the possibilities of such a project. When they met, Marshall advised Eisler to specify an exact proposal, which should include “a concrete plan of work” and a preferably modest budget. Moreover, it may also have been Marshall who gave Eisler the idea of tackling his laboratory experiments by re-scoring existing motion pictures, as this idea seems to have been modeled on the modus operandi of the RF-funded CHR project, within the scope of which Hollywood footage was utilized to edit educational short films. In any case, in the eventual proposal, which Johnson submitted on behalf of the NSSR on December 5, 1939, Eisler suggested for the first time using existing footage and dropped, among other idealistic plans, his idea of tailor-made film material, which would have collided with a don’t of RF policy anyway.

However, even after receiving the proposal and budget, Marshall did not simply let the usual application procedure take its course. Instead, he asked Iris Barry of the MoMA film library to provide him with references to Eisler’s work in film. Barry then furnished Marshall with a list of “films for which Hanns Eisler [had] composed music” as well as references to his film scores in Kurt London’s pioneering book on Film Music and in an article penned by Eisler himself in World Film News. Marshall later also arranged for Eisler to meet Barry in person to discuss the possibilities of cooperation with the MoMA film library, which led to the aforementioned agreement. Moreover, Marshall contacted Paul Lazarsfeld, the director of the famous Radio Research Project (RRP), and asked him about his opinion of Eisler and whether the expertise of the RRP could be applied to the composer’s plan to empirically study the effects of film music. Finally, Marshall ar-

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33 Hanns Eisler, “Music and Film: Illustration or Creation?,” in World Film News I (1936), 23.
34 Lazarsfeld’s answer of January 2, 1940, was ambiguous. He admitted that he did not know Eisler well personally, but reported, all empirical sociologist, that “[n]o one seems to doubt whatever problems on the social aspects of music he would tackle, his work would be worthy of support.” Lazarsfeld also recounted
ranged a meeting between Alvin Johnson, Eisler, Eisler’s technical assistant Harry Robin, and himself to go through the original proposal once again and outline the recommendation Marshall could give at the next meeting of the executive committee of the RF. This pertained particularly to the estimated budget, which was revised and simplified. Also, Marshall “tried to explore [the] plans which Eisler and Johnson have for assuring the effect of the [FMP].”

In summary: Marshall did not exaggerate at all in his following reply to Eisler’s thank-you letter on January 29, 1940: “I was ... glad to do anything I could to bring this proposal into consideration here for I felt personally that it promised most useful outcomes.”

Did the FMP, after so thorough a conception, eventually fulfill its aims? Was it a success or a failure? The answer is “both” or rather “neither,” which also reflects the current opinion of the FMP. Eisler biographer Jürgen Schebera inadvertently hits the nail on the head by describing the project as ‘legendary.’ Though it enjoys some fame, it continues to be steeped in legend. The purpose of this paper is to illustrate and explain the ambiguous outcome of the FMP.

that he had heard rumors of Eisler’s having “a too-great interest in his own advancement, sometimes at the expenses of others.” Furthermore Lazarsfeld added, albeit with the apparent purpose of interceding for further support of Adorno’s study of music broadcasting: “My general feeling would be that [Eisler] hasn’t quite the deep intellectual sincerity and freshness of approach which Dr. Adorno has, but that his interests lie in the same direction and that from a practical point of view he might be easier to handle.” As to the possibility of a collaboration of the RRP with the prospective FMP, Lazarsfeld promised to prepare “a short summary of [the] musical experiments” of the RRP so that Marshall would be able to judge whether [the RRP could] be of any help in developing Dr. [sic] Eisler’s plans.” (RAC Music Filming 1939-1941). Thus it appears somewhat optimistic when on January 3, 1940, Marshall reported to Eisler “Lazarsfeld’s willingness to cooperate in any study of the kind Eisler [wished] to undertake.” (RAC Music Filming 1939-1941). Equally euphemistic is Albrecht Betz’s interpretation of Lazarsfeld’s letter as “ein sehr positives Gutachten.” (Albrecht Betz, Hanns Eisler: Musik einer Zeit, die sich eben bildet (München: edition text + kritik), 153.  

35 Summary of the interview on January 3, 1940, Music Filming 1939-1941.  
Among the actual achievements of the FMP, a top place is held by the book *Composing for the Films*.\(^{38}\) It came out almost five years after the end of the project, unpleasantly at the time when, as one of the first victims of the anti-Communist witch hunt, Eisler got into the firing line of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC).\(^{39}\) Eisler had written the book together with Theodor W. Adorno, who, however, chose to withdraw his co-authorship so as not to get embroiled in the affair.\(^{40}\) Although apparent from the style and content of many passages, Adorno’s eminent contribution was thus not known to a broader public until 1969, almost seven years after Eisler’s death, when Adorno decided to publish the original German version under the names of both authors.\(^{41}\) (The first German edition\(^{42}\) was brought out by the East Berlin publishing house Henschel & Sohn. In it, certain passages were altered to accommodate a European readership and, especially, to comply with the official art doctrine of the Eastern bloc.)\(^{43}\)

Though it evolved from the research of the FMP (and for Adorno’s part also from his experiences of the RRP), the book *Composing for the Films* goes beyond the scope of the musical experiments of the project. The authors largely draw on their experiences with the Hollywood film industry,\(^{44}\) which is taken as the epitome of the “cultural industry.”

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\(^{39}\) When Eisler, charged, among other things, of being the “Karl Marx of communism in the musical field,” was heard before the HUAC, he got enjoyment out of voluntarily offering “as evidence [his] book,” and advising Robert Stripling, Chief Investigator, to study it (see *Hearings regarding Hanns Eisler*, op. cit., 22-23 and 56).


\(^{41}\) See ibid.: “I consider it legitimate to publish the book in the Federal Republic of Germany, deleting the changes made for the 1949 edition. It is also correct for it to be published under both our names.”


(It may be noted that the term “cultural industry,” which Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer developed for their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, was first introduced into the English-language discourse in *Composing for the Films.* Within the “strictly delimited segment” of the production and reception of film music, the authors attempt to “show the interaction of [the] two factors [of mass culture]: the aesthetic potentialities of mass art in the future, and its ideological character at present,” i.e. within the cultural industry. Some of the common prejudices about motion picture music as well as bad film scoring practices are exposed (chapter one: “Prejudices and Bad Habits”); the sociological and aesthetical background of such practices is elucidated (chapter four: “Sociological Aspects”, chapter five: “Elements of Aesthetics”). On the other hand, Eisler and Adorno address the “aesthetic potentialities” of film music by identifying and exemplifying models that, with regard to their musical dramaturgy or function, represent “critical ideas” towards a scoring practice beyond the patterns criticized (chapter two: “Function and Dramaturgy”). Furthermore, the authors make an emphatic plea for employing “The New Musical Resources” (chapter three), “because objectively they are more appropriate” for film. This chapter can be largely understood as the response to the problem area that is listed first in the proposal of the FMP. The argument is excellent and still thought-provoking today. Also, the three other problem areas of the FMP are addressed in *Composing for the Films*: “the more general problem of music in relation to the content of the film” in the second and fifth chapter, the “problems of instrumentation” as well as “blending music and sound effect” in parts of the sixth chapter, “The Composer and the Movie-Making Process.” Finally the artistic outcome of the FMP, i.e. its film music demonstrations, are presented and explicaded in a special “Report on the Film Music Project.” Eisler and Adorno originally conceived it as the seventh chapter, but the editors of the Oxford University Press chose to banish it to an appendix, which thus had the disadvantage of not being incorporated in the premises for the “Suggestions and Conclusions” in the last chapter of the book. Nonetheless, this report represents an im-

45 In their joint foreword of September 1, 1944, Eisler and Adorno refer to the chapter “Kulturindustrie” in the book *Philosophische Fragmente*, as the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was initially titled (see Theodor W. Adorno, Hanns Eisler: *Komposition für den Film* (München: Rogner & Bernhard, 1969), 10).


47 Today, especially the model of “dramatic counterpoint” has become famous, although it is often erroneously considered to be the only method of audiovisual correlation that Eisler and Adorno accepted.

in the last chapter of the book. Nonetheless, this report represents an impressive account of the FMP, which encourages further study. As the composer Antony Hopkins wrote in his review of the British edition\textsuperscript{49} of \textit{Composing for the Films}:

It is when we get to the appendix that the book really comes to life. In it, we find a description of the work done by the [FMP] of the [NSSR]. I would recommend this section to the notice of all film directors, for it might do much to renovate their ideas about the possible functions of film music. It also includes the score of a sequence written to film by Eisler, one of \textit{Fourteen Ways to Describe Rain}; ...\textsuperscript{50}

It does not appear that many film directors or others in the field of film production followed the advice of Hopkins. In the United States, this may have been to some extent due to Eisler’s conviction and deportation for alleged un-American activities, which defamed his artistic legacy for years to come.\textsuperscript{51} Moreover, many Hollywood composers and filmmakers felt personally insulted by the devastating critique and polemical tone in many of the book’s passages. It is therefore not surprising that they reacted defiantly rather than openly to the constructive suggestions in \textit{Composing for the Films}. It may also be assumed that many readers whose livelihood was made in the film industry cast the book aside before reading through to the appendix.\textsuperscript{52}

However, also in the GDR, where Eisler ultimately settled after his deportation from the United States, such accounts and analyses as in the report on the FMP were not necessarily well-received and embraced. Instead, the experiments of the FMP were in danger of being viewed as esoteric and arousing suspicion of “formalism.” This can be inferred from the unappreciative and occasionally nonsensical deletions made in the first German edition particularly in the chapter on the FMP.

Thus, it may especially hold for the elements of \textit{Composing for the Films} pertaining to the FMP what Adorno wrote in the postscript of his 1969 edition of the original German version: “the book ... had up until then led an apocryphal existence for political reasons both in the East and West, and had been read by very few of those people who could per-

\textsuperscript{49} Hanns Eisler, \textit{Composing for the Films} (London: Dennis Dobson, 1951).

\textsuperscript{50} Antony Hopkins, “\textit{Composing for the Films} by Hanns Eisler,” (review), in \textit{Sight and Sound} XXI/4 (1952), 183.


\textsuperscript{52} Roy Prendergast’s sweeping assessment of \textit{Composing for the Films} being “testy and valueless” may be regarded as typical for the reaction of those who feel personally insulted by the book (Roy M. Prendergast, \textit{Film Music: A Neglected Art—A Critical Study of Music in Films} (New York: Norton, 1977)).
haps have been interested in it.”

Regarding the book as a whole, such shadowy existence ceased after Adorno revealed his co-authorship. Although *Composing for the Films* continues to be controversial, it is considered a classic today, being the second monograph on film music ever, and the first of its kind. It has been reprinted many times (also in the *Collected Writings* of Adorno and the *Collected Works* of Eisler) and translated into several languages. Therefore, it is largely because of this book that the FMP has not sunk into oblivion, but enjoys some renown.

In addition to the appendix in *Composing for the Films*, Eisler wrote two other reports on the experimental work of the FMP. The first report, “Film Music—Work in Progress,” was published in 1941 in the periodical *Modern Music*, and the second one was the “Final Report” of October 31, 1942. Both of these are informative and instructive, but do not address the four problem areas outlined in the original FMP proposal. Instead, the 1941 interim report provides some cursory insights into the experimental work of the FMP as well as details about Eisler’s score for the documentary *White Flood* and his ideas of re-scoring selected sequences from the Hollywood features *The Grapes of Wrath* (by John Ford, Twentieth Century Fox 1940) and *The Long Voyage Home* (by John Ford, Walter Wanger Productions 1941). The “Final Report,” on the other hand, offers a brief overview of the practical results of the FMP, i.e., the completed demonstrations, by outlining the musical methods employed in each demonstration and indicating the general dramaturgical methods that were taken into consideration. An in-depth theoretical analysis is put off until the publication of a special book, the future monograph *Composing for the Films*.

Whereas Eisler brought his 1941 interim report to wider public attention through its publication in *Modern Music*, the American forum for the musical avant-garde at that time, he merely sent a single copy of his “Final Report” to John Marshall. Neither was this final report reproduced, nor did it circulate. It was not published until 1983, in a volume of Eisler’s *Collected Works*. Still, Eisler did not refund the contingent of the grant that had

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been earmarked for the reproduction of four biannual reports, in total 500$. No protest came however from the RF, just as there were no queries about the other divergences from the original itemization of the budget.

The ambiguity of the FMP, as to whether it was a success or a failure, particularly stems from the character of the experimental demonstrations that Eisler worked out within the scope of the project—the pieces of the “Art of Fugue” of film scoring as it were. First, these pieces do not coincide with the conception in the proposal of the FMP and the press release issued by the NSSR on February 21, 1940. Not all of the principle film types were included in the experiments. Documentary material predominated and no animated films were included. Nor was all of the footage that Eisler worked with from already completed motion pictures. Instead, Eisler wrote the score for the educational documentaries *White Flood* (1940) and *A Child Went Forth* (1941)\(^{56}\) as part of the original production. This was, as previously mentioned, a reciprocal arrangement: as a countermove to his obtaining film material of high quality, Eisler waived his fee and also paid for the production of the musical soundtrack from the FMP’s budget. However, for *A Child Went Forth*, Losey’s second screen venture, Eisler also had a five per cent share in the profits.\(^ {57}\) And there were profits from this two-reeler portraying “a model solution for the evacuation of children” in modern warfare. “Distributed by the Rockefeller Committee on South American Relations [i.e. probably the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA) or, as of March 1945, the Office of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA)] and the Office of War Information, [the film] had been dubbed in twenty-four languages by October 1945.”\(^ {58}\)

Eisler also included selected sequences from the motion picture *The Forgotten Village* (1941)\(^ {59}\) among the artistic results of the FMP.\(^ {60}\) Aside from the fact that he wrote the score for this cinematic fable about deep-rooted superstition in rural Mexico in between

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\(^{56}\) Released 1941 by National Association of Nursery Educators; directors, producers: Joseph Losey, John Ferno; script: Joseph Losey, photography: John Ferno; narrator: Lloyd Gough.

\(^{57}\) See the letter from Joseph Losey to Hanns Eisler, August 16, 1941, SAdK, HEA 4139.

\(^{58}\) David Caute, *Joseph Losey*, op. cit., 70.

\(^{59}\) Released 1941 by Pan-American Films, Inc; producer, director: Herbert Kline; script: John Steinbeck; photography: Alexander Hackensmid; Narrator: Burgess Meredith.

\(^{60}\) Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films*, op. cit., 140.
his work on the FMP, it was completely beyond its scope. Eisler was paid a regular composer’s fee and no expenditures from the RF grant were made on the production of the musical soundtrack to *The Forgotten Village*. In addition, Eisler listed excerpts from newsreels among the results of the FMP.\(^{61}\) The surviving documents, however, reveal that whereas the composer did intend to score a newsreel, apparently by March of Time, he never carried it out.\(^{62}\) Instead, he seems to have fallen back upon some newsreel-like sequences from the documentary *The 400 Million* (1939), to which he had composed his first dodecaphonic film music.\(^{63}\) This substitution with excerpts from Joris Ivens’s cinematic indictment of the Japanese aggression against China is suggested by the details Eisler gives in the appendix of *Composing for the Films* and the “Final Report” (e.g., that the newsreel contained war scenes such as the aerial bombing of a city, the score was set for large orchestra and in an improvisation-like form, and the recording was conducted by Dr. Fritz Stiedry).

It may be assumed that Eisler included excerpts from *The Forgotten Village* and an alleged newsreel among the practical results of the FMP in order to meet both the proposed total running-time of circa eighty minutes and the intended variety of film types. However, it should be noted that it was difficult for Eisler to obtain suitable Hollywood footage for his experiments. Unlike the CHR, he required film material that had to fulfill two other requirements: First, it was not to be in the final composite form but in the form of separate visuals and soundtracks in order that the composer’s alternative score could be mixed anew with the dialogue and the noises of the respective sequences. Second, it had to be of outstanding quality, for the potential of film music is limited by the picture itself: “Good music accompanying hackneyed or idiotic action and meaningless chatter becomes bad and meaningless.”\(^{64}\) Initially, Donald Slesinger of the RF-funded American


\(^{62}\) The final “Statement of Expenses: Hanns Eisler—Rockefeller Music Fund” has no item that could be assigned to the recording of a score for a newsreel (RAC Music Filming 1942-1962, Folder 3096). A list of works in the handwriting of Louise contains the entry “Nicht angefangener: March of Time” (Hanns Eisler Collection, Feuchtwanger Memorial Library [hereafter FML], Specialized Libraries and Archival Collections, University of Southern California).

\(^{63}\) Released 1941 by History Today, Inc; producers, directors, photography: Joris Ivens, John Ferno; commentary written by: Dudley Nichols; Narrator: Frederic March.

\(^{64}\) Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films*, op. cit., 117.
Film Center (AFC), and Iris Barry of the MoMA film library, sought to obtain on Eisler’s behalf the requisite Hollywood footage, but to no avail. Therefore, as noted in the afore-cited diary entry by Clifford Odets, Eisler, his wife, and his technical assistant traveled to Hollywood in August 1940 so as to get in contact with the heads of the film industry, introduce them to the work of the FMP, and gain their cooperation. For this purpose, Marshall arranged for Eisler and Robin to meet the staff of the Motion Picture Research Project, Leo Rosten’s pioneering venture into the sociology of Hollywood, which, after initial support from the Carnegie Corporation, had just been awarded a grant from the RF. Rosten readily made the premises and facilities of his office available to Eisler and Robin during their stay in Hollywood. He also helped introduce them to institutions and people with influence and decision-making power such as the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and its then president Walter Wanger. Their tour through major film studios including Metro Goldwyn Mayer, Paramount, Columbia, Twentieth Century Fox, RKO, and Disney, as well as institutions such as the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc. (MPPDA, also known as the Hays Office), obviously went well and, before long, several favorable contacts had been made.

Unfortunately, Eisler had to leave Hollywood and ultimately return to New York before he could wholly reap the benefits from those contacts. In fact, his abrupt departure marks the moment from that on the FMP appears to have been derailed from its original course. The reasons for this may be attributed to the visa and financial troubles Eisler was facing at that time. Notwithstanding his five-year appointment as a professor of music at the NSSR, beginning in the fall of 1938, he had not yet succeeded in obtaining an immigration visa. Instead he was still residing in the United States on a temporary visa for business and pleasure. In 1938, Eisler applied for an immigration visa under the German-Austrian quota, but was not admitted “because of his political views and affiliations.” Since he was also denied the extension of his visitor’s visa, he even had to discontinue his lectures at the NSSR in mid-semester, spring 1939, and take asylum in Mexico City.

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67 See the undated report on these contacts, probably by Harry Robin, in SADK, HEA 4349.
68 The following details are taken from Eisler’s FBI file and the Hearings regarding Hanns Eisler.
There he could continue teaching music courses at the Conservatorio Nacional de Musica for the next five months until he re-entered the United States on a new visitor’s visa in time for the fall semester at the NSSR.

Around that time, Eisler and Johnson appear to have arrived at a daring strategy: Eisler would hold out on temporary visas until in the fall of 1940, at which point he would have completed his second year of continuous teaching as a professor of music and hence be eligible for a non_quota visa. However, continuing on as a professor without immigration status proved economically ruinous for Eisler. He had obtained his temporary visa on the condition that he was not paid a regular salary. Instead, he merely received a meager “compensation for his teaching in the form of one-half of the tuition fees of his students.” In consequence, the composer was severely debt-ridden when the NSSR was awarded a RF grant for him to carry out the FMP. Moreover, Eisler’s temporary visa expired on January 28, 1940. He applied for an extension, which was denied by the Department of Labor. Eisler ignored the department’s demand to leave the country in the hope that he could somehow get by until September 1940, when he would be eligible for a non quota immigration visa. In the meantime, he was able to twice elude arrest, the warrant for which was issued on July 17, 1940. The first time, he was staying with a friend in Buck’s County, Pennsylvania, and commuting to New York, when he was thought to be residing on New York’s Upper Westside. The second time, when his new address had been investigated, he had just left for Hollywood. From there, Eisler and his wife went across the Mexican border on September 19, 1940, to secure non_quota visas. They were able to do this at the consulate without incident, but the Eisler couple were impeded from re-entering the United States the following day by an outstanding warrant as well as misgivings and protests about Eisler’s political character. He was heard before

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69 *Hearings regarding Hanns Eisler*, op. cit., 101.

70 See the Immigration Act of May 26, 1924, Section 4: “When used in this Act the term ‘non quota immigrant’ means [...] (d) An immigrant who continuously for at least two years preceding the time of his application for admission to the United States has been, and who seeks to enter the United States solely for the purpose of, carrying on the vocation of [...] professor of a college, academy, seminary, or university; and his wife [...] if accompanying or following to join him.” One might presume that Eisler and Johnson concealed this visa matter from Marshall upon applying for sponsorship by the RF. This however was not the case. Rather, Johnson wrote Marshall on November 27, 1939: “[F]ormally at least [Eisler] must round out his second year of teaching here, in order to get a permanent non-quota visa.” (RAC Music Filming 1939-1941).

a board of special inquiry, which debarred him and his wife from immigrating. Subsequently, Eisler appealed to the Immigration Board of Appeals in Washington, which eventually admitted him and his wife for permanent residence in the United States and quashed the warrant for arrest. The award was however delayed for almost a month, during which the Eislers were stuck at the Mexican-American border and precious time passed by. After his eventual admission, Eisler thus did not have any other choice than to return immediately to New York and fulfill the legal requirements of his non-quota visa, i.e. conduct his profession of a professor of music at the NSSR.

To make matter worse, Harry Robin had also left Hollywood shortly after Eisler’s departure and had traveled back to New York to get married. Upon learning of Eisler’s visa debacle, he surprisingly, albeit apparently on Johnson’s advice, refrained from returning to Hollywood and concluding the project’s business. Eisler repeatedly demanded the immediate resumption of work in Hollywood, but Robin did not concede. Into the bargain, Robin also asked Marshall for an increase in salary, because he was now married.\footnote{See the letter from Harry Robin to John Marshall, August 23, 1940, RAC Music Filming 1939-1941.} Marshall replied that this would be a question Robin would have to raise with the NSSR. Any increase in salary would, however, have to “be within the budget which the [RF’s] grant provided for the [FMP].”\footnote{Letter from John Marshall to Harry Robin, August 27, 1940, RAC Music Filming 1939-1941.} As Marshall suggested to Johnson, such a revision of the FMP’s budget might entail $600 reallocated to an increase in Robin’s yearly salary, since under the conditions of his previous RF fellowship, “his stipend would have been increased $50 a month if he had been married.”\footnote{Letter from John Marshall to Alvin Johnson, August 27, 1940, RAC Music Filming 1939-1941.}

For Eisler, the prospect of an additional burden on the FMP’s budget may have been the last of a series of annoyances that led him to take harsh measures: he dismissed Robin by telegraph. Yet this dismissal, however understandable it might have been, did not prove to the project’s advantage: Not only was Robin a skillful sound engineer and music editor whose collaboration had been invaluable, but he also was the only fully employed technical assistant who ever worked on the FMP. Later on, Eisler would enlist the services of technical assistants only as required. Again, nobody at the RF raised objection against the consequent reallocation of the FMP’s budget.
The most significant reallocation occurred as a consequence of Eisler’s request for a nine-month extension of the grant, which was approved by the RF on January 29, 1942.\(^{75}\) During the remaining period, Eisler drew from the unexpended balance of the RF grant a salary for himself and an assistant, which was effectively deducted from the original allocation for the other items of the FMP’s budget. In other words, the experimental work of the FMP had to be carried out with fewer resources than originally conceived.

In defiance of those adversities and financial bottlenecks, Eisler succeeded in working out two more film music demonstrations in addition to the educational shorts \textit{White Flood} and \textit{A Child Went Forth}. One was an alternative version (or rather two alternative versions) of an excerpt from the Hollywood feature \textit{The Grapes of Wrath} (1940).\(^{76}\) Eisler had the good fortune of securing the required material from this film classic through the contact he had made with Twentieth Fox during his visit to Hollywood as well as with the assistance of the New York office of the MPPDA—namely its Assistant to the Secretary Arthur DeBra.\(^{77}\) For his experiments, Eisler chose the only sequence that also contains an original score by Alfred Newman, then director of the Twentieth Century Fox Music Department, and rescored it twice. The result was a remarkable assemblage of three versions of the same film excerpt: the original one with music by Alfred Newman, and the two alternatives with music by Hanns Eisler. As stated in the appendix of \textit{Composing for the Films}, “[[t]he purpose was to gauge the whole range of [musico-]dramatic possibilities” in feature films.\(^{78}\) In addition, Eisler obviously paid particular attention to different ways of relating music, noise and dialogue. The recording of the composer’s alternative scores set for large orchestra was made in late 1942 in Los Angeles under the direction of Jascha Horenstein and apparently with members of the Los Angeles Phil-

\(^{75}\) RAC Music Filming 1942-1962, Folder 3096.
\(^{76}\) Released 1940 by Twentieth Century Fox; producer: Darryl F. Zanuck; director: John Ford; script: Nunnally Johnson, photography: Gregg Toland; original music: Alfred Newman.
\(^{77}\) See the letters from Arthur DeBra to Hanns Eisler, December 16, 1940, and December 30, 1940, SAdK, HEA 4309.
\(^{78}\) Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, \textit{Composing for the Films}, op. cit., 146.
harmonics. Eisler was very much satisfied with this recording and “proud like a chicken [sic],” as he wrote Odets.

Another film music demonstration was a new sound version of *Rain*, the much-admired cinematic poem by the great film auteur Joris Ivens, which had been released as a silent film in 1929 and first scored by Lou Lichtveld in 1932. Eisler gave his new sound version the title *Fourteen Ways to Describe Rain* and considered it “the richest and most complete” of all the demonstrations worked out under the auspices of the FMP. As he explained in the appendix of *Composing for the Films*:

[The score] is composed in the twelve-tone style, [set] for ... flute, clarinet, violin (alternating with viola), cello, and piano. The task was to test the most advanced resources and the corresponding complex composing technique in their relation to the motion picture. The picture about the rain seemed particularly suitable for this because of its experimental character and the lyrical quality of many of its details, despite its thoroughly objective treatment. Every conceivable type of musico-dramatic solution was considered, from the simplest naturalism of synchronized detail painting to the most extreme contrast effects, in which music ‘reflects’ rather than follows a picture.

First-rate musicians such as Rudolf Kolisch (conductor), Tossy Spivakovsky (violin), and Eduard Steuermann (piano) took part in the recording of this crown of the “Art of the Fugue” of film music, the mastery and beauty of which would cause much awe among its listeners (and spectators) at the time.

The rescored excerpt from *The Grapes of Wrath* and Eisler’s new sound version of *Rain* would provide ideal source material for empirical study, inasmuch they represent alternatives to pre-existing films and film sequences. However, an analysis of audience reactions such as conceived in the proposal of the FMP was never realized. For a while, the exiled art psychologist and film expert Rudolf Arnheim was being discussed for lending his expertise to the FMP’s empirical study. Arnheim even formally offered Eisler his assistance in a letter of January 3, 1940, but shortly afterwards received a RF fellowship to work with Lazarsfeld’s RRP in analyzing soap operas and their effects on American radio audiences. Eisler later sought to involve his friend, the art historian and sociologist

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79 Letter from Hanns Eisler to Clifford Odets, November 18, 1942, Indiana University, Bloomington, Lilly Library, Clifford Odets Papers, Box 2.
81 Ibid.
82 See John Marshall, Interviews 1940, RAC.
83 Letter from Rudolf Arnheim to Hanns Eisler, January 3, 1941, SAdK, HEA 4090.
Joachim Schumacher, as well as, in particular, Lazarsfeld and his RRP in the potential empirical study of the FMP. Apparently Eisler arranged a meeting with Lazarsfeld to discuss this over lunch, but it never came to pass.\textsuperscript{84} Subsequently, no further efforts seem to have been made to measure audience reactions. Once more, this omission was accepted by the RF without objection, even though the contingent allotted for analyzing audience reactions was largely expended otherwise.

It was certainly in the vital interest of Marshall and the RF that after the conclusion of the FMP, its results would be acknowledged as broadly as possible. Thus, whereas the grant should enable experiments freed from the restraints of the film market, it was never the intent for the FMP to be effectively regarded as the utopian venture of an enthusiastic idealist whose work would ultimately end up on the dump of history. Rather it was hoped that the outcome of the FMP could give impetus to the innovation and advance of the practice of film scoring and general film production.

One may therefore be disappointed about so little gleanings that at first seem to have taken place with regard to the accomplishments of the FMP. Neither were the demonstrations shown as a whole nor were there many screenings at all. Certainly, the two educational shorts \textit{White Flood} and \textit{A Child Went Forth} were distributed and hence seen by a number of people, but it is unlikely that they were aware of the background and significance of the scores for those pictures. Eisler also does not appear to have ever publicly presented his alternative version of an excerpt from \textit{The Grapes of Wrath}. It may well be that he considered this experiment too controversial to introduce it to Hollywood, particularly since his alternative score highlights the controversial nature of the motion picture itself. Subsequent to the FMP, Eisler was able to establish himself in Hollywood as a freelance film composer and thus had good reason to shy away from openly antagonizing the music business in the film industry with alternative versions of Oscar-winning productions. Instead, Eisler would mainly show two sequences from \textit{White Flood}, which he or sometimes even Adorno would say a few words of introduction about. These presenta-

\textsuperscript{84} See the undated letter from Hanns Eisler to Theodor W. Adorno, [possibly January 21 or 28, 1942, or even February 4, 1942.] SAdK, HEA 4205, published as “Falsche Flaschenpost?,” ed. Johannes C. Gall, in \textit{Eisler-Mitteilungen} 32 (June 2003), 11.
tions at least met with great success, which can be inferred from the reviews and the composer’s own account.\textsuperscript{85}

In the “Final Report on the [FMP],” Eisler stated that the “whole practical results, that is to say film and music, [would] be put at the disposal of the [MoMA] after six more months,” as arranged.\textsuperscript{86} Unfortunately, this does not seem to have ever been done. Instead, the respective film material was initially stored in vaults in both Hollywood (Moviola Co.) and New York (Preview Theater), the rental of which was paid by the NSSR from the balance of the RF grant. On May 23, 1944, the book-keeping department of the RF however admonished the NSSR to send the overdue final statement in order to close the account.\textsuperscript{87} This final statement engendered a lengthy correspondence between Eisler, Johnson, and the book-keeping departments of both the NSSR and the RF concerning the expenditures that were incurred after the termination of the grant. In the end, it was agreed that the payments for vault rental made after November 1, 1942, be refunded to the RF and that the scattered film results be sent to the NSSR at cost. Interestingly, Marshall did not intervene and remind of the original arrangement with the MoMA film library. He refrained from any comment. Later, in 1947, Clara Mayer, Dean of the School of Philosophy and Liberal Arts of the NSSR, asked Eisler in a letter what she was to do with his films, as the inflammable nitrate material appeared contrary to insurance regulations.\textsuperscript{88} What decision was then made remains an unanswered question. However, it is certain that Eisler showed his \textit{Fourteen Ways to Describe Rain} in Los Angeles and in New York shortly before he left the United States for good in 1948. Since then this new sound version of \textit{Rain} as well as the alternative version of an excerpt from the \textit{Grapes of Wrath} have been lost without a trace. Only recently the corresponding autograph music

\textsuperscript{85} For the screening of September 16, 1944, within the scope of the symposium "Music in Contemporary Life," (before some 1,500 people) at Royce Hall, University of California Los Angeles, see e.g. the undated letter from Hanns Eisler to Louise Eisler (FML Eisler Collection); Walter H. Rubsamen, “A Modern Approach to Film Music: Hanns Eisler Rejects the Clichés,” in Arts and Architecture LXI/11 (1944), 38; Naomi Reynolds, “An Institute of Music in Contemporary Life,” in Film Music Notes, December 1944; Alfred Frankenstein, “Triumph of the 12-Tone System,” undated newspaper clipping from the San Francisco Chronicle.

\textsuperscript{86} “Final Report on the Film Music Project on a Grant by the Rockefeller Foundation,” op. cit., 595.

\textsuperscript{87} Letter from George Beal to Alvin Johnson, May 23, 1944, RAC Music Filming 1942-1962, Folder 3096.

\textsuperscript{88} Letter from Clara Mayer to Hanns Eisler, June 17, 1947, FML Eisler Collection.
to Eisler’s *Grapes of Wrath* experiments\(^89\) as well as the spectacular original sound recording of the *Fourteen Ways to Describe Rain*\(^90\) have been re-discovered. With regard to those two precious pieces of Eisler’s “Art of the Fugue” of film music, this will finally allow a reconstruction in the one case and a reproduction in the other.

**Conclusion**

Adding to the ambiguity of the FMP is the lack of acknowledgement on the part of the RF regarding the significant accomplishment the FMP made on a relatively small grant. In telling *The Story of the Rockefeller Foundation*, Raymond Fosdick, President of the RF of many years standing, only vaguely refers “to half a dozen diversified experiments” in the field of film study.\(^91\) Certainly, Fosdick had every reason to deliberately avoid an acknowledgement of the FMP after Eisler’s deportation and in the era of McCarthyism: Several newspapers had cited Eisler as evidence of alleged RF funding of Communists. Fosdick was thus not in a position to extol the RF for the stimulation and support of a study in mass culture that eventually resulted in a seminal book on *Composing for the Films* and a thought-provoking artistic compendium of film scoring.

Today, the FMP may however be pulled out of the siding of the RF’s history. This will lead by itself to a reduction of the ambiguity of this study.

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\(^{90}\) See Johannes C. Gall, “Eislers Platten mit der Regenlyrik,” in *Eisler-Mitteilungen* 34 (October 2003), 25.