

# Online Role-Playing -

## Second thoughts after a first attempt

A follow-up on the 2007 keynote address by  
Professor Sandra Wills:

‘Enroll in new designs for learning:  
Online Role Plays’

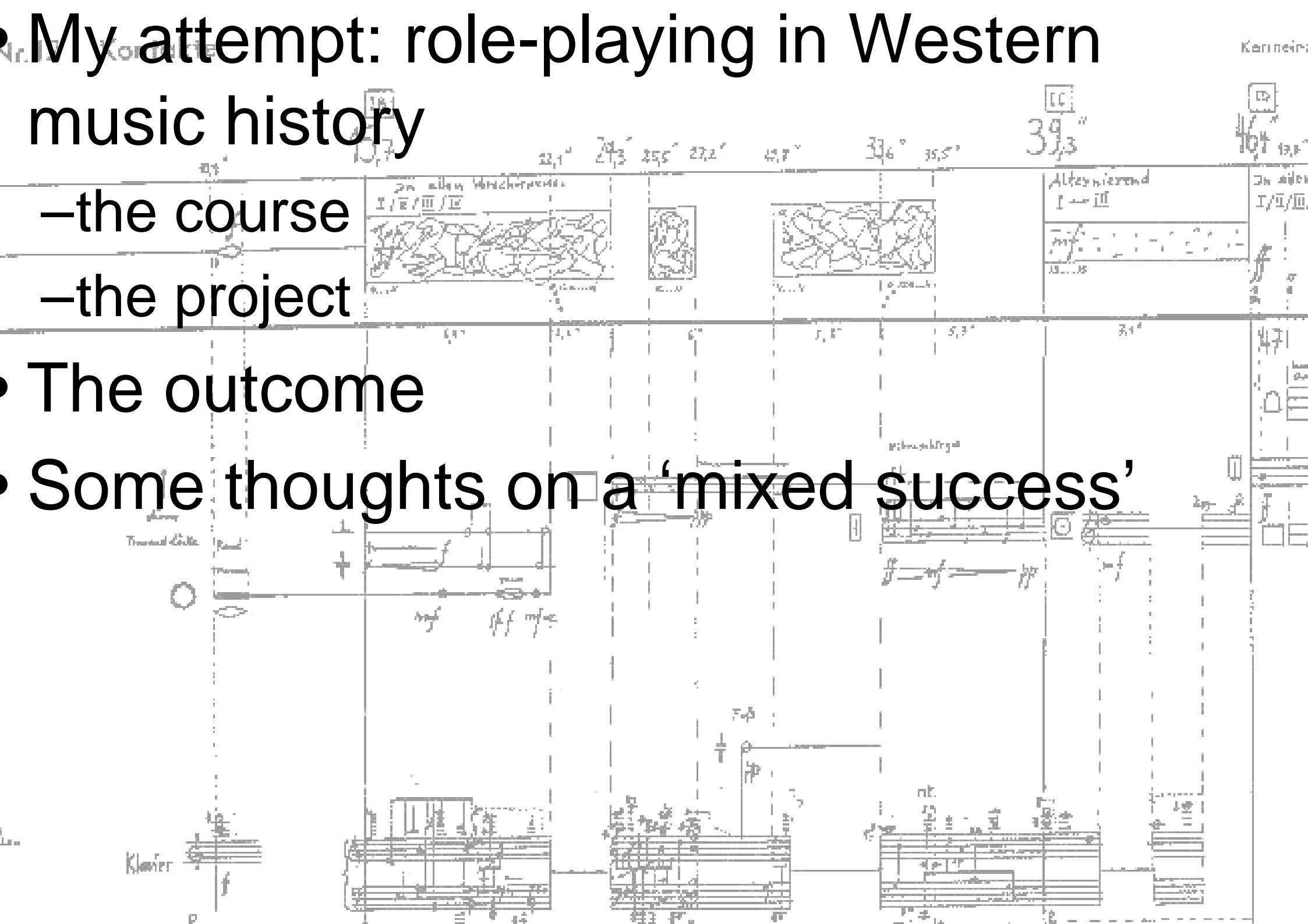
Brian Thompson  
Department of Music, CUHK

# My attempt: role-playing in Western music history

- the course
- the project

## The outcome

## Some thoughts on a 'mixed success'





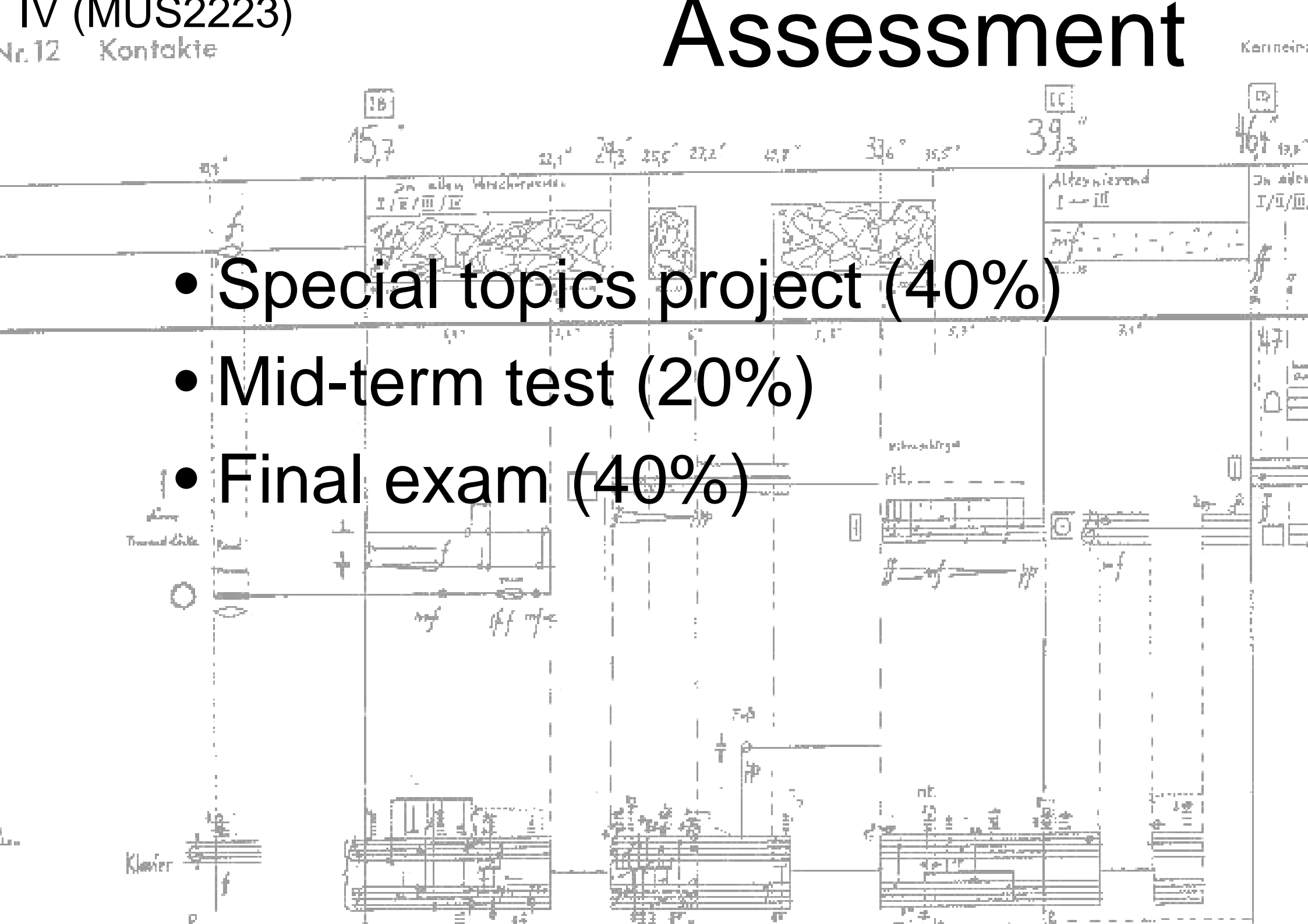
## History of Western Music IV (Mus2223)

- A required lecture course
- Taken mostly by 2nd-year students

# WebCT used for:

- Discussion and direct communication with students
- Soft copy of course documents
- Some additional audio and video files
- Glossary

- Knowledge of general trends in music since about 1850
- Understanding of musical styles
- Appreciation of the various influences on music
- Experience working in groups
- Improved study and communication skills

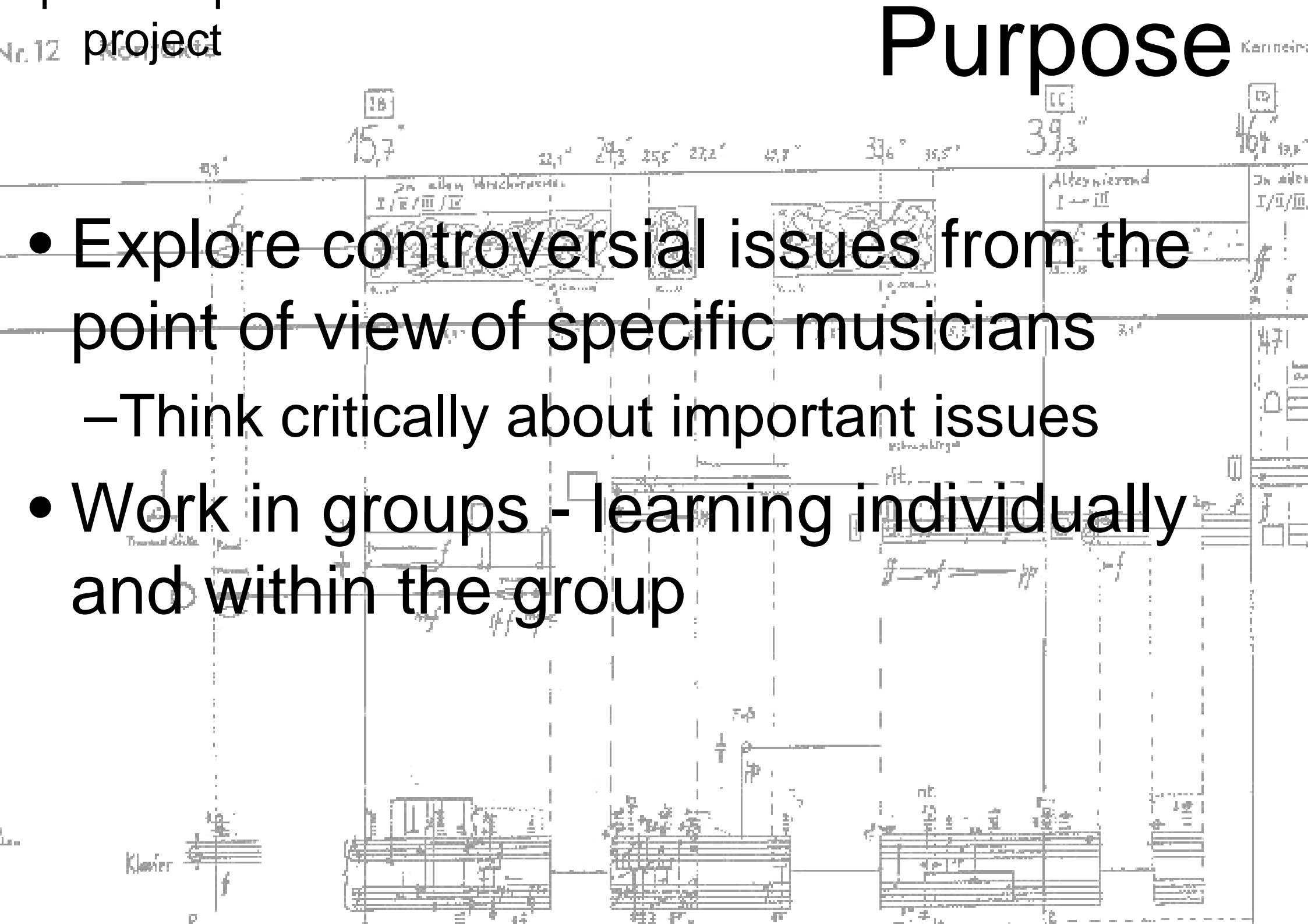
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- The background image is a complex technical drawing or musical score page. It features several columns of handwritten text and musical notation. At the top, there are boxed numbers 18, 19, and 20. Below these are various measurements in inches (e.g., 15.7, 22.1, 24.3, 25.5, 27.2, 42.7, 33.6, 35.5, 39.3, 46.1). The text includes phrases like 'Zu allen Anschlüssen I/II/III/IV', 'Alternierend I-III', and 'Zu allen I/II/III'. There are also musical staves with notes and clefs, and technical diagrams with lines and symbols. The overall appearance is that of a detailed engineering or musical manuscript.
- Special topics project (40%)
  - Mid-term test (20%)
  - Final exam (40%)

# Special topics project

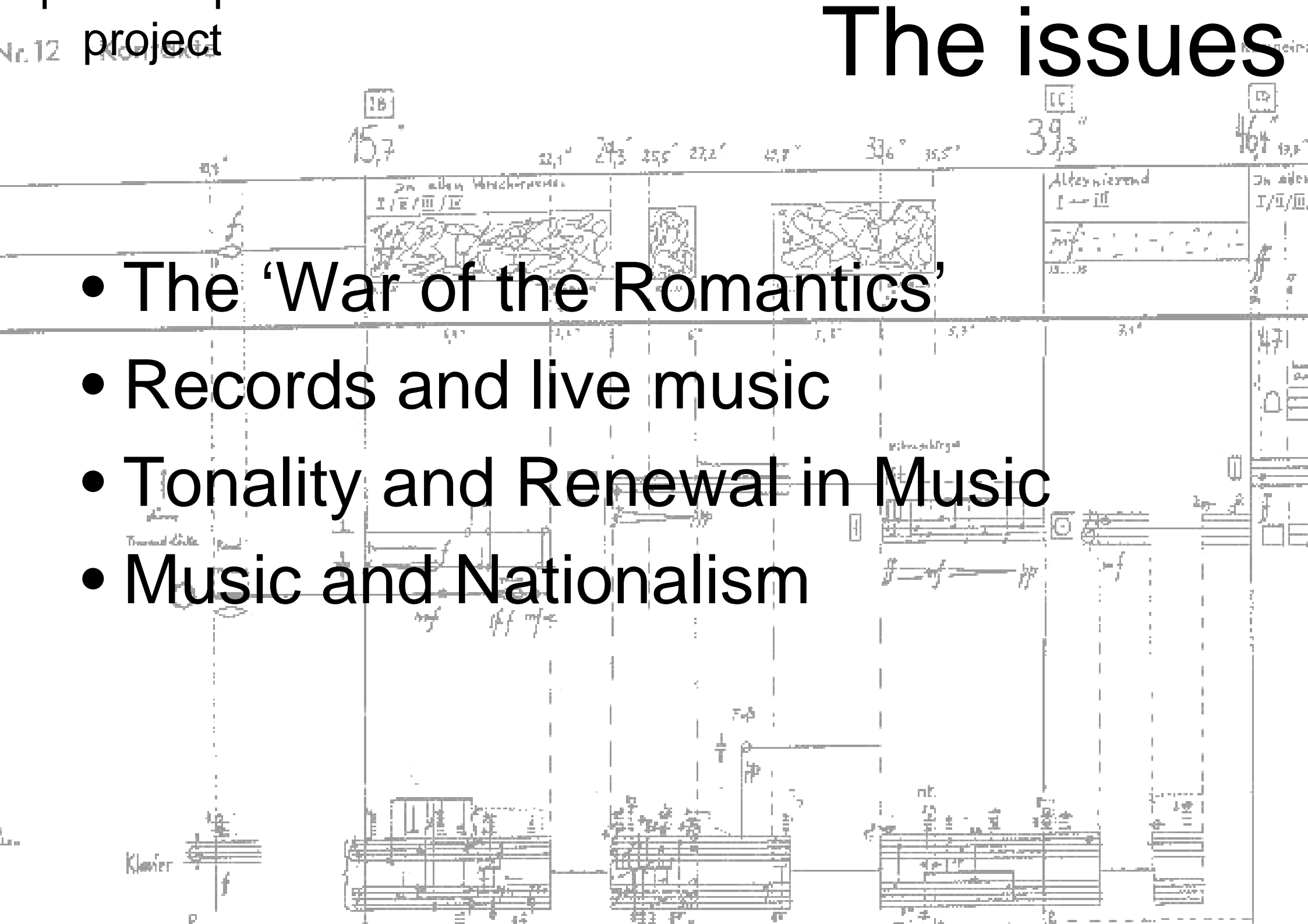
The image shows a handwritten musical score for piano, likely a study or exercise. The score is written on a grid of staves. At the top, there are several measurements in inches: 15.7, 22.1, 24.3, 25.5, 27.2, 42.7, 33.6, 35.5, 39.3, and 46.7. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamics. There are also some text annotations in German, including "Zu allen Anschlagsorten" (for all attack points) and "Altezierend I-III" (Altezierend I-III). The score is divided into several measures, with some measures containing multiple staves. The handwriting is clear and legible.



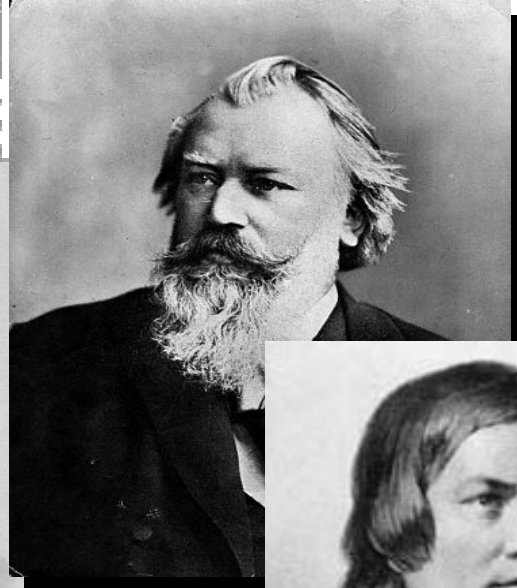
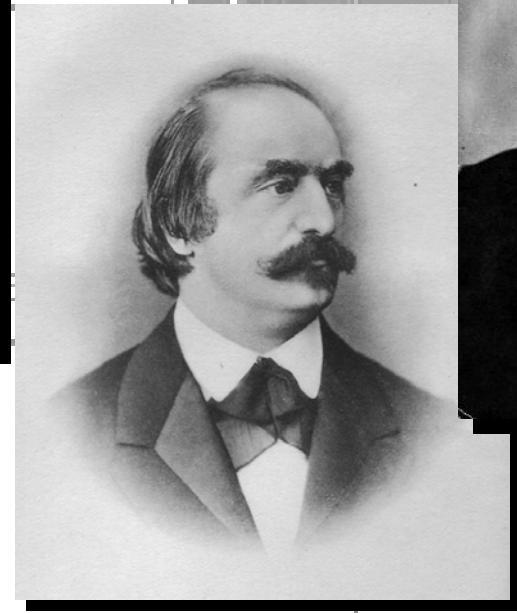
- Explore controversial issues from the point of view of specific musicians
  - Think critically about important issues
- Work in groups - learning individually and within the group



- The 'War of the Romantics'
- Records and live music
- Tonality and Renewal in Music
- Music and Nationalism



# the Romantics



Richard Wagner, Hector Berlioz, Hugo Wolf, and

Edouard Hanslick, Johannes Brahms and

# Group 2 Records and live music



**Theodore Adorno**  
**Walter Benjamin**  
**Glenn Gould**  
**Marshall McLuhan**  
**Artur Schnabel**  
**John Philip Sousa**

# Group 3 Tonality and renewal in music



**Milton Babbitt, Pierre  
Boulez, George Rochberg,  
Luigi Russolo, Igor  
Stravinsky, Jean Sibelius,  
Arnold Schoenberg, Edgar  
Varese**



# Group 4 Nationalism

## in music



**Bela Bartok,  
Johann  
Gottfried Herder  
Ernest Newman  
Vladimir Stasov  
Francis Toye,  
Virgil Thomson  
Ralph Vaughan**

## Three stages:

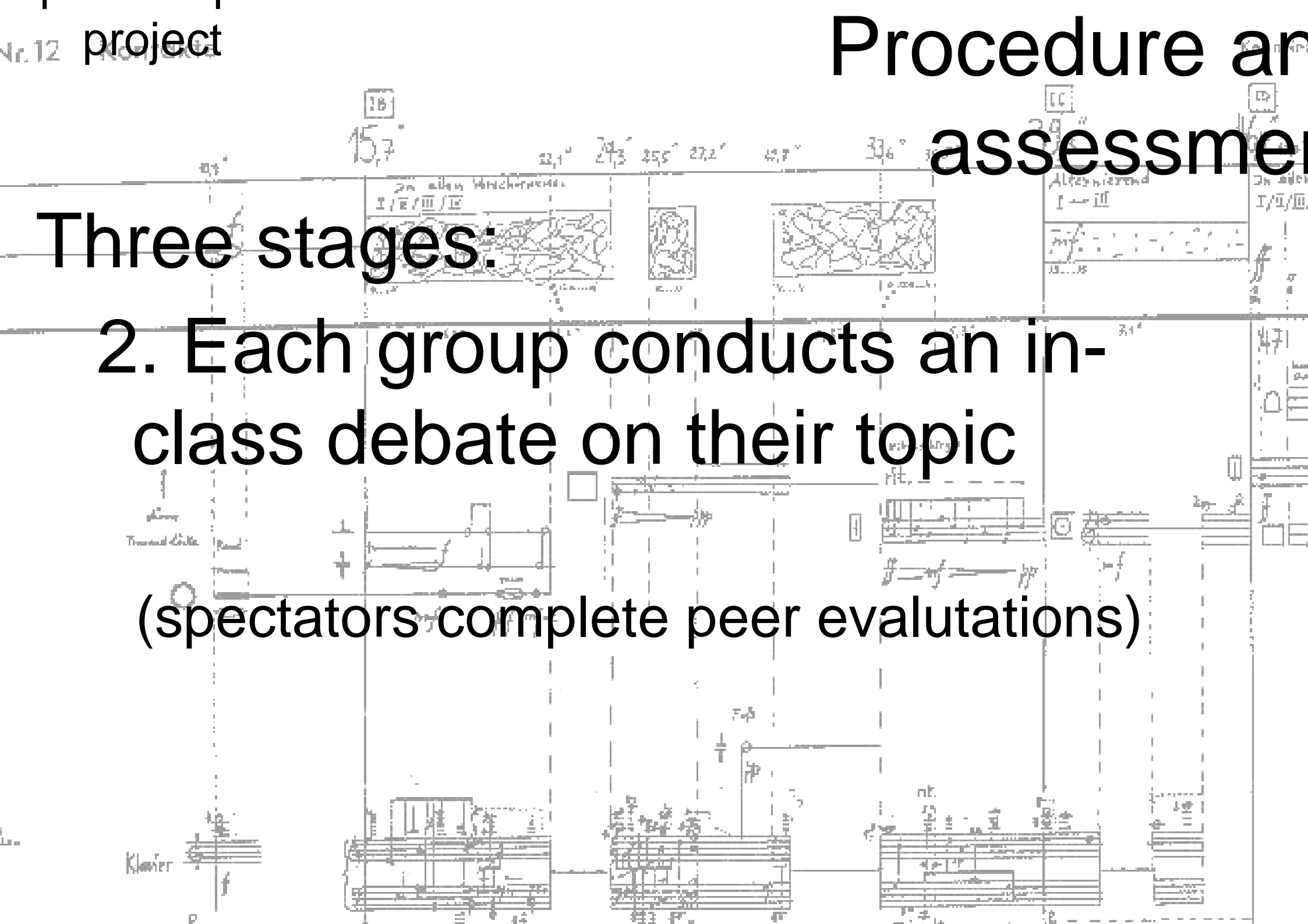
1. Individually, students research their characters and topic, and then engage in online discussion with other group members (via WebCT)

# Procedure and assessment

Three stages:

2. Each group conducts an in-class debate on their topic

(spectators complete peer evaluations)





three stages:

3. Each student submits a report

- introduction to the character and the character's views on the topic
- statement on what the student has learned from the project

Online discussion (30%) assessed on:

- Depth of the discussion
- Number of the contributions

The debate (40%) assessed on:

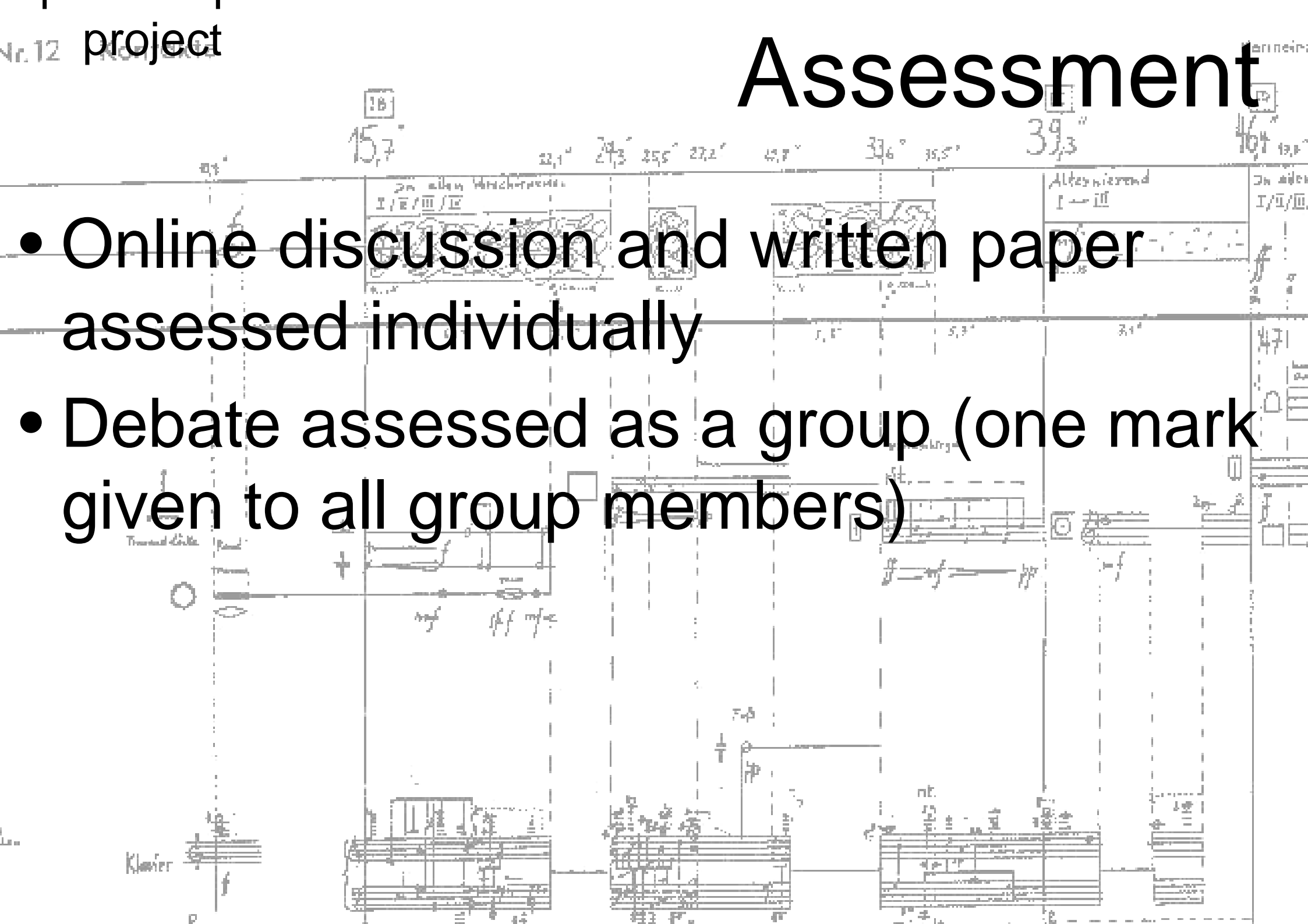
- Preparedness of the participants
- Depth and liveliness of discussion
- Ability of participants to stay in character
- Peer evaluations

Written paper (30%) assessed on:

- Clarity and completeness

# Assessment

- Online discussion and written paper assessed individually
- Debate assessed as a group (one mark given to all group members)



# Peer reviews

(scale of 1 to 5)

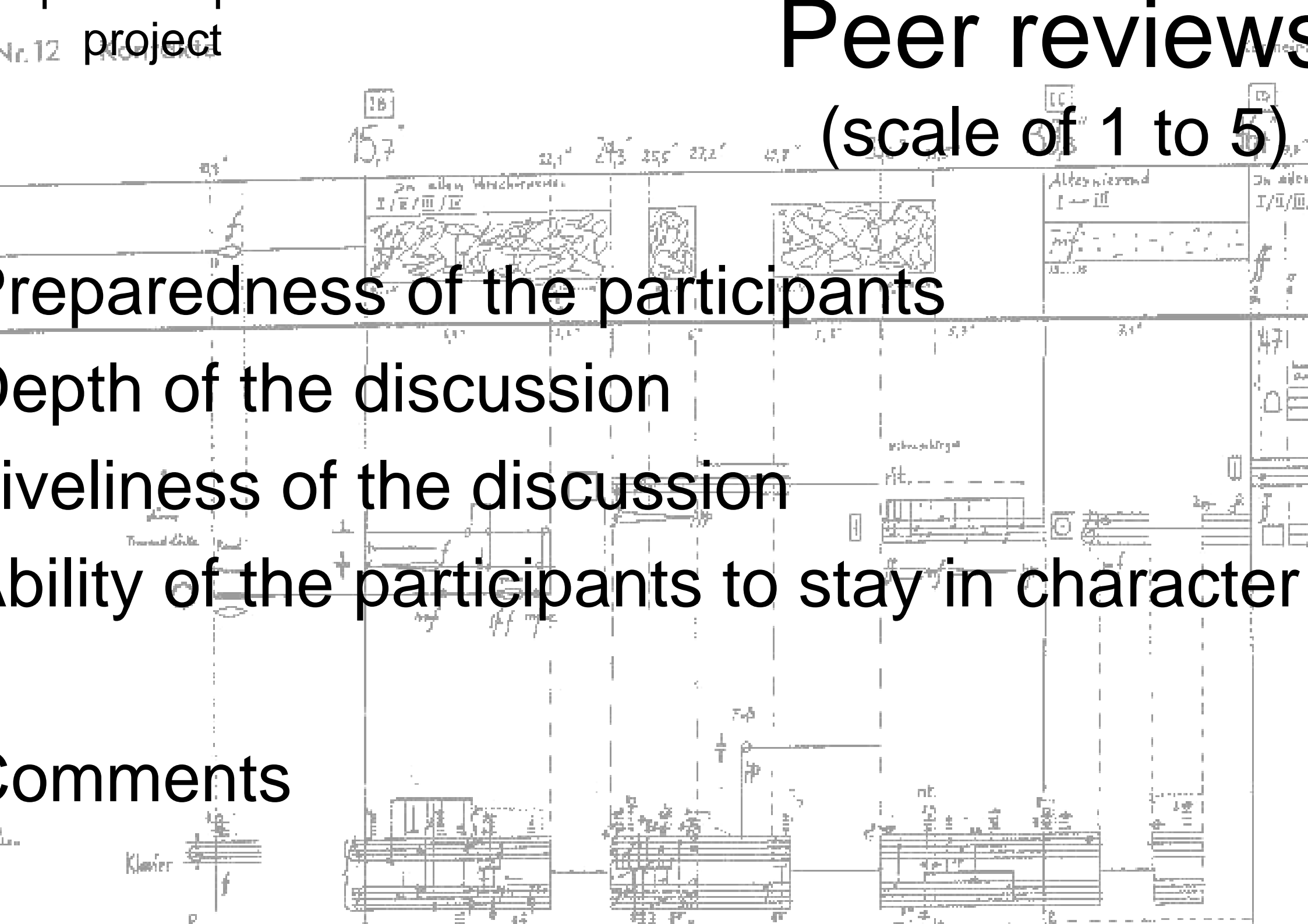
Preparedness of the participants

Depth of the discussion

Liveliness of the discussion

Ability of the participants to stay in character

Comments



# Online objectives

(what I hoped students would do...)

Begin discussing the content

Share views

Gradually assume their characters and begin debating

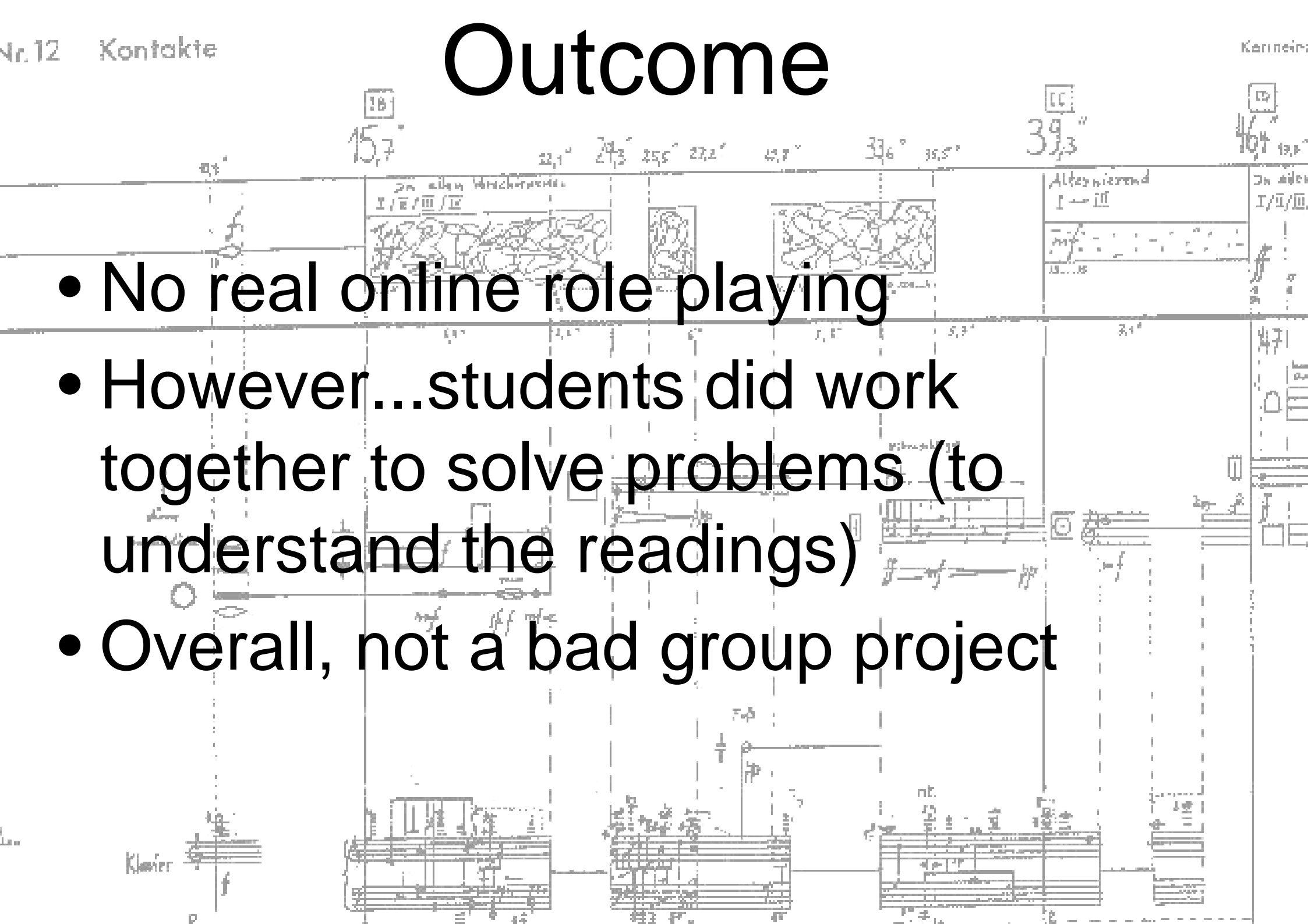
Gain a clear sense of their character's view of the topic - and be able to react from his point of view to other's opinions

# What really happened...

- Began discussing the content
- Shared views
- Never assumed their characters
- Discussed but never really began to debate
- Prepared for what turned out to be scripted debates

# Outcome

- No real online role playing
- However...students did work together to solve problems (to understand the readings)
- Overall, not a bad group project



Yes, but...

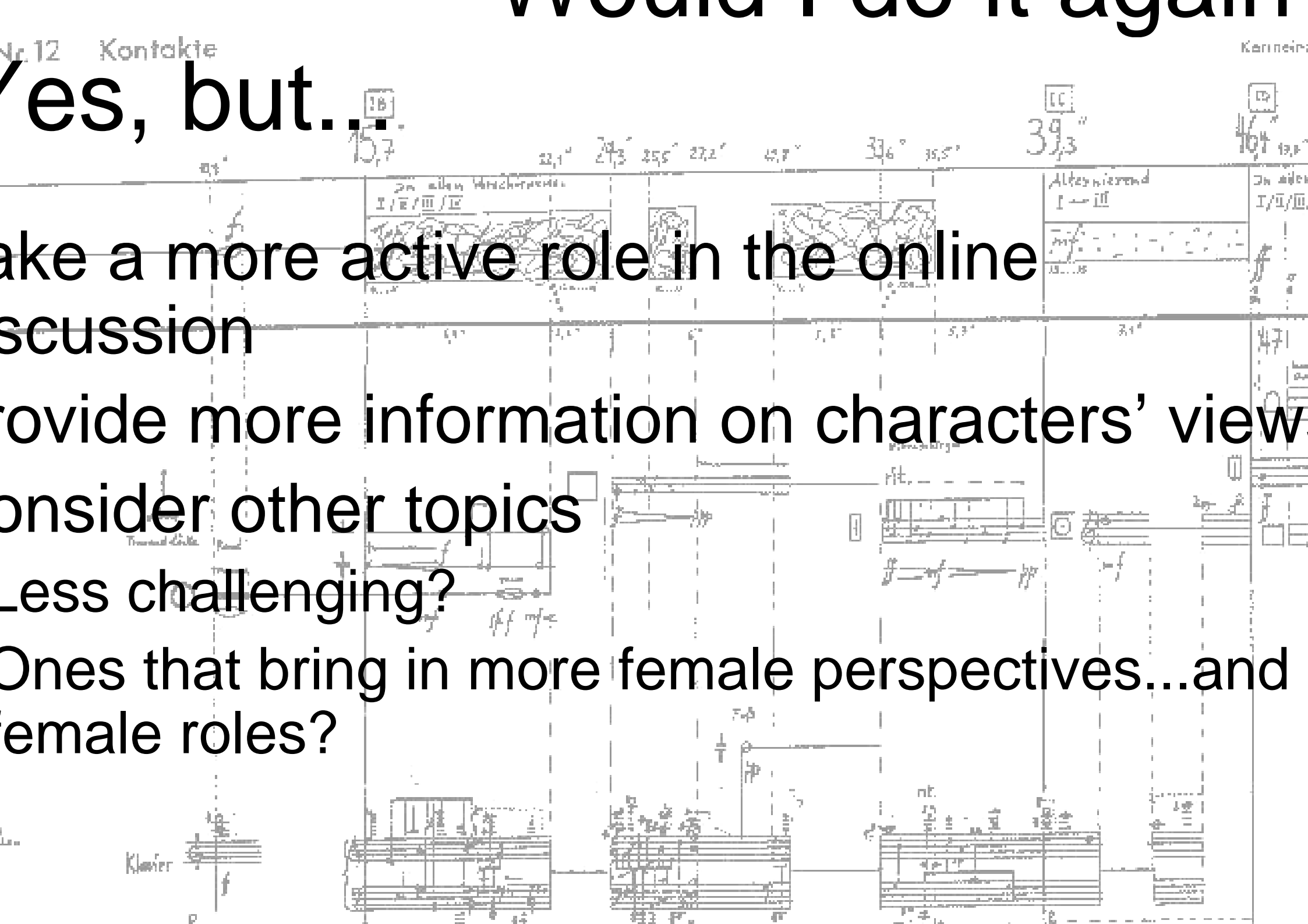
Take a more active role in the online discussion

Provide more information on characters' view

Consider other topics

Less challenging?

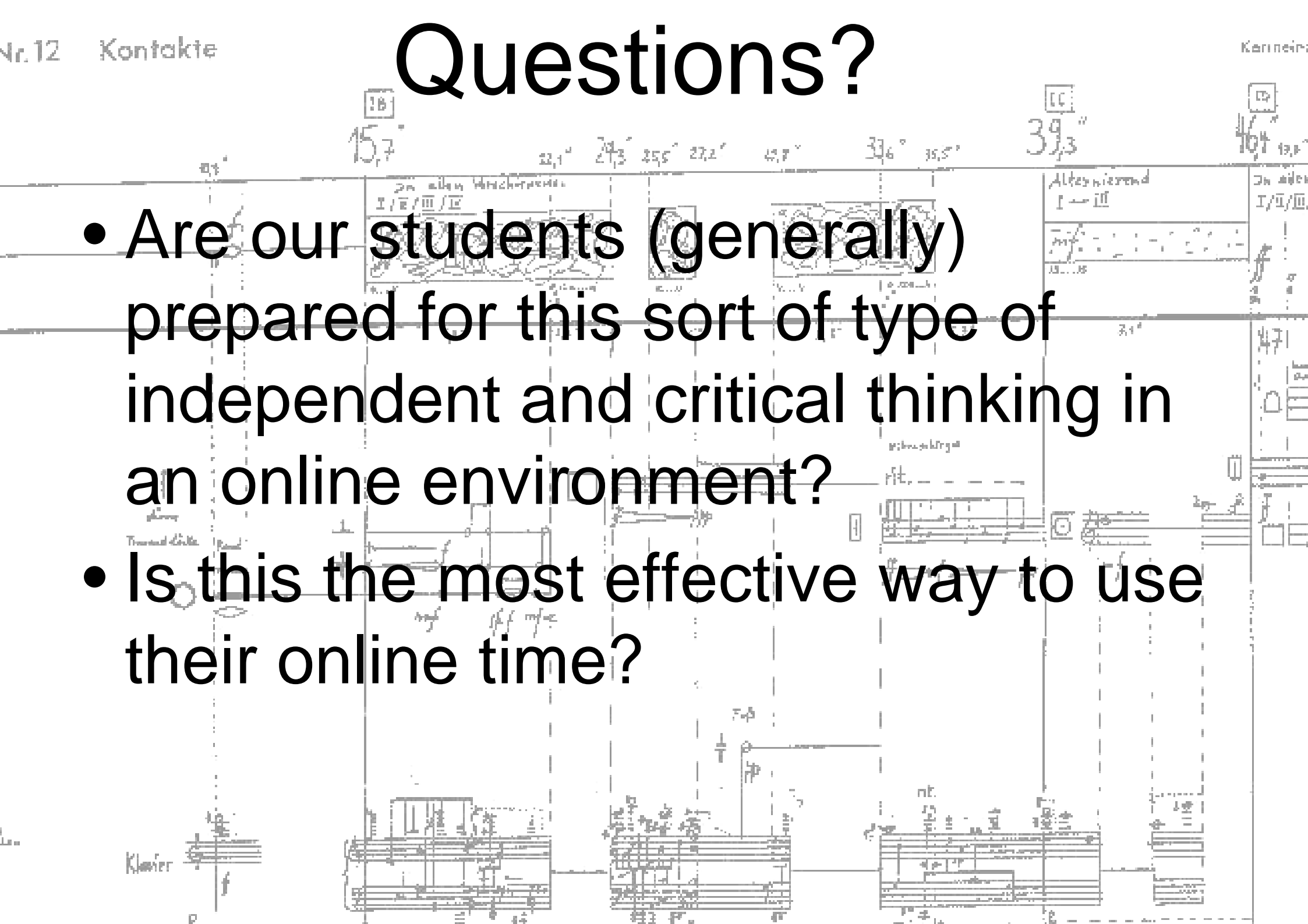
Ones that bring in more female perspectives...and female roles?





# Questions?

- Are our students (generally) prepared for this sort of type of independent and critical thinking in an online environment?
- Is this the most effective way to use their online time?





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