

White paper on the panel discussion 'Attitude and Pose'

5th Philosophical Talk of the Nikolaus Harnoncourt Zentrum
MDW Vienna, 14 February 2026, Joseph-Haydn-Saal

(The original German title, "Haltung und Pose", contains an untranslatable semantic ambiguity as the word "Haltung" means both mental attitude and bodily posture. This becomes important as it underlines the ambiguity as a crucial aspect of the entire discussion. In the following "Haltung" is thus translated "attitude/posture")

Background

The fifth Philosophical talk of the Nikolaus Harnoncourt Zentrum took place for the first time at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna (MDW). Rector Martin Rummel from the Bruckner University Linz opened the event and emphasised the importance of social discourse on education, art and the interplay between these areas.

The title 'Attitude/Posture and Pose' was inspired by Austrian photographer Elfi Semotan, who chose this title for her first major museum exhibition in 2021.

Panelists

Magdalena Hoffmann – Principal harpist of the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra (since 2018)

Prof. Dr. Lambert Wiesing – Professor of Philosophy at Friedrich Schiller University Jena, specialising in phenomenology

Florian Boesch, baritone, curator of the Denkwerkstatt (philosophical workshop)

Philosophical clarification of the terms

Lambert Wiesing noted that attitude/posture and pose are not classical philosophical terms and do not appear in standard encyclopaedias. The terms originate from art history and refer to visible phenomena, in particular the description of sculptures.

Attitude/posture

Attitude/posture is a phenomenon of expression in which inner feelings – opinions, convictions, views – are revealed to the outside world. Important characteristics:

- Attitude/posture must be visible – it is linked to physicality and corporeality
- It reveals the existence of an opinion or conviction

- Attitude/posture is long-term and static ('maintain your attitude/posture')
- It authentically connects outward appearance with inner feelings.

Pose

The pose is the emancipation of outward appearance from inner feelings. Characteristics:

- The pose shows that no opinion should be expressed
- It is a form of superficiality that has taken on a life of its own
- Poses are short-lived and changeable (from 'pause')
- It differs from acting: acting is about convincingly portraying inner feelings, whereas a pose shows that it is not about portrayal
- A pose can be playful and emancipatory

Key topics of discussion

1. Social media and Instagram

Magdalena Hoffmann reported on her experiences with Instagram as a musician. She described social media as an 'insanely dangerous drug' and emphasised the problems it poses:

- The platform requires constant self-promotion.
- It demands that artists consciously take on a role.
- The mystery and introspection that an artist needs for their art are undermined.
- Enormous energy is spent on maintaining appearances, which is then lacking for the art

Hoffmann advocated taking on a conscious role instead of pretending to be permanently authentic. The discussion ended with the hope that the system could abolish itself through its own intolerability.

2. Music and physical posture

Magdalena Hoffmann explained the importance of physical posture when playing the harp:

- Posture primarily serves the music – the sound and musical expression.
- Body movements help to make phrases visible and audible, especially on instruments without sustain.
- As soon as gestures become exaggerated or disconnected from their musical purpose, they degenerate into posing.

The boundary between musical posture and posing when conducting was also discussed, with credibility being identified as the decisive criterion.

3. *Sprezzatura* – the art of nonchalance

A central concept in the discussion was the Italian term *sprezzatura* from Baldassare Castiglione's "Il Libro del Cortegiano." It describes the art of presenting what one has studied with such nonchalance that it appears effortless. In music, this was taken up by Caccini and Monteverdi as freedom of voice above the *basso continuo*.

The discussion concluded that *sprezzatura* should not be described as a pose, but rather as a high art form that conceals effort and exertion in order to achieve greater artistic effect.

4. Authenticity and credibility

A recurring theme was the question of authenticity. Markus Gabriel's statement was quoted: 'Human beings are spiritual creatures who live their lives in the light of an idea they have of themselves.'

Problem: If the idea of oneself is not authentic, it becomes difficult to distinguish between attitude/posture and pose. The discussants emphasised that credibility – similar to spoken language – becomes a decisive category.

5. Photography, images and media

Lambert Wiesing argued that digital images in social media resemble painting rather than classical photography:

- Classical photography has a causal connection to the depicted object.
- Digital images are curated and constructed like paintings.
- They claim reality rather than documenting it.

AI exacerbates this problem, as images increasingly lose their evidential value. This leads back to the need for a culture of credibility, as already exists in language.

Examples from the discussion

Volodymyr Zelensky: His military uniform was discussed as an example of attitude/posture – he maintains this even in inappropriate contexts, which expresses his position and conviction.

Johnny Depp: Torn jeans worn by a wealthy individual as an example of posturing – the outward appearance has been emancipated from its original expression (poverty).

Daniel Barenboim: His statement 'You have to believe it' as the key to differentiation – if you believe something, it is attitude/posture; if not, it becomes a pose

Key findings

1. Attitude/Posture and pose are not opposites, but rather a spectrum with fluid transitions
2. Both are aesthetic, visible phenomena linked to physicality

3. Pose can be emancipatory and liberating, especially in art
4. Credibility is becoming a decisive factor in an increasingly digital world
5. For artists, the balance between pose and posture is a question of maturity
6. One cannot live without pose when living in society

Concluding remarks

The discussion ended with the realisation that the distinction between attitude/posture and pose is like that between black and white – the terms must be clear in order to describe the grey areas of reality. The ability to recognise the mix in a specific moment was identified as a question of personal maturity.

Lambert Wiesing emphasised that clear concepts are necessary in order to better describe the plurality of phenomena. Magdalena Hoffmann pointed out the particular challenge for artists to preserve their inner life in a digitalised world while at the same time having to maintain a public presence.

The event was streamed live and recorded.

It was open to the public with free admission.