



Curating Contemporary Music

Edited by

Lars Petter Hagen and Rob Young

Contributions by

Heloisa Amaral, Patrick Frank, Kenny Goldsmith,
Lars Petter Hagen, Katja Heldt, George Lewis,
Kamila Metwaly, Du Yun

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Introduction

Defragmentation – Curating Contemporary Music

Lars Petter Hagen

The art historian Aby Warburg (1866–1929) is said to have donated his significant family inheritance to his youngest brother on condition that he promised to buy all the books Aby wanted in perpetuity. He had built up an enormous book collection right from his twenties, but, inspired by studies in Renaissance painting in Florence and Strasbourg, wanted to have a library that went outside traditional disciplines and categories. He called the library his 'Denkraum' (thinking space) and considered it a 'problem library' rather than a collection of books, where the differences between a dedication to knowledge and aesthetic output are erased.

In Warburg's problem library, sense arises from compatibility. Throughout his life, Warburg kept his library alive by organising and constantly rearranging the collection on the principle of 'the good neighbours rule': the idea that books arranged by their titles – where every single work is complemented by its neighbours on the shelf – open pathways into the fundamental strengths in the mind and history of mankind.



Cabinets of curiosity: The Warburg Haus, Hamburg. Photo: Lars Petter Hagen.



Lars Petter Hagen

A piece of music, a concert, a concert-series or music-festival, all have similarities to a library. The work's own logic, or the relations between different works and different contexts, become a 'Denkraum'. Music can adapt to new and unexpected connections; move between the known and unknown; between past, present and future; and facilitate new thoughts, experiences and ideas.

What are the roles of the curator in the music field and how does the work materialize? What kind of practices are involved? *Defragmentation – Curating Contemporary Music* was a project that attempted to highlight some of the problems and urgent questions that we find in today's contemporary music scene. Within the frame of the topics *gender and diversity, decolonization and technology*, Defragmentation looked at – and tried to understand – structures in various institutions of contemporary music. Curatorial strategies and practices are obviously intimately linked to political questions. Which mechanisms are we subject to? And which conscious and unconscious (or subconscious) rules are we led by? Who gets to choose the music we hear? How are decisions made, and by whom?

The ambition was to investigate how the urgent sense of fragmentation and disconnection that exists in the public sphere at the moment is materialized in the musical field. The project took the form of an ongoing dialogue between performers, composers and curators, through public meetings and talks, a four-day convention during the Darmstadt Summer Course for New Music, publications and artistic projects.

The internet and post-truth era have brought about a radical development in the relationship between music institutions, performers, composers, theoreticians and the public. Traditional hierarchies are challenged through new and endless possibilities in distribution, documentation, creation and presentation; possibilities that blur the borders between artistic and curatorial practices, and that results in a renewed interest – among both composers and performers – in social, political and cultural connections to our surroundings, through music.

In the field of music, the notion of the 'curator' is still quite new; at least compared to the visual art world. But the function is not new: it has just had different names: artistic director, dramatist, festival programmer, etc. In recent decades, the borders between the roles of the artist and the roles of the curator in the very open-ended 'field of music', are also increasingly blurred. Many musicians include curatorial strategies in their work. Both curatorial, compositional and performative strategies include collaborative methods, interdisciplinarity, appropriation, staging archives, working with context as a compositional parameter, development of concert series and alternative institutions.

This issue of *OnCurating* is a collection of, and expansion on, some of the ideas and topics that were addressed in the Defragmentation project. It covers a wide range, including issues of ensuring inclusivity and diversity, dealing with traditions and archives as both a resource and an obstacle, and applying curatorial strategies within compositions of musical works. These are all questions whose answers will continue to enrich and inspire the next phases of contemporary music and sound art.

Lars Petter Hagen (NO) is a composer and curator. His practice is in symphonic and chamber music as well as electronic and interdisciplinary work. Hagen has been the artistic director of Ultima Oslo Contemporary Music Festival, The Nordic Music Days and Happy Days Sound Festival. From 2017 he took on the role of curating the centenary celebrations of Norway's leading orchestra, the Oslo Philharmonic.

UbuWeb: An Accidental Archive

Kenneth Goldsmith

Andy Warhol was a massive hoarder, a voracious collector, and a compulsive shopper. After his death, his six-story Upper East Side townhouse was crammed to the gills with unopened boxes of coats, watches, diamonds, rugs – you name it – piled up in rooms so stuffed you could barely enter them. Many of Warhol's purchases were still in boxes that he never opened. From the time he moved into the townhouse in 1974 until his death in 1987, he continued to accumulate until only the kitchen and one bedroom functioned as anything other than storerooms.

A year after he died, all of Warhol's possessions were laid out for all to see on huge tables at Sotheby's in New York: the whole thing – six thousand items, divided into 2500 lots, from cookie jars to precious gems – generated \$25 million, laying the foundation for The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. A Sotheby's Senior Vice President was charged with cataloguing and inventorying all the objects at Warhol's home. While the home's front rooms were neat and nattily decorated, the back rooms were stuffed. She recalled that "The picking up of the property was a tale all unto itself... There were drawings in one of the bureaus in one of Andy's bedrooms... I just opened the bureau drawer, and there were envelopes. There was a mailing envelope – a manila envelope – that had his address and Cy Twombly's return address. It had been opened, so I took it out. It was a Twombly drawing addressed to Andy, and it was around the time that he had been shot and was recovering... It was a beautiful, beautiful Twombly drawing..."¹ The cache included everything from thousands of pieces of Russel Wright pottery to valuable artworks by Man Ray, Duchamp, and Rauschenberg.²

As in life, so in art. Warhol's endless recycling of images were based upon things he clipped from newspapers and magazines that were collected, reprocessed, and archived by Warhol himself. These tendencies culminated in his *Time Capsules* (1974–87), where the distinctions between collecting, curating, archiving, and hoarding collapse into an artistic practice. The *Time Capsules* consisted of 610 cardboard boxes which Warhol filled with stuff, sealed, signed, numbered and sent off to a New Jersey storage facility.

Beginning in 1974, he kept an open box next to his desk at his 860 Broadway studio, into which he tossed whatever came his way, from envelopes containing tens of thousands of dollars in cash, to nude photos of Jacqueline Onassis, to a mummified human foot belonging to ancient Egyptian, to a 45 rpm test-pressing of a Ramones single signed by Joey Ramone, to a McDonalds Big Mac wrapper – and that's just a fraction of the trash and treasures contained within.

How exactly were they assembled? In his book, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)* (1985), he gives us a hint:

What you should do is get a box for a month, and drop everything in it and at the end of the month lock it up. Then date it and send it over to Jersey. You should try to keep track of it, but if you can't and you lose it, that's fine, because it's one less thing to think about, another load off your mind. Tennessee Williams saves everything up in a trunk and then sends it out to a storage place. I started off myself with trunks and the odd pieces of furniture, but then I went around shopping for something better and now I just drop everything into the same-size brown cardboard boxes that have a color patch on the side for the month of the year.³



Andy Warhol, *Time Capsule 262*. Courtesy The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh (warhol.org)



Opening and cataloguing Warhol's *Time Capsules*. Courtesy The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh (warhol.org)

Unpacking and indexing these boxes for the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, where they themselves are archived, was a tremendous amount of work that was usually performed by three persons: one to remove the objects from the box, another to painstakingly describe each object, and a third to enter all the archival information into a database. In the most Warholian manner, each and every item – be it diamonds or Kleenex – was catalogued with the identical care. Some boxes were stuffed with so many things that they took several months to catalogue.

Warhol's *Time Capsules* are a kind of folk archiving, one that takes no real expertise or training but grows organically through a mixture of process, accumulation,

and desire. As I have written previously, ‘The alt-librarian Rick Prelinger has proclaimed archiving as a new folk art, something that is widely practiced and has unconsciously become integrated into a great many people’s lives, potentially transforming a necessity into a work of art.’⁴ There’s something about the *Time Capsules* that resonates with the digital age, when many of us, like Warhol, have become accidental archivists by accruing artifacts in a voracious, yet almost unconscious way. Think of the way that vast amount of digital artifacts – voice memos, airline tickets, tax certificates, PDFs, paystubs, photos, and so forth – accumulate daily in our Downloads folder, similar to the way that flotsam and jetsam accrued in the *Time Capsules*. If we so desired, we could easily posit our Downloads folder as a work of archival art, as Warhol did his boxes. Similarly, we could envision our furious sharing of artifacts on social media as a type of public folk archiving, be it the amassing of photos on Instagram, the aggregation of LPs on MP3 blogs, or adding to the groaning archives of YouTube. To paraphrase Andy, in the future, everyone will be a world-famous archivist for 15 minutes.

This was exactly the way that UbuWeb grew. There was never any plan to build an archive, instead it was accidental, perhaps closer to a assembling a cabinet of curiosities or gathering a butterfly collection. When I first flung a few concrete poems onto a server in 1996 (not too different than the way Warhol flung objects into his boxes), I just wanted to see how they looked. It was shortly after the graphical web’s appearance, and the novelty of seeing images on the web was still fresh. I thought the poems looked great so I told a few friends to have a look and let me know what they thought. They liked them, so I scanned a few more.

I had a few paperbound books of concrete poetry anthologies, and grabbed the images from them. Before long, I had scanned and uploaded those books and found myself with a little digital archive of concrete poetry. In this way, UbuWeb began as a compilation of compilations, an anthology of anthologies. My shelves were groaning with books and records that anthologized the avant garde. I took those as a roadmap and folded them into the site. Like unbinding a book into a stack of pages or turning an LP into a series of singles, unboxing those artifacts set them free from their original contexts, making them available to other types of narratives. Sorted alphabetically in sections like Sound, Film & Video, Contemporary, or Historical, they were able to engage in a dialogue with their neighbors in ways that were nearly impossible when locked into their original formats. On UbuWeb, for instance, Weegee’s films are alphabetically snuggled up next Carrie Mae Weems’s; it feels natural – after all, both are renowned photographers – but rarely are those two names mentioned in the same breath.

It wasn’t long before I had a substantial archive of the avant-garde on my hands. But in the mid-90s, there was something still verboten about the term *avant garde*, reeking of patriarchy, hegemony, and militarization. Giving voice to these concerns, Dick Higgins wrote, ‘It is because of the assumption that this organization was somehow masculine that the question of sexism was raised in the form it was, asking if the very concept of an avant-garde, which relates to the military metaphor of advance troops coming before the main body, is masculine.’⁵ Kimberly Jannarone concurred: ‘The term “avant-garde” – coming to us from the military and first applied to the arts around World War I – is heavily weighted by historical and political critical baggage. [...] Indeed, the historical avant-garde often relied on sexist, racist, primitivist, and imperialist notions.’⁶ And it’s true even today: witness how Italy’s far right wing party Casa Pound named itself after Ezra Pound, even emblazing images of him across their posters. Or how Putin’s main ideologist, Vladislav Surkov, reputedly took techniques from his days as an avant garde theater producer and used them to sow confusion, discord, and chaos – exactly what the avant garde excelled at – into political situations.

While all of this is undeniably true, my innate sense of the avant garde was muddier and more complicated. I'm thinking of the many artists who dissembled received notions of 'avant garde' as part and parcel of their avant garde practices such as Cornelius Cardew, Amiri Baraka, Musica Elettronica Viva, or Henry Flynt. Others took the idea of avant garde in other directions previous excluded from the canon. My mid-century avant garde pantheon includes artists like Moondog, Marie Mencken, Harry Partch, Daphne Oram, Conlon Nancarrow, Alice B. Toklas, and Sun Ra. Driven by outsiders and visionaries, my avant garde reveled in eccentricity, impurity, and innovative formal experimentation. And at the same time, I loved the canon contained within those books I unbound, including James Joyce, William Carlos Williams, or Pablo Picasso. But most of all, I loved it when they all got jumbled together on UbuWeb. Sparks flew when Henry Miller collided with Ana Mendieta, Karlheinz Stockhausen with Hito Steyerl, Fatboy Slim with The Situationist International, or F.T. Marinetti with Trinh T. Minh-ha, each nudging, reflecting, and shading their neighbors in unpredictable and destabilizing ways.

Sometimes the dead patriarchs' works were the basis for new works by contemporary artists that self-reflexively deconstruct and critique older notions of the avant garde. I'm thinking of one artist, Takayuki Nakano who goes down into his Tokyo basement every Wednesday night and screams out *Finnegans Wake* at the top of his lungs, accompanying himself on drums. He's taped hundreds of hours of it. Or a poet who took it upon himself to read aloud and record all 900-plus pages of Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans*; he quickly became bored and started howling the book like an alley cat, page after page, until he completed his task. These gestures defuse some of the accusations hurled at the avant garde, making it playful and funny, fodder for deconstructing and remixing. And all of these things lived happily together on my book and record shelves. Why wouldn't they do so on UbuWeb? Our avant garde is vast and inclusive, moving as far as possible from the 'patriarchal, militaristic, racist, and imperialistic' model. I liked the idea of taking a discredited or orphaned term like 'avant garde' and using it against its bad history in order to reimagine it, similar to the way that AIDS activists in the 1980s *détourned* the Nazis' pink triangle into a symbol of liberation.

Each time the site expanded, I tried to keep pushing things in this direction. When we were approached by a bookseller who had digitized the full run of *Aspen* magazine, our site was flooded with dozens of artists spanning various genres, timeframes, and practices – the jazzmen Yank Lawson and Peanuts Hucko playing 'St. James Infirmary Blues' snuggled up against Richard Huelsenbeck intoning dada poems. When we partnered with *Bidoun*, a quarterly publication founded with the intention of filling the gaping hole of arts and culture coverage in the Middle East and its diaspora, we found ourselves awash in the electronic music of Turkish composer İlhan Mimaroglu, the performance films of Armenian artist Hamlet Hovsepian, the Radio Tehran Sessions of Forough Farrokhzad, and the animations of Iranian illustrator Ali Akbar Sadeghi. And when we built a section dedicated to Ethnopoetics, Chippewa Songs & Song Pictures, Shaker Visual Poetry, and Indonesian Ketjack seeped into the archive.

But while the archive expanded in many directions, there was some places where I refused to let it go. While we host John Lennon's radio plays, we'd never host an MP3 of the avant-tinged 'Blue Jay Way'. It's too pop, too available, and besides, we'd probably get sued out of our brains if we did. Instead, we host two remixed, warped, and looped versions of the song, one by The Big City Orchestra, who did a whole album of Beatles reworkings, and another by John Oswald, the founder of plunderphonics. I'm not certain of what the limits of the avant garde is, but it's that uncertainty that makes it work. UbuWeb lacks objectivity, expertise, theoretical justification, and historical

accuracy. I could be wrong, but something tells me that those certainties were what gave the avant garde a bad rap in the first place.

If there's any correlative as to how UbuWeb was curated, it would be the model of record collecting. The amateur record collector is driven by curiosity and whim, more than by any specific agenda. One band tends to lead to another, and while a few bands are collected in depth, most of the collecting is scattershot and wide – a record by this band, a record by that band. Sometimes one genre leads to another, pulling the collector into new directions (I remember how Led Zeppelin's 'Kashmir' opened my ears to Arabic music). While some collectors are sticklers for perfection, most are happy to live with a record marked by a few scratches or a dinged cover; and while there are serious audiophiles, most are content listening to a smartphone connected to a USB speaker. Record collectors tend to pick up their music in odd places, scouring flea markets, garage sales, attics, and thrift shops, as much as they shop in stores. The process of collecting adopts a rhizomatic rhythm; sometimes years will pass before picking up another record by a band that was heavily collected in the past. A record collection resembles a library in that LPs sit on shelves for years between plays, not unlike the way books languish for decades between check-outs. On occasion, the collection grows quickly and in unexpected directions, like when a friend gives you all their discs because they no longer have a player. All these attributes of record collecting translate equally well to downloading MP3s on the web.

This is exactly the way that UbuWeb grew – by curiosity, intuition, and sensibility, rather than by rules, rigor, and dogma. One thing led to another and we simply followed those leads. We never cared much for quality either. A lot of our films are digital ghosts of umpteenth generation VHS rips that someone shot with a camcorder off a TV late one night decades ago. Ubu's artifacts are flawed, filled with stops, stutters, and glitches.

Sometimes, a film will only contain a portion of its whole; other times, a film that is supposed to have sound doesn't have any at all – or else it's accompanied by the wrong soundtrack entirely. I don't want to fetishize bad media – should a better copy come our way, we'll upgrade it. But sadly, because the materials we deal with are so obscure, what we host is often the only copy that exists. Our materials seem to flow to us from everywhere – off our shelves, from record stores, file-sharing sites, and blogs. Sometimes people gave us enormous collections, like the time we absorbed a two-terabyte collection of hundreds of bootlegged artists' videos that a collector donated to us, expanding the archive in unpredictable ways.

Like any record collection, there are huge gaps in UbuWeb. Artists that should be here are missing; and even the artists' whose works we have a lot of are far from complete, consisting of several random videos or albums, simply because that's what floated up on file-sharing. If an artist gives us some videos, they never give us all their videos – we just get a few. We don't ask why they decided to share those, instead we gratefully absorb them into the collection. File-sharing is tidal; some days the flow brings in massive hauls, and other times, only a stray artifact or two washes ashore. Like the scavengers we are, we pick them up, shake off the dust, and post them. Although she's describing Warhol's way of assembling, the legal scholar Amy Adler gets at the heart of what I'm trying to do with UbuWeb when she writes:

We used to think of an artist as someone who sat in nature or in his garret, working alone to create something new from the whole cloth. But now that we are bombarded by images, the most important artist may be the one who can sit through other people's art (or trash), the one who functions like a curator, and editor, or even a thief. In a world with a surfeit of images, perhaps the greatest artist is not the one who makes an image but the one who knows which image to take: to sort through the sea of images in which we are now drowning and choose

the one that will float. Warhol as usual was among those who saw this first; as a critic explained, Warhol realized that the most critical piece of making art had become ‘choosing the right source image.’⁷

I prefer Adler’s word ‘choosing’ to the overused word ‘curating’. Curating gets us back into the realm of certainty, expertise, exclusivity, and assuredness – the exact things I wished to destabilize with UbuWeb. Same with big words like ‘Library’, or ‘Archive’, Maybe we can swap these out for smaller ones: ‘wunderkammer’, ‘collection’, or ‘assembling’. Or, if we have to use those words, maybe we can add rejoinders: An unstable library. A conflicted curation. An accidental archive. UbuWeb was assembled by embracing the fragmented, the biased, the subjective, and the incomplete. This is *not* like that. An algorithm isn’t capable of sensibility; it can’t replicate the capriciousness of human taste. When accretion isn’t mandated to proceed by logical order, other narratives become possible. Alternative or folk models of gathering – jumble sales, boot sales, garage sales, flea markets, time capsules – represent a new type of archive for the precise reason that machines still are not capable of gathering artifacts in perversely illogical and intuitive ways.

In the end, we do this to preserve that which we love; in doing so, we write our own histories because nobody is writing them for us. As the assembler and poet Charles Bernstein says, ‘I don’t have faith that mainstream interests will preserve protect and defend any of this work. For me, the activity of archiving allows it to exist. If we didn’t do this, it would be entirely lost. What would be preserved would be mainstream work, official verse culture. That is my work. You can’t separate out my essays from my poetry, editing, and organizing alternative forms of exchange. Can you create spaces for cultural exchange outside of the dominant killing forces?’⁸

Notes

- 1 <http://www.sothebys.com/en/news-video/blogs/all-blogs/21-days-of-andy-warhol/2013/11/andy-warhol-estate-sale.html>, November 14, 2018
- 2 http://articles.latimes.com/1988-02-21/entertainment/ca-44010_1_andy-warhol-estate, November 14, 2018
- 3 Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: From A to and Back Again* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975).
- 4 Goldsmith, Kenneth. *Wasting Time on the Internet* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016), p. 96.
- 5 Dick Higgins: *Modernism Since Postmodernism: Essays on Intermedia* (San Diego: San Diego State UP, 1997), p. 30.
- 6 Kimberly Jannarone: “The Political Fallacy of Vanguard Performance,” *Vanguard Performance Beyond Left and Right* (U Michigan, 2015), p. 6
- 7 Adler, Amy. “Fair Use and the Future of Art.” *New York University Law Review*, Vol. 91, June 2016, p. 572.
- 8 Charles Bernstein in conversation with the author, September 24, 2017.

Kenneth Goldsmith (USA) is the founder of the online resource of avant garde art and sound, UbuWeb.com. He is the author and editor of over twenty books and teaches writing at the University of Pennsylvania. In May 2011, he was invited to read at President Obama’s ‘Celebration of American Poetry’ at the White House, where he also held a poetry workshop with First Lady Michelle Obama. In 2013, he was named as the inaugural Poet Laureate of The Museum of Modern Art in New York. His most recent book is *Wasting Time on the Internet*, a meditation on digital culture.

A Small Act of Curation

George E. Lewis

During 2017 and 2018, I was part of Defragmentation, a project on ‘Curating Contemporary Music’. The initiative was supported by the Kulturstiftung des Bundes (German Federal Cultural Foundation), and involved four European contemporary music festivals – the Ultima Festival (Oslo), and the Germany-based International Music Institute Darmstadt (including the Darmstadt Ferienkurse), the Donaueschinger Musiktage, and the MaerzMusik Festival for Time Issues.¹

The Defragmentation project featured four areas of emphasis: Decolonization, Technology, Curation, and Gender/Diversity, the area with which I was the most directly involved as an adviser, along with Georgina Born and Thomas Schäfer, who brought me into the project.² The online narrative from Darmstadt portrayed Defragmentation as

a research project aimed at enduringly establishing the debates currently ongoing in many disciplines on gender and diversity, decolonization and technological change in institutions of New Music, as well as discussing curatorial practices in this field... A key goal is to accelerate structural and habitual change with respect to these interlinked thematic areas and develop better practices.³

In 2018, I took part in two public Defragmentation events. First, Maerzmusik 2018 saw the rollout of the project in a public meeting and discussion at the Berliner Festspiele.⁴ Second, the Darmstadt Ferienkurse 2018 produced the centerpiece of the Defragmentation events, a four-day conference on the topic that included lectures, panels, workshops, and listening spaces and sessions.⁵ The conference reflected the understanding that the practices and discourses around contemporary music events differed markedly from curatorial practices in other fields – particularly the visual arts, a field that, in distinction to music curation, features a robust ongoing discussion of curatorial issues in academic and lay media and conferences.

A focused understanding of the need for change in the art world of contemporary music permeated both the planning process of Defragmentation and the public discussions in Darmstadt. Over the four days of the conference, topics introduced in lectures by curators and scholars working in visual arts included ‘Critical Practices of Curatorship’ (Dorothee Richter), ‘Curating Performance in the Agonistic Field’ (Florian Malzacher), ‘Forms of Display’ (Jérôme Glicenstein), and ‘Decolonization As Method’ (Bonaventure Ndikung and Berno Odo Polzer). Music-centered practices of curation were explored and critiqued by Martin Tröndle (‘The Classical Concert, Situation and Institution’) and Anke Charton (‘Thoughts on Intersectionality and New Music’), while Rolando Vázquez and Polzer presented a session on ‘decolonial listening’. Music-centered ‘conversations’ (panel discussions) included ‘Methodologies of Diversity’ (Bill Dietz, Hannah Kendall and Stellan Veloce), ‘Sound Acts’ (Veloce and Terre Thaemlitz), ‘Multi-Diasporic Sound Art’ (Raven Chacon and Miya Masaoka); ‘Gender, Audience & Affect’ (Amy Cimini, Bill Dietz and Christabel Stirling); and ‘Architectures of Sound’ (Stirling, Masaoka, and Marina Rosenfeld). A 2019 special edition of the *Darmstädter Beiträge zur Neuen Musik* presented published versions of some of the talks.⁶



George E. Lewis. Photo: Emily Peragine.

Also presented was a session led by the Gender Relations In New Music group (GRiNM).⁷ This was an outgrowth of the 2016 Darmstadt Ferienkurse's project on Gender Relations in Darmstadt, led by Born and composer Ashley Fure.⁸ Exploring the Darmstadt Ferienkurse archive, Fure and Born compiled a remarkable set of statistics that shed light on the ongoing paucity of women composers in terms of commissions, performances, and prizes at the Ferienkurse. For example, according to Fure and Born, of 4750 pieces programmed at Darmstadt between 1946 and 2014, 334, or seven per cent, were composed by women.⁹

It was not hard to conceptually migrate from the 'lens of gender' Fure and Born used to one of race and ethnicity, which for Defragmentation was seen as implicitly coming under the rubric of 'diversity'. Over the decades, however, I had already experienced considerable skepticism around that term.¹⁰ In her 2012 book, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*, Sara Ahmed noted that 'Strong critiques have been made of the uses of diversity by institutions,'¹¹ and one ongoing concern of mine was voiced by her understanding that well-meaning people hoped to 'embed diversity such that it becomes an institutional given,'¹² while avoiding issues of race.¹³

Accordingly, Ahmed's book reflects on the relationship between diversity and institutional whiteness, going on to personalize the situation in a way that I certainly recognized: 'There are problems and pitfalls in becoming a diversity person as a person of color. There is a script that stops anyone reading the situation as a becoming. You already embody diversity by providing an institution of whiteness with color.'¹⁴ This is similar to my own understanding that in institutionally and historically white spaces, people of color are often perceived as 'bringing race to the table' – simply by being there, whether or not they explicitly broach the topic. Thus, for Ahmed, 'diversity pride becomes a technology for reproducing whiteness: adding color to the white face of the organization *confirms the whiteness of that face*.'¹⁵ – what Ahmed calls 'an institutional speech act'.¹⁶

A GRID document from October 2016 referred to ‘gender, sexuality, race, class, disability and so on’ as ‘vectors of disadvantage’,¹⁷ a framing that stands at variance with GRID’s own research, in which gender appears as a category of advantage in terms of commissions and performances – that is, if the composer is male. Even though the authors of this ‘post-GRID’ document cautioned that ‘it’s undesirable and difficult to pull out any one vector’ – despite having done exactly that in their research – I took GRID’s work as an example for my own informal Google-based inquiry into the history and presence of Afrodiasporic composers, i.e., composers of African descent, at Darmstadt.

Exploring this sub-vector of diversity revealed whiteness as a second category of advantage. The white South African composer Kevin Volans forged extensive connections at Darmstadt during the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁸ As for composers of African descent who were not white, an eight-minute work for flute, piano, and cello by Zulu composer Andile Khumalo was performed at Ferienkurse 2008.¹⁹ I located a work by New York-born Alvin Singleton, who studied with Goffredo Petrassi at the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome and lived and worked in Europe for fourteen years. The work won the Kranichsteiner Prize for the best work performed at Darmstadt in 1974, but his music never again appeared at Darmstadt.²⁰

What this means is that of those same 4750 compositions, just two works by a non-white Afrodiasporic composer were performed at Darmstadt. In percentage terms, this works out to 0.04 percent of the total.²¹ This would still be a larger percentage than Donaueschingen, which never managed to program a work by an Afrodiasporic composer (except for its yearly concert devoted to jazz) between the inception of the festival in 1921 and its 1995 edition.²²

What accounts for these radical lacunae? Arguably, the Donaueschingen Festival is focused on composers with strong ties to or provenance from Europe; the Ferienkurse less so. Still, we can compare contemporary music and contemporary art in terms of outcomes since 1996, a watershed year in curation in the visual arts with the advent of Documenta11, in which Nigerian Okwui Enwezor became the first nonwhite curator of the festival. As Anthony Gardner and Charles Green saw it, ‘Documenta11 painted a picture of contemporary art as a network in which New York, Lagos, London, Cape Town, and Basel were more or less equally important to a contemporary canon and similarly crucial in understanding contemporaneity, as opposed to some centers being exotic margins and others more genuinely cosmopolitan and contemporary.’²³

In this light, my focus on the Afrodiasporic lacuna in contemporary music seems comparable to an interview on US television in 1983 in which David Bowie matter-of-factly asked an interviewer, ‘Having watched MTV over the past few months, it’s a solid enterprise with a lot going for it... I’m just floored by the fact that there’s so few black artists featured on it. Why is that?’ The circularity of the interviewer’s response reflects the racializing aspect of the border-policing and gatekeeping functions of genre with which artists of color are all too familiar, functions that it would be overly flattering to cast as ‘epistemological’: ‘We want to play artists that seem to be doing music that fits into what we want to play on MTV.’²⁴

I’d like to leaven this turn in the discussion with a reminiscence of a conversation with an old friend who directs a public cultural institution in Germany. His institution was collaborating with an academic institution in the US to present a multi-day presentation of African American music in Germany. However, the project proved difficult to put together due to resistance from various stakeholders to the strong desire on the part of

the US institution to present an evening devoted entirely to African American 'contemporary classical' music.

I wondered what the difficulty was there, since at least in the US, there was and continues to be a longstanding African American contemporary classical music scene with composers and performers of considerable prominence. My friend shared that the resistance had something to do with concerns about 'quality'. I pointed out that since the music was fully notated, experts could assess the quality via scores if they liked, just as they do for competitions, curatorial initiatives, fellowships and prizes. Of course, everyone knew that this was possible, so a lack of 'quality' could not serve as justification for the resistance. Rather, what was really being expressed was a 'coals to Newcastle' moment – what could these composers have possibly done that we have not already done?

The question here, of course, is: Who is 'we'?

In 1984, Fredric Jameson ventured to 'periodize the 60s'. His staging ground for the period begins 'in the third world with the great movement of decolonization in British and French Africa... these "natives" became human beings, and this internally as well as externally: those inner colonized of the first world – "minorities," marginals, and women – fully as much as its external subjects and official "natives".'²⁵ Jameson is speaking here of identity and subjectivation, and when we discuss curation in the 21st century, identity – or for some, identity politics – always comes to the fore. In the above case, a defense of the identity of classical music was at stake, where that identity would be maintained as essentially 'white'.

To pursue this path as a curator requires adherence to a cultural and institutional logic that appears as a form of prestidigitation, in which the presence and contributions of Afrodiasporic musicians in Europe is made to simply disappear. This is despite a presence that goes back to the early modern era, well before that day in 1803 when Ludwig van Beethoven, in a fit of pique, removed the name of the Afro-European violinist and composer George Bridgetower from the dedication to the new sonata that they had already premiered, and substituted the name of Rodolphe Kreutzer,²⁶ who, as Hector Berlioz reported, disliked Beethoven's music and 'could never bring himself to play this outrageously unintelligible composition.'²⁷ The original dedication was 'Sonata mulattica composta per il mulatto Brischdauer, gran pazzo e compositore mulattico.'²⁸ Beethoven's joking reference notwithstanding, Bridgetower's racial provenance seemed otherwise unremarkable, certainly posing no barrier to the understanding of his performances and composing as squarely within the European tradition.

As Sara Ahmed writes, 'An institutional logic can be understood as kinship logic: a way of "being related" and "staying related," a way of keeping certain bodies in place. Institutional whiteness is about the reproduction of likeness... Institutions are kinship technologies: a way of "being related" is a way of reproducing social relations.'²⁹ In her 2006 article, 'World Systems and the Creole', Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak proposes 'creolity' as a way of thinking that can more robustly supplant this kind of traditional kinship discourse,³⁰ and I have written elsewhere that twenty-first century new music itself is becoming marked by a condition of *créolité*.³¹ *Éloge De La Créolité*, an influential 1989 manifesto crafted by Caribbean writers Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphael Confiant begins with this ringing declaration:

Neither Europeans, nor Africans, nor Asians, we proclaim ourselves Creoles. This will be for us an interior attitude – better, a vigilance, or even better, a sort of mental envelope in the middle of which our world will be built in full consciousness of the outer world... The son or daughter of a German and a Haitian, born and living in Peking, will be torn between several languages, several histories, caught in the torrential ambiguity of a mosaic identity. To present creative depth, one must perceive that identity in all its complexity. *He or she will be in the situation of a Creole.*³²

At least in music, kinship is often represented as genre. Its root, gen- (genetic, genotype, and even gender) is often found as representing not only family, but fixity. While genre markers – improvised music, classical, contemporary, jazz, zeitgenössisch, Neue Musik – are often framed by scholars as ontologically salient, promoting both community and intelligibility, one might ask a race-aware curation to address more pointed discussions of the gatekeeping, border-policing, and kinship-enforcing functions of genre; or, perhaps, the less salutary aspects of how genre assignments can devolve into rigid binaries between insider and outsider, margin and center, overgeneralized moral imperatives, restrictions on mobility of practice, and questionable divisions between good and bad music – often enough based not so much on the content of the music as on its assumed provenance in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, or national origin. Here, assumed genre actually affects what we are able to hear.

In 1918, American literary critic Van Wyck Brooks, like many, viewed the search for American cultural identity in racial terms: ‘The European writer, whatever his personal education may be, has his racial past, in the first place, and then he has his racial past made available for him. The American writer, on the other hand, not only has the most meager of birthrights but is cheated out of that.’³³ This was Brooks’s novel solution: ‘If we need another past so badly, is it inconceivable that we might discover one, that we might even invent one? Discover, invent a usable past we certainly can, and that is what a vital criticism always does.’³⁴ This understanding of the usable past is compatible with a 1930 article in which Henry Cowell portrayed Charles Ives as the epitome of a new wave of ‘composers of Anglo-Saxon American blood who write music of significance, music with something to say, music which contains undefinable American feeling, music in which the distinction from European style is clear, music which necessitates the development of new materials and modes of expression.’³⁵

Despite the current fashion for deriding identity politics, this example shows us how far back we can locate that discussion, as well as the diversity of subject positions involved. Indeed, philosopher Monique Roelofs maintains that identity politics has been centrally associated, not just with women and persons of color, but also with ‘certain kinds of white, masculinist, middle-class, European, heterosexual, and colonial perspectives.’³⁶ Thus, as historian George Lipsitz has put it, ‘Once we remember that whiteness is also an identity, one with a long political history, contemporary attacks on “identity” politics come into clear relief as a defense of the traditional privileges and priorities of whiteness in the face of critical and political projects that successfully disclose who actually holds power in this society and what they have done with it.’³⁷

As a historicized element of identity, the usable past not only grounds our present, but provokes our future, and the circulation of usable pasts amounts to a kind of identity-based infrastructure. So I did not feel any particular compunction about identifying non-whiteness as a category of potential infrastructural disadvantage in contemporary music. Despite the enormous influence of Afrodiasporic music-makers around the

world, we continue to experience gaps in the historical narrative and sonic presence of certain kinds of black music; perhaps none of these erasures are more glaring than that of the Afrodiasporic classical composer. I draw here upon composer, improviser, and musicologist Dana Reason's powerful notion of the 'myth of absence', which she uses in her 2002 study of the art world of experimental improvised music to summarize her finding that lack of press coverage and festival programming of the works of women leads to the automatic assumption that women are not present in the field in sufficient numbers to matter.³⁸

Thus, at the Defragmentation conference at Darmstadt I moved to drive a large sound truck right over the myth of absence and right through this glaring hole in the historiography of contemporary music, by creating a listening/viewing space in which a large-screen video monitor, two-channel sound system, and comfortable seating and lighting invited visitors to experience a four-hour sound and video loop consisting entirely of the work of Afrodiasporic composers active since 1950. By doing so, I sought to provide a small example of how black liveness matters, and how music curators might actually do diversity by highlighting black creativity in contemporary music as an international, multi-generational practice with important work coming out of North America, South America, Europe, the UK, Scandinavia, and Africa. Moreover, the focus on the work of living composers and postwar music allowed not only a richer sense of the multiplicity of experiences, aesthetics, and practices that characterizes contemporary Afrodiasporic music, but also a far more diverse and contemporary portrayal of the impact and potential for change that contemporary music presents in the twenty-first century.³⁹ Of course, there were many more Afrodiasporic composers working in this time period than I could present, but one criterion for inclusion was my judgment as to whether the aesthetic stances expressed in the music I presented would have been compatible with the sonic goals of Darmstadt and Donaueschingen at the time in which the music was written.

This paper supports the call of the 2016 'post-GRID' document to develop metrics on race and ethnicity as well as gender in multiple sectors of contemporary music.⁴⁰ There is indeed a lot of work to be done, particularly in an intersectional mode. However, regular encounters in the USA and Europe with major festivals and educational programs devoted to contemporary music show that the paucity of nonwhite ethnicities, particularly the Afrodiasporic, is so obviously extreme as to oblige direct action now, without waiting for studies. Here, it is important to note that Defragmentation's diversity initiative, while bearing obvious implications for contemporary music curation globally, was in primary dialogue with the Western European legal, political, and cultural condition.

Policymakers in both the USA and Europe have noted the need for reliable demographic data to assess effectiveness in achieving diversity, and to that end, the Defragmentation team was provided with the World Economic Forum's "Global Gender Gap Report" from 2016.⁴¹ However, it may well be that in Western Europe at least, gender statistics were more readily available than other demographic vectors. As social scientist Patrick Simon has noted,

The refusal to include ethnic categories in official statistics characterizes nearly all the countries of Western Europe. According to a recent inventory, the reasons that these countries refuse to include questions regarding ethnic groups are mainly political, constitutional and legal: this is the case notably of France, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Denmark and Italy... where the absence of 'multicul-

tural' traditions and the recent emergence of debates around ethnic and racial discriminations explain the absence of data on ethnic and racial categories.⁴²

One claim made by European policymakers is that 'ethnic categories are rejected in order to promote national unity'⁴³ and avoid identity politics. However, as Simon writes, "ethnic and racial" statistics have the power of revealing historically crystallized relationships of power.⁴⁴ Thus, 'One may well wonder whether the negation of minority identities that prevails in France in the name of universalism is not often simply a tactic for consolidating the position of dominant groups.'⁴⁵ Or, as Georgina Born and Kyle Devine wrote in a 2015 article, 'a cultural-educational domain that is generally understood as ethnically unmarked or "non-raced" – as representing the musical-universal, the "commonality of humanity" in music – is actually experienced as ethnically white and is linked to an invisible politics of whiteness.'⁴⁶ At the very least, the title of one of Simon's articles on the French government's refusal to collect race and ethnicity (but not gender) statistics seems apt: 'The Choice of Ignorance'.

Oddly, the 2016 post-GRID proposals appear to explicitly endorse a standard criticism of 'identity politics': 'How, in the new music and artistic fields, do we balance a desire for diversity with our other musical, aesthetic, and political agendas? How do we take progressive steps to equalize gender, race, and class representation while retaining commitments to high musical and artistic ambition?'⁴⁷ The language expressing this ostensible conundrum inadvertently adopts the spurious 'identity or excellence' binary, whose aim it has always been to preemptively shut down attempts by non-majoritarians to win space, portraying women and people of color as the only identity politicians around.

The prominent German critic and journalist Hanno Rauterberg has been critical of 'identity politics' in contemporary art. In a 2017 article titled 'Tanz der Tugendwächter' (Dance of the Virtue Police), Rauterberg tells us that 'politically correct art has conquered the museums, from Kassel to New York.' The author starts with a familiar portrayal of an Eden in which 'art was free from everything. Free from shame and shyness, free from internal constraints and from the outside mostly. And society? Proud to see itself reflected in the freedom of art.' Then came the Fall: 'The old struggle over form, composition or originality seems to have ended. It is about questions of identity, origin, gender, skin color.'⁴⁸

The fear expressed here is palpable. If you are a scholar, critic, curator, teacher, or artist who grew up with the notion of autonomous art, you might need to retool for a new profession—not so easy. In 1969, the philosopher Stanley Cavell used the late music of Beethoven to make a related point about the situation in which Rauterberg and others find themselves: 'Convention as a whole is now looked upon not as a firm inheritance from the past, but as a continuing improvisation in the face of problems we no longer understand.'⁴⁹ When those previously designated as permanent subalterns finally begin to speak, you might have to listen – to new ideas and perspectives. Acts of listening and responding inevitably place us in a position of momentary subalterity, whatever our designated social, racial, gender, or class position; suddenly, you are experiencing the condition that so many women and artists of color have experienced, where (to extend Stuart Hall) gender and race become two of the prime modalities through which curation is lived.

Monique Roelofs recognizes that both identity and the aesthetic can be double-edged swords. On the one hand, she notes that 'constructions of identity in the arts pose the

risk of aesthetic deficiency or tedium.' On the other, she maintains that 'artistic inquiries into identity and difference... can push the boundaries of experience, engender new formal vocabularies, and alter the forums that support public life.'⁵⁰ Her conclusion is that 'the question of identity, broadly conceived, reaches into the core of the notion of the aesthetic.'⁵¹ The baleful binaries so often invoked in response to demands for greater and more diverse representation (quality or inclusion, scholarly value or identity politics) ignore the fact that identity has always been central to music: Wagner's mythical Wälzung tribe, Schoenberg's proclamation of a method that would assure the superiority of German music for the next hundred years, Julian Carrillo's search for a microtonal 13th sound.

Epilogue

In January 2019 I was walking near the Centre George Pompidou when an enormous poster on the side of the building piqued my attention: 'Polish Avant-Garde'. Later, I read an article about the show:

An exhibition of long-forgotten Polish avant-garde art has gone on show at the Pompidou Centre in Paris. The exhibition entitled 'Une avant-garde Polonaise: Katarzyna Kobro et Wladyslaw Strzeminski' (Polish Avant-Garde: Katarzyna Kobro and Wladyslaw Strzeminski) introduces western audiences for the first time to the works of the man and wife 'giants' of Poland's art movement. The curators of the exhibition, which begins today, described Kobro and Strzeminski as 'Important members of the "progressive international" who have attracted considerable scholarly attention', they remain largely, and unjustly, unknown to the wider public.⁵²

This was exactly what I had tried to do with my small act of curation in Darmstadt the previous summer. Of course, since 'Polish' constitutes an identity as well as a nationality, I wondered if the identity politics warning lights were flashing red somewhere in the larger art world. Somehow, I doubted it.

In this essay, I did not intend to present a set of 'best practices' for curation; rather, I sought to encourage questions about how curatorial outcomes reflect the community of thought and practice in which the curators and their constituencies are embedded. Do the outcomes of new music curation processes implicitly celebrate the European sonic diaspora? Or can the field and its curators explore, recognize and even posit a multicultural, multiethnic base for new music, with a variety of perspectives, histories, traditions, and methods?

Perhaps controversially, I want to suggest that although pursuit of greater numerical representation (or even 'balance', however defined) is desirable, this alone is unlikely to bring full subjecthood to women composers or composers of color in the long run. Subjecthood and membership are reflected not only in numerical representation, but also in the circulation of sounds, culture, histories and ideas. Conceptual migration (or even conceptual nomadism) would create a new curatorial subject for contemporary music that can directly conceive of ascribing kinship, membership, and subjecthood to these new composers and their forebears, creating a new, creolized usable past for new music. Building upon that foundation, we can address the question of how Defragmentation might sound, and how that sound can be heard.

Clearly, the Paradise on Earth portrayed by Rauterberg, in which society was proud to see 'itself' reflected in the freedom of art, was not being experienced by everyone in

quite the same way. If the aesthetic becomes the modality through which intersectionality and creolity are lived, we can note with Okwui Enwezor that

In the context of decolonized representation, innovation is as much about the coming to being of new relations to cultures and histories, to rationalization and transformation, to transculturation and assimilation, and new practices and processes, new kinds of exchange and moments of multiple dwelling as it is about the ways artists are seen to be bound to their national and cultural traditions. Here, political community and cultural community become essentially coterminous.⁵³

This is one way in which Spivak's notion of creolity as 'the delexicalization of the foreign' might be realized in innovative musical and curatorial practice, requiring a new model of the educated curator, composer, improviser, listener, and critic. In this way, as Spivak predicts, 'Creolity...will yield us a history and a world.'⁵⁴

Notes

1 The international team of curators, composers, performers, and academics pursuing the project included Heloisa Amaral, Camille C. Baker, Georgina Born, Björn Gottstein, Lars Petter Hagen, Tim Perkis, Berno Odo Polzer, Thomas Schäfer, and myself, with Katja Heldt as primary team coordinator. See "Defragmentation – Curating Contemporary Music, Thinking Together – Project Presentation & Panel Discussion," https://www.berlinerfestspiele.de/en/berliner-festspiele/programm/bfs-gesamtprogramm/programmdetail_240304.html.

2 Ibid.

3 "Defragmentation--Four-Day Convention on Curating Contemporary Music," <https://internationales-musikinstitut.de/en/ferienkurse/defragmentation/>.

4 "Defragmentation – Curating Contemporary Music, Thinking Together – Project Presentation & Panel Discussion."

5 "Defragmentation--Four-Day Convention on Curating Contemporary Music," program book, <https://internationales-musikinstitut.de/content/uploads/imd-2018-07-06Defragmentation.pdf>

6 See "Defragmentation: Curating Contemporary Music," Darmstädter Beiträge zur Neuen Musik (Sonderband), edited by Sylvia Freydank and Michael Rebhahn (Mainz: Schott, 2019).

7 <https://www.grinm.org/about>.

8 For commentary on the GRID initiative by two of its primary exponents, see Ashley Fure, "Reflections on Risk, Pigeonholes, Precarity, and the Zero-Sum Game of Time: On Speaking Out," <https://griddarmstadt.wordpress.com/2016/08/14/reflections-on-risk-by-ashley-fure/>. Also see Juliana Hodkinson and Georgina Born, "Social Relations in New Music: Tackling The Octopus," <http://seismograf.org/gender-and-social-relations-in-new-music-tackling-the-octopus>.

9 Ashley Fure, "GRID: Gender Research in Darmstadt, A 2016 HISTORAGE Project Funded by the Goethe Institute," https://griddarmstadt.files.wordpress.com/2016/08/grid_gender_research_in_darmstadt.pdf.

10 See Georgina Born and George E. Lewis in conversation with Leonie Reineke, "What Would It Sound Like?" How To Approach Gender and Diversity in Contemporary Music," in Thomas Schäfer et al, Darmstadt Summer Course 14-28 July 2018 (program book), 242-249, <https://internationales-musikinstitut.de/content/uploads/imd-180725PrgrammbuchIMD-ENDS.pdf>

11 Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 1.

12 Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 16.

13 Indeed, the twenty-three page initial draft document that I encountered on coming into the project referred frequently to gender, but only once to race. “Defragmentation: Curating contemporary music,” unpublished internal draft overview.

14 Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 4.

15 Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 151.

16 Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 54.

17 “Taking GRID Forward With IMD: Proposals for the 12/10/2016 Think Tank,” https://errantsound.files.wordpress.com/2017/01/session4_grid-manifesto-oct2016.pdf

18 See Joevan de Mattos Caitano, “Intercultural Perspectives in the International Summer courses for New Music: The Internationales Musikinstitut Darmstadt in the context of exchanges with Latin America, Africa, USSR, Oceania and Asia” (PhD diss., Hochschule für Musik Carl Maria von Weber, Institut für Musikwissenschaft, Dresden, 2019), 152 ff.

19 Joevan de Mattos Caitano, “Intercultural Perspectives in the International Summer courses for New Music,” 166. The Khumalo work is also listed in the online listing of the Internationales Musikinstitut Darmstadt at <https://imd-archiv.de/detail/IMD-M-2008CDR040-01?q=Andile&d=&p=1&s=25&l=list&o%5Bscore%5D=desc>.

20 Chicago-born Maurice Weddington, who won first prize in the Gaudeamus competition in 1973, has lived in Berlin since winning a DAAD Berliner Künstlerprogramm residency in 1975. *Mehr Licht*, a work for bass flute written for Eberhard Blum, received its European premiere in 1977 – in Darmstadt, but not at the Ferienkurse. For a discussion of this work, which was performed at the Darmstadt Institute for New Music and Music Education, see Eberhard Blum, “Bemerkungen zu neuer Flötenmusik,” https://www.moeck.com/uploads/tx_moekctables/1979-2.pdf_S_317-321.pdf.

21 At Darmstadt 2018, two works by living Afrodiasporic composers (Lester St. Louis and George Lewis) were performed, along with a work by Julius Eastman (1940-1990). See Thomas Schäfer et al, *Darmstadt Summer Course 14-28 July 2018* (program book), <https://internationales-musikinstitut.de/content/uploads/imd-180725PrgrammbuchIMD-ENDS.pdf>.

22 See Josef Häusler, ed., *Spiegel der Neuen Musik: Donaueschinger, Chronik—Tendenzen—Werkbesprechungen, mit Essays von Joachim-Ernst Berendt und Hermann Naber* (Kassel: Bärenreiter-Verlag, 1996). For a complete list of composers programmed at the festival, see <https://www.swr.de/swr-classic/donaueschinger-musiktage/programme/donaueschinger-musiktage-archiv/-/id=2136962/did=14231624/nid=2136962/csruw2/index.html>.

23 Anthony Gardner & Charles Green, “Post-North? Documenta11 and the Challenges of the ‘Global’ Exhibition,” <http://www.on-curating.org/issue-33-reader/post-north-documenta11-and-the-challenges-of-the-global-exhibition.html>.

24 Andy Greene, “Flashback: David Bowie Rips Into MTV for Not Spotlighting Black Artists,” *Rolling Stone*, January 13, 2016, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/flashback-david-bowie-rips-into-mtv-for-not-spotlighting-black-artists-62335/>, accessed August 4, 2019. For the video, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XZGiVzIr8Qg>, accessed August 18, 2019.

25 Fredric Jameson, “Periodizing the 60s,” *Social Text* 9:10, “The 60’s without Apology” (Spring/Summer 1984), 180-81.

26 Alexander Wheelock Thayer, translated by Henry Edward Krehbiel, *Thayer’s Life of Beethoven*, Vol. 1, revised and edited by Elliot Forbes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 333.

- 27** Robin Stowell, *The Early Violin and Viola: A Practical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 138.
- 28** See “Ludwig van Beethoven, Sonate für Klavier und Violine (A-Dur) op. 47, 1. Satz, Partitur, Autograph,” Beethoven-Haus Bonn, NE 86, https://da.beethoven.de/sixcms/detail.php?&template=dokseite_digitales_archiv_en&_dokid=ha:wm108&_seite=1-2, accessed August 3, 2019.
- 29** Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 38-39.
- 30** Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Dialogue: World Systems & the Creole,” *Narrative* 14:6 (January 2006): 102-112.
- 31** For an extended view of the creolization of contemporary music, see George E. Lewis, “The Situation of a Creole,” in “Defining Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Music,” forum convened and edited by David Clarke, *Twentieth Century Music* 14:3 (2017): 442-46.s
- 32** Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphael Confiant, translated by M. B. Taleb-Khyar (édition bilingue français/anglais), *Éloge De La Créolité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), 112.
- 33** Van Wyck Brooks, “On Creating a Usable Past,” *The Dial* (April 11, 1918): 338.
- 34** Brooks, 339.
- 35** Joel Sachs, *Henry Cowell: A Man Made of Music* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 235-36.
- 36** Monique Roelofs, “Identity and its Public Platforms: A String of Promises Entwined with Threats,” *Texte zur Kunst* 107 (September 2017): 70.
- 37** George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics, Revised and Expanded Edition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 67.
- 38** See Dana L. Reason Myers, “The Myth of Absence: Representation, Reception and the Music of Experimental Women Improvisors” (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2002).
- 39** The list of composers: T.J. Anderson (USA, b. 1928); Nicole Mitchell (USA, b. 1967); Alvin Singleton (USA, b. 1940); Tania León (Cuba, b. 1943); Anthony Braxton (USA, b. 1945); Tyondai Braxton (USA, b. 1978); Julia Perry (USA, 1924-1979); Andile Wiseman Khumalo (South Africa, b. 1978); Hale Smith (USA, 1925-2009); Courtney Bryan (USA, b. 1982); Roberto Valera Chamizo (Cuba, b. 1938); Hannah Kendall (UK, b. 1984); Anthony Davis (USA, b. 1951); Julius Eastman (USA, b. 1940); Matana Roberts (USA, b. 1975); Jeffrey Mumford (USA, b. 1955); Yvette Janine Jackson (USA, b. 1973); Muhal Richard Abrams (USA, 1930-2017); Olly Wilson (USA, 1937-2018); Wadada Leo Smith (USA, b. 1941); Eleanor Alberga (Jamaica/UK, b. 1949); Wendell Logan (USA, 1940-2010); Tyshawn Sorey (USA, b. 1980); Roscoe Mitchell (USA, b. 1940); Elaine Mitchener (UK); Maurice Weddington (USA/Germany, b. 1941); Ulysses Kay (USA, 1917-1995); *singe and verb* (Beth Coleman with Howard Goldkrand (USA); Anthony R. Green (USA); Camille Norment (USA/Norway, b. 1970); Benjamin Patterson (USA, 1934-2016); Pamela Z (USA, b. 1956).
- 40** “Taking GRID Forward With IMD.”
- 41** Klaus Schwab, Richard Samans, Saadia Zahidi, Till Alexander Leopold, Vesselina Ratcheva, Ricardo Hausmann, and Laura D’Andrea Tyson. “Insight Report: The Global Gender Gap Report 2016” (Cologne/Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2016).
- 42** Patrick Simon, Victor Piché, and Amélie A. Gagnon, eds., *Social Statistics and Ethnic Diversity: Cross-National Perspectives in Classifications and Identity Politics*, 5 (Heidelberg, New York, Dordrecht, and London: Springer Open, 2015), <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2F978-3-319-20095-8.pdf>
- 43** *Social Statistics and Ethnic Diversity*, 19.
- 44** Patrick Simon, “The Choice of Ignorance: The Debate on Ethnic and Racial Statistics in France,” in Patrick Simon, Victor Piché, and Amélie A. Gagnon, eds., *Social*

Statistics and Ethnic Diversity: Cross-National Perspectives in Classifications and Identity Politics, 75-76 (Heidelberg, New York, Dordrecht, and London: Springer Open, 2015), <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2F978-3-319-20095-8.pdf>.

45 Simon, "The Choice of Ignorance," 75.

46 Georgina Born and Kyle Devine, "Music Technology, Gender, and Class: Digitization, Educational and Social Change in Britain," *Twentieth-Century Music* 12:2 (2015): 139.

47 "Taking GRID Forward With IMD."

48 Hanno Rauterberg, "Politisch korrekte Kunst: Tanz der Tugendwächter," *Die Zeit*, July 26, 2017, <https://www.zeit.de/2017/31/kunst-museen-reform/komplettansicht>, translated by the author.

49 Stanley Cavell, "Music Discomposed," in *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 201.

50 Roelofs, "Identity and its Public Platforms," 70.

51 Ibid.

52 "A Polish Avant-garde: Katarzyna Kobro & Władysław Strzemiński in Centre Pompidou," *culture.pl*, October 2018, <https://culture.pl/en/event/a-polish-avant-garde-katarzyna-kobro-wladyslaw-strzeminski-in-centre-pompidou>.

53 Okwui Enwezor, "The Postcolonial Constellation: Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition," in *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, edited by Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor, and Nancy Condee, 225 (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008).

54 Spivak, "Dialogue: World Systems & the Creole": 106.

George E. Lewis (USA) is Professor of American Music at Columbia University. Lewis is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy, a MacArthur Fellow and a Guggenheim Fellow. He is the author of *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (University of Chicago Press) and co-editor of the two-volume *Oxford Handbook of Critical Improvisation Studies*. Lewis's compositions have been performed by ensembles worldwide, and he holds honorary doctorates from the University of Edinburgh, New College of Florida, and Harvard University. From 1980-82 he served as Music Director (curator) of the Kitchen Center for Dance, Music, Video, and Performance.

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Producing Situations: How Performer-Curators Are Rethinking Roles and Formats

Heloisa Amaral

In his preface to the booklet of the 2014 edition of the Darmstadt Summer Course for New Music, director Thomas Schäfer talks about a ‘new self-image of the ensembles’, an image reflected in the title of that year’s course: *Performing Matters*. The new ensembles Schäfer refers to are made up of performers who are keenly aware of their own position within the field of contemporary music. These performers typically create their own projects, test different forms of collaboration, and leave their personal imprint on commissioned works. Further, they think and act beyond their immediate field, searching for new impulses in other musical genres, related art forms, politics and science, thus questioning the relevance of their work within a larger social context. Finally, they challenge prevailing discourses and modes of musical presentation, in particular the classical concert format.

The classical concert as we know it today clearly belongs to a bygone historical paradigm. Rooted in a 19th century bourgeois ideology and based on notions of economical and social success, it was established in times of great social change – industrialization, secularization and the flourishing of urban life. Back then, it represented a space in which the more aspirational social classes could satisfy their spiritual, social and intellectual needs that were no longer met by the church or the court.

The classical concert as we know it today clearly belongs to a bygone historical paradigm. Established in times of great social changes – with the industrial revolution in the late 18th century forcing hordes of people in Europe and the colonized world to move to cities and adopt an urban lifestyle in which traditions from land and church had little place,¹ classical music concerts had come to represent a space in which the aspirational classes could form social bonds and satisfy their spiritual, social and intellectual needs. For that reason, the rituals that framed these concerts naturally evolved around ideals of economical and social *réussite* (self-control, a disciplined body language) firmly rooted in a bourgeois worldview.²

Faced by a contemporary world characterized by more fluid relationships, the format has become anachronistic: concert organizers (and their funders) want programmes that more accurately mirror the pluralism of today’s society; diversity and outreach have become recurrent topics in the music scene; young musicians, no longer satisfied with merely executing scores, long for ways to connect with their audiences and to make their art and skills relevant to the world around them. Audiences and artists alike are thirsty for shared cultural experiences, but the raw exposure to musical works without attention to context or any kind of mediation, is too unfamiliar for some and, for others, not stimulating enough.

In Martin Tröndle’s 2011 book *Das Konzert*, curator Markus Fein describes the ‘concert of the future’ as including cross-disciplinary experimentation (with science, other arts, politics); a relational social dimension (sharing food, active participation by the audience, city tours); choreography and stage design (lighting, video, timing, movement); scenography (visual amplification of music, unusual seating arrangements, site-specific concerts). Other strategies may include eclectic repertoire,

alternative venues and site/event-specific programming; inclusion of different narratives or historical dimensions via pre-concert talks, workshops for amateurs, etc. Fein's argument for this expansion of the concert format is mainly based on the necessity of attracting new audiences. While performers are indeed concerned with the rehabilitation of an institution in decline, and while it may be important or unavoidable to consider the economic sustainability of our field of work, many of us are driven by aesthetic motivations that do not necessarily follow the market logic of audience-pleasing. Making use of newest technologies and/or inspired by practices of curatorship widespread in dance, theatre and the visual arts, these performers address the classical concert as a living practice and artistic material.

This essay addresses projects and practices that I consider particularly relevant and inspiring in that sense, as well as examples taken from my own work. I place particular focus on concert concepts that focus on cross-disciplinarity, reaching out to audiences, diversity, and on the social engagement of performers. Rather than a broad diversity and for the sake of precision, I have with few exceptions opted for describing productions in which I am either involved in or which I have personally attended. The examples chosen here represent therefore only a small fraction of the wealth of projects and initiatives out there.

At the intersection between audience development and aesthetic experimentation are projects by ensemble Ictus or the Danish Scenatet. In the tradition of Pierre Boulez, who replaced seats with comfy mats in the 'rug concerts' held during his tenure as music director of the New York Philharmonic in the early 70s, Ictus's Liquid Rooms and Scenatet's concert walks are informal, relaxed performance situations intended to lower the threshold for concert attendance for those not familiar with the strict rituals of the traditional classical concert.

During Scenatet's concert walks in Glorup, Denmark in 2013, visitors were guided through the forest of Glorup, where they met musicians performing in stages set between trees, or boating on a lake. In Ictus's Liquid Room, on the other hand, the audience was invited to move freely within the concert space, entering or leaving it at will.

Liquid Rooms are an ongoing immersive concert concept inspired by rock festivals and improv gigs. Although the repertoire presented in a Liquid Room session changes with each iteration, it generally includes composed works with a cool, ambient or hyperenergetic flavour mixed with what Ictus calls 'instantaneous productions' (remix, improvisation based on a framework). There is no fixed stage. Instead, music is performed in a series of stages placed in different parts of the room. Musicians dress casually. Blackouts, strobing, projections and other extra-musical elements ensure a smooth and unbroken transition between stages and musical works in addition to preparing the atmosphere for the next piece.

The connection between pieces is not chronological or stylistic, neither does it base itself on an articulated message or subject. Rather, it follows a logic coming from a quasi-visceral understanding of the combination of textures, motivic patterns, dynamics, speed and movement as way of eliciting particular atmospheres, emotional climaxes and listeners' states of mind. This abstract form of 'embodied dramaturgy', familiar to most musicians and used intuitively in concert programming, is particular to music as an artform unfolding in time. If formalized, it could become one of music's most interesting contributions to current curatorial discourses.

Ictus's Liquid Rooms represent an effort to break free from the elitism of contemporary music by linking it to musical genres and contexts generally associated with mass culture. In a mix of artistic manifesto and brand statement, Nickel Ensemble propose something similar: 'In the past 20 years, the knowledge revolution, with its easiness of transport and mobility under the general acceptance of a globalized

capitalism, has generally redefined our experience of life and concretely reshaped the world of arts [...]. [In this new world] a “classical” music group jumps out of the concert hall to play in a bar or a club not for the sake of being COOL and attract additional public but for the idealistic (probably naive) thought to possibly reshape current structures within the pre-given social order where the relations between the artist, the audience and the hosting platform are to be reexamined.’

In this text, Nickel outline the social context in which they operate (a changing world, mobile, globalized, borderless); they identify a problem (the incompatibility between a classical music culture and this context); finally, they propose a solution: finding alternative venues for performance that allow for a restructuring of the relationship between musicians, audience and organizers.

I am not sure how far Nickel succeed in transplanting contemporary music to bars and clubs – to the best of my knowledge, most of their concerts take place in venues and festivals specializing in contemporary music. What they manage very well, though, is to bring a dynamic and refreshing spirit to traditional contemporary music settings, behaving as they would in bars or clubs. Thus, in a recent performance at the Orangerie, the members of the group entered the stage like rock stars and were treated accordingly by the audience of young composers and performers at the Darmstadt Summer Course. Nickel’s primary wish might have been to perform elsewhere, and not to be considered ‘cool’, but it is precisely the coolness they bring to the traditional concert hall that guarantees their success.

Belgian ensemble Nadar is another group yearning to present music that reflects and interacts with today’s world. They are happy to abandon the concert hall if the latter becomes a burden for the realization of a musical idea. In an article in the music magazine *Positionen*, the group insist: ‘new music needs to be programmed and presented in ways that match its content and context’.

One example is the outdoor multimedia concert *Dead Serious*, centred around a piece for four hot air balloons by composer Michael Maierhof. Hot air balloons were once used for espionage. In Nadar’s performance, they alluded to modern forms of vigilance. The concert, in the words of the ensemble, was ‘to be situated somewhere in between concert, immersive installation and political performance, with “surveillance” and the related blurring of the borders between reality and virtuality as recurring themes’. The hot air balloons were accompanied by an installation composed of four large screens showing footage taken during a balloon flight over the city. Brief interventions by visual artist Waafaa Bilal, including choreography for drones and belly dancer, reinforced the theme of surveillance and served as thematic bridges between the different pieces. Again, here the audience was invited to walk around, creating its own path in the proposed landscape. Nadar’s multilayered, choreographed and site-specific presentation far exceeded the boundaries of the traditional concert format.

In *OurEars* (2018), Nadar presented a series of mini-concerts designed specifically for private locations in Darmstadt – a shared apartment, an artist’s studio, a doctor’s surgery and an alternative cultural centre. The audience was invited to experience the music through the imaginary eyes and ears of the buildings’ inhabitants, whose life stories we could reconstruct from photos on walls, personal objects, biographical notes in the programme booklet or recorded interviews aired during the events. The feeling of taking part in an irreproducible situation was, if possible, even more present than in *Dead Serious*.

Other strategies used by Nadar to turn music concerts into full-blown cultural events include storytelling and the stimulation of dialogues across artistic disciplines. *Long Live the New Flesh*, from 2012, investigated the use of sampling in different art forms, combining musical and video pieces in the same concert. According to Nadar,

the result of this combination formed a 'metacomposition'. In *Lesaserma Pokhunakis* (2016), the ensemble commissioned four composers to create individual works and to collectively design a structure to frame them. This resulted in a new 'metacomposition' consisting of a faux-documentary film about the imagined life of fictional writer Pokhunakis, with the four new pieces used to punctuate or illustrate different stages of the writer's life. Nadar is also attentive to the way it presents content on the internet, extending their curatorial concerns to online platforms and social media, or as they say, to the 'virtual concert halls'.

While Nadar builds its image and repertoire around new technologies and virtual reality, other performers and ensembles cultivate diversity. In such cases, it is the exploratory approach of our increasingly chaotic world, and the way these musicians deploy the mix – of styles, repertoire, media, activities – which defines their distinctive image.

For Manchester-based ensemble Distractfold, for instance, it is the diversity within the ensemble that makes it 'unique': 'Coming from different continents, backgrounds and having received a diverse education, [the members of Distractfold Ensemble] create a nexus of ideas and influences which all contribute towards the ensemble's unique voice and identity.'

If some ensembles and musicians bet on diversity when curating concert programmes, others such as the Norwegian Ensemble neoN wager on the opposite extreme. Although the ensemble's overall profile is versatile, neoN prefers programmes centred around focused listening, with single longform works such as the performance of two tea roses by Phill Niblock at HOK in 2012, or even performances lasting several days in which one idea is explored from various angles. The latter is best illustrated in a project with electronica artist Jan St Werner from 2018. Here, a limited number of composed works served as the basis for improvisation in shifting formations as well as for collaborations with other artists, including spontaneous guests who jammed along with the musicians. Diversity, for our group, is represented by our musical choices rather than by the combination of pieces within a concert. It means expanding the sonic palette beyond that which we have learnt at school, as well as approaching our not exclusively classical musical interests with a language familiar to all of us. This goal is generally achieved through crossover collaborations such as the project with Jan St Werner. The ensemble's portfolio in this direction also includes a collaboration with pop artist Susanna Wallumrød and a forthcoming partnership with noise musicians Lasse Marhaug and Otomo Yoshihide's Far East Network.

Another example of musical crossover is that of the Silk Road project of cellist Yo-Yo Ma, prominently described in Tim Rutherford-Johnson's recent *Music After the Fall: Music Composition and Culture Since 1989*. Silk Road is an ensemble composed of musicians with different origins, from classical, folk and contemporary Western and non-Western traditions, whose individual characteristics are as important as their identity as a group. The multiculturalism of the musicians is clearly mirrored in their attitude on stage and in their styles of dressing, from casual to formal clothing or national costume.

Silk Road defines itself as an 'imagination platform': through affiliation with universities and public schools, the group encourages dialogue between artists, educators and entrepreneurs. It has indeed become more common for performers and ensembles to propose activities that encompass much more than concerts but which do not necessarily fall into traditional models of teaching. Nadar and Nickel offer summer academies in which they promote the music they like; Distractfold is ensemble in residence at the Architectural Association in London; Nickel and Distract-

fold organize their own festivals; and the Berlin ensemble Adapter regularly offers open evening workshops called Open Mic's where composers work with musicians on fragments or ideas-in-progress in front of an engaged audience.

Making the backstage area of music-making transparent is likewise at the core of Impossible Situations: A Collective Experiment (IS:CNE), a platform for artistic creation and exchange initiated by myself and violinist Karin Hellqvist (Duo Hellqvist/ Amaral) and with a membership including a number of composers, architect Filippa Berglund and sound engineer Max Sauer. IS:CNE artists have been meeting regularly since 2016 to develop new compositions and to work out together how to integrate them into different concert situations. Working with an architect at all stages of the process brings the question of the use of space into the picture, allowing for an even more sustained exploration of the diverse parameters of the concert situation, particularly in regard to the constantly shifting performance contexts, as becomes clear from the example above.

Inspired by ideas about exhibition-staging from the art world, we experiment with the placement of musicians, audience, projection and speakers in the space, and try to integrate elements of the process into our performances. We have, for instance, invited photographer Ellen Inga to freely document our workshops for a period of three years. Inga's work serves a double purpose: Considering that the project wishes to explore new roles for all parties involved, the collective observation of the pictures between and within concerts is a useful reminder of how easy it is to fall into habitual and unproductive patterns of communication. More importantly, we use them as tool to remember special moments or to reflect on unnoticed ones. Lately, it has also



Duo Hellqvist/Amaral performs *Plans* by Øyvind Torvund at the Zagreb Music Biennale 2019. Photo: Ellen Inga for Impossible Situations.

become part of the scenography, as in our last performance, where the audience sat on the floor surrounded by small prints of Inga's pictures. With the video of Øyvind Torvund's *Plans for Future Keyboard and Violin Pieces* projected on the ceiling and the pictures covering the ground, we tipped the customary horizontal angle of viewing towards the vertical.

The exposure of processes also takes place at a discursive level. IS:CNE working sessions include workshops organized either independently or in partnership with festivals and/or music academies. During these workshops, students, artists and curators working at the intersection of performance, composition and visual presentation are given the opportunity to shadow rehearsals, set-up and concerts, and hence to get a glimpse of what happens backstage at a concert. Such public workshop situations force us to articulate doubts and concerns normally confined to the practice room, thus bringing more clarity and precision in musical decision-making. On the occasion of a workshop at the SPOR Festival in Aarhus in 2018, we decided to share with the audience our dilemma concerning the video projection in Daniel Moreira's piece *The Delivery*. The problem was as follows: the marionette theatre designated for the performance had turned out to be too small to accommodate the staging intended by the composer, which consisted of a central projection with instruments placed on one side of the stage. Not only was the stage too small to fit the projection, piano and violin next to each other, but the dark colours of the walls made the projection blurry. After long deliberations, it was decided to place supplementary low-standing screens on each side of the stage running simultaneously with the backwall projection, with the performers standing right beneath the latter, in the centre of the stage.

The new setting enhanced the visibility not only of the video but also of the performers, and contributed both to the rhythmical energy and to the overall intensity of the piece. Aesthetically, however, it had travelled far from Moreira's original intentions, for it shifted the focus from the storyline of the film; that is, from a clear narrative structure to a multilayered interaction between live performers, tape and video.

The conversation with the audience during the workshop began in quite a heated tone, with the composer feeling somewhat cornered by the rest of the group, who supported the scenographer's solution. As the discussion evolved, though, arguments became more nuanced; daring even. Suddenly, what had started as a fight between two sides turned into a common object of reflection and experimentation: what would happen if... The following evening, both audience and artists felt a strong ownership over the final presentation, aware at the same time that the iteration proposed was only one option out of many.

Thinking across disciplines is also a particular asset when connecting music to topical issues. Kaleidoskop Soloists' Ensemble and choreographer Laurent Chétouane joined forces to develop the concert format Transit presented at the Donaueschinger Musiktage in 2017. Embodying the tragic situation of migrants in Europe, musicians dressed in ragged clothes entered the concert hall in a truck and moved erratically among the audience while performing meditative music by Chiyoko Szlavnic, Dmitri Kourliandski and Sebastian Claren. Although I react to the one-sidedness of the repertoire and the choice of costumes – too illustrative for my taste – I admire the way Transit brings the political concerns and interests of the performers to the new music stage.

In the same line, albeit in a complete different format, Norway's Ning Ensemble created *Rikskonsert (Kingdom Concert)*. A mixture of talkshow, conference and concerts, including unorthodox arrangements of Norwegian classics, national anthems, folk songs, jingles and pop hits, the project was intended as a questioning of Norwegian musical identity in times of globalization, multiculturalism, self-realization and commercialism.

Similarly, politically-minded musicians from ensemble Interface created the project *Zwischenzone Ost* to assert their concern with the porousness of the East European border with the precarity of nations such as Russia, Turkey and Greece. *Zwischenzone Ost* consists of a series of concerts and open roundtables in which composers, interpreters and audience shared music and views that critically reflected on the notion of 'Europeanness'.

Like *Zwischenzone Ost*, *Disobediences in Sound* combines performance and public discourse. A platform initiated by violinist Karin Hellqvist and myself in 2017, *Disobediences* combines concerts with satellite activities that are either discursive (lectures, roundtables, screenings about relevant issues) or that integrate practice and discourse (workshops, open rehearsals). Nothing is really new in the topics addressed by the project: we look at presentation formats, audiences and the use of public space in contemporary experimental music. The difference, however, is the perspective: we focus on the role of the performer and on the question of whether and how a socially-engaged performance practice of contemporary music is possible.

The opening concert of the project at CentroCentro, the headquarters of the government of the city of Madrid – raised questions that were discussed at length during a symposium organized together with composer, sound artist and Vang-Curator Alberto Bernal at MediaLab Prado: What does it mean to perform a concert with explicit political context in a building that houses the city council, and which is guarded by dozens of heavily armed security officers who accompany the artists around the building and constantly peep into the auditorium as if criminal acts were about to be perpetrated? Besides, whom do these guards represent? What government sits in this building and what does it stand for? On another note, what do we performers wish to say by programming a work commenting on the habits of the US military (as in Marina Rosenfeld's *my red red blood*) side by side with a harsh critic of the inhuman aspects of capitalism (as in Fran MM. Cabeza de Vaca and rapper Maria Salgado's *ACAB*)? More importantly, who is listening to us, and who do we want to reach with such messages?

Conclusion

As these examples show, performers have been taking more responsibility for the content of what they present, with many of us rejecting traditional models such 'wait for a call from a programmer in need of a performer for this or that work' or 'commission pieces by composer X to get a concert at festival Y' in favour of cohesive self-curated projects or initiatives developed in close dialogue with composers, concert organizers and others.

These initiatives denote a paradigm shift from an interpretive tradition of musical performance to an understanding of performance as relational, critical and, ultimately, performative practice.

Curatorship as a discipline is concerned with making visible, making aware, connecting, reconfiguring, reconstellating that which already exists. Performer-curators no longer just play: they think, manage, coordinate, imagine scenarios for an ideal outcome. In this regard – and as some of the examples above illustrate – concerts have expanded into 'events', and performers have become – to quote art theorist Claire Bishop – 'producers of situations'.

With this changing role, our expectations towards the field also change, and so does our wish to participate in the musical discourse. The voice of the performers, it is true, is still not as present in the field in the same way as that of composers, critics and curators. Luckily, though, composers and programmers are increasingly open to discussions with musicians, and to hosting musician-led projects. More importantly, we have become conscious of the necessity of being part of the shared discourse.

This essay is adapted from a lecture held on 17 July 2018 as part of the Defragmentation Convention in Darmstadt.

Notes

1 Hobsbawm, E. (1975). *The Age of Capital. 1848-1875*. Abacus: London.

2 Ungeheuer, E. (2011). *Concert Formats Today: Abolished liturgy or hidden rituals*. In *Das Konzert* (Tröndle, M., Ed.). Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.

Heloisa Amaral (PT/BRA) is a pianist, artist-researcher and curator. Her musical partnerships include Duo Hellqvist/Amaral and Ensemble neoN as well as collaborations with composers such as Joanna Bailie, Simon Steen-Andersen, Johannes Kreidler, Phil Niblock, Helmut Lachenmann, Natasha Barrett, Jan St. Werner, Marina Rosenfeld and Catherine Lamb. A former curator at NyMusikk and co-founder/programmer of Ultima Academy at the Oslo Ultima Festival until 2015, Heloisa lectures in curatorial practices in music at the Royal Conservatory of The Hague and pursues an artistic-research PhD on the same topic at the Orpheus Institute (BE) /University of Leiden (NL). She is an advisor to DEFRAGMENTATION – Curating Contemporary Music, a project of the German Federal Cultural Foundation and the International Music Institute Darmstadt (IMD), the Donaueschingen Festival, MaerzMusik – Festival for Time Issues.

www.hellqvistamaral.com

How Do We Listen?

An Interview with New Music Curator Kamila Metwaly Katja Heldt

Katja Heldt: You started curating *Untraining the Ear* in 2017. What is the concept behind the project?

Kamila Metwaly: *Untraining the Ear* takes place in the discursive art space SAVVY Contemporary in Berlin, which situates itself between non-Western and Western art forms and knowledge exchange. As a collective, we continuously try to deconstruct existing ideologies, canonical narratives, and the idea of the *other*, speaking from the position of that *otherness*. *Untraining the Ear* was the first project that I contributed to within SAVVY Contemporary, and the team consists of Beya Othmani, Abhishek Nilamber, Jasmina Al-Qaisi, and most recently Ola Zielinska. For the series, we work together with Marcus Gammel of Deutschlandfunk Kultur and Jan Rolf of the CTM festival in Berlin. The series could be considered a continuation of an inquiry into sound begun by Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, founder and artistic director of SAVVY Contemporary, Elena Agudio, co-artistic director of SAVVY, and Marcus Gammel during the exhibition and radio project SAVVY Funk during Documenta 14 in 2017.

The *Untraining the Ear* series takes a slightly different turn, though. Its main focus is *listening*, which can include the sonic and the musical, but not exclusively auditory. The project started with the reflection on the possibilities of listening to what one might call *elsewhere*, and out of curiosity to understand what could that claim, the process of *untraining* an ear, entail? Each contribution was unravelling layers of sonic histories, acoustemology, and knowledge forms, which do not only revolve around the Euroamerican logicity in musical tradition, composition, and the aestheticization of the sonic in such constructs.

Our primary concern is the social, political and historical elements of listening; and with each artist, we raise and tap into questions around how does listening influence and inform their work and process, both conceptually and artistically. And how we, as a collective of listeners experiencing those works, must ask:

What is our listening influenced by? Do we actually listen and who do we listen to? What shapes our listening processes? And can *active listening* become an agent for change?

We are interested in listening as a conscious decision. We meet up to listen, which implies being mentally and physically present and together, witnesses to a spectacular and endless iteration of sound, air-breathing thoughts and igniting a shared space. To a large extent, it is about listening beyond the Western canon, but it is also an attempt at subverting power. For each session, we invite and commission artists to engage with the audience's ears, share their stories, thoughts, and works on the subject and propose alternative ways of listening through their performances and in-depth conversations following or preceding their performance. We believe that for too long the idea of decolonization has been ignored by musicology (across various genres) and sound arts, and therefore this project also attempts to give space to tackle the subject of decolonizing the realm of what one might call *the sonic*.

KH: What does the term 'untraining' mean in the context of the listening sessions?

KM: The initial idea was to start an investigation into the sonic within our various modes of listening. Later on, we fell for the notion of *untraining* as a possibility of listening to 'other' sound and 'other' music, to investigate, inquire, deep-dive into *other* histories, and give space to (re)write *other* histories. Choosing the process of untraining results from a need for un-mixing our listening and understanding what it entails. Not only taking into account what we are listening to, but furthermore what influences how we listen. How do we (de)tune ourselves from the well-tempered spectrum of our conditioned ears while listening? *Untraining* also could entail another way of telling and sharing stories, and of being together, of creating contact zones. This format was also an attempt to slow down, to contest modes in which artists become a resource, or a



Kamila Metwaly

token, for a project within an institution and how institutions are greedy – always needing more and ever new artists to work with. Each session is the result of long-term research and following in-depth conversations with each invited artist, often leading to intensive and lasting relationships. Once we untrained our ears, we also untrained our expectations towards the artist and created space for something genuine to happen. This has made each session very different from one another, both conceptually and experientially.

KH: In your project description, you emphasize the difference between hearing and listening. What is your understanding of those terms?

KM: Yes. The difference between listening and hearing is an essential aspect of our work and mostly inspired by the work of Pauline Oliveros's extensive deep listening practice. It is also a way to think of listening as a tool for deciphering and discerning between those two states. On the one hand, the involuntary physical hearing and on the other, the subjective and culturally trained process of listening. Pauline Oliveros states that listening is a space of focused attention. We are interested in this zone of focusing, we want to stop hearing and start listening actively and use the process of listening as a

tool to activate discourse. Throughout our series and with each invited artist, we investigate different shades of politicized, socialized, and exoticized listening. Each artist offers new and different propositions or exercises through which we learn to reflect on our processes of normative listening and through which we learn to attain a more active and aware space of being.

KH: Who are the guests you have invited so far?

KM: So far, we have had eight sessions. The first artist was Tara Transitory aka One Man Nation, a Singaporean sound artist, and composer, who lived at that time, between Chiang Mai and Berlin. Transitory performed in the corridor of SAVVY, and her work extended into the gallery. She activated the whole space almost turning it into one huge vibrating speaker and pushed the audience to listen with the entire body, creating particular spatial and bodily sonic relationships between herself, the space and the listeners together.

The second guest was Audrey Chen, a Chinese/Taiwanese-American composer. In her contribution, she experimented with shifting the audience's attention to mundane repercussions in artistic practices and explored how her listening plays an integral role for the basis of her compositions. As an artist, she alludes to sounds that she experiences every day, and consequently during her performances blurs the line between abstract and physical spaces.

For the third session, we invited Lucretia Dalt and the visual artist Regina De Miguel, who presented a transtemporal exercise, focusing on speech, voice and transcultural communication, but also exploring ways to voice life-form entanglements, respectively on topics and conflicts that traverse cultures and geographies. We also invited Dayang Yraola, the curator and one of the key researchers around the work and archives of the Filipino pioneer composer and creative ethnomusicologist José Maceda, who died in 2004. Yraola has worked and known Maceda personally, and was humble enough to share and comment on his archive, but also conduct an extensive workshop into Maceda's musical philosophy and compositional techniques here in Berlin. It was the first time we had curated an exhibition which engaged with the historicity of listening.

Another of our listening sessions paid a special homage to the French composer and electronic music pioneer Éliane Radigue. It was a durational listening session, and

we invited a few musicians to engage with her legacy and perform her music over a span of three hours.

Carlos Gutiérrez and Tatiana López are from Bolivia, where they both work with the Experimental Orchestra of Indigenous Instruments (OEIN). During the listening sessions and a workshop, they told us stories about Bolivian music tradition and taught us how to build the Sikus, a traditional Andean panpipe, which was also used for a performance. They also specifically shed light on a very different history of composing contemporary music outside of the European art music tradition and aesthetic.

Jessica Ekomane Etoua is an artist that reflects on technology as a tool, the importance of referencing, archives and history in sound art and music making, and we really enjoyed the interesting discussions we had after her performance. Our last guest, for now, was Pamela Z, an American composer, sound and media artist, who is mainly known for her vocal improvisations and techniques, but also for her pioneering work in body synth. She presented a series of works spanning from the 90s to today in an exhibition entitled *Sonic Gestures*, and within the exhibition, she has also performed a more extensive repertoire of her works. The series is continuing, and we are all looking forward to meeting and learning from more inspiring artists.

KH: You have quite a special and diverse background: you were born in Poland, but you grew up in Cairo, and now you live in Berlin. When did you start thinking and researching about decolonization processes, and how did you start working with people of SAVVY?

KM: I am not sure if the process of decolonization has a starting and an ending point. I think it is rather a way of living and being. I could say that my earliest recollection could be related to my father's work in experimental theatres in Poland and Egypt, which of course engaged – in practice – with the decolonization of the Egyptian theatre, which as he argued, was built upon the imperial tradition of French and later British theatre practices. However, a lot of the learning, especially theoretically, I gained when I arrived at SAVVY, by coincidence. I met Antonia Alampi, one of the co-artistic directors of SAVVY already back in Cairo, where I lived before moving to Berlin in 2017.

At that time and until today, I was deeply invested in research around a composer, pioneer of electronic music, Pan-africanist and creative ethnomusicologist,

the Egyptian Halim El-Dabh, who has for too long lived in the footnotes of the Western musical avant-garde and history of electronic music. While researching his work and listening to his music, I realized how much knowledge is or was inaccessible to me. I realized how much knowledge never makes it through to those books and those narratives that create and sustain a certain scene, a certain canon. I didn't know anything about him; being an Egyptian living in Egypt my whole life, I didn't realize that electronic music could also be a history and tradition from Egypt, the Middle East, and from Africa. So I was quite disappointed, and naturally started thinking that it is also essential to challenge perceptions that we have about music.

In Berlin, Alampi asked me if I would like to engage with SAVVY and create this sound-based project there. I was curious about what we could do in an art space. How can sound and music exist and how can we create intersections between history, experientiality, art, and propose a critical discourse that listens elsewhere. I was of course inspired by the ideology of SAVVY and how it is committed to change, I wondered how could we do that in the category of music and sound art?

KH: The notion of 'untraining' claims that it is possible to train and change our process of listening. Do you have the impression that you achieve this goal?

KM: I would say that it is an ongoing quest, a hypothesis that we are invested in and with each session learn about realities that we might not have experienced before. The further we go with this project, the more we realize how difficult it actually is to achieve that claim. Maybe we should rephrase the term *un-training* into *re-training* to underline the aspect of playing with the idea of how to engage with different ways of telling stories? This change accounts not only for each individual but also for the institutions we are collaborating with.

My own interest as a curator is to ask how we as an art space can facilitate possibilities of *listening*. I try to break it down to the function of the listening *of* an institution versus listening *to* an institution and questioning how we embrace different possibilities of listening to a space and the space listening to us. I think the most crucial part of the project is this sort of self-reflectivity, of how listening can be a project of disruption of the normative, creating its own ecology of agencies and refusals.

KH: So, is the ‘untraining’ directed towards a changing of institutions rather than changing the individual process of listening?

KM: In my opinion, one of the elements of the Untraining the Ear project is reflecting on how we deal with each other as curators, artists, and audiences. SAVVY does work differently from other institutions, and therefore, we also improvise and make attempts at curating or facilitating spaces of exchange. As an art space, we are not well equipped, we are not a concert hall, nor are we a music venue or facility. We don’t want to be an event space which books artists, and rushes from one topic to the next, from one artist to the other, but rather maintain a conversation, a discursive programme, a strong language, and a specific regard on the world.

As a former crematorium, the building itself has a particular history with different qualities. Each space in itself carries a specific sound; it reverberates, it even listens by itself. In these surroundings we try to engage in fruitful and ongoing conversations with the artists, through which we can learn from each other. A difference from other institutions is that SAVVY is mainly funded on a project-to-project basis and not supported by the government to the extent that we can officially call ourselves an institution. Many of our team members work voluntarily or contribute their free time, passion and dedication to create publications, programmes, talks and screenings, in addition to our annual exhibition projects.

Our team at SAVVY is based on a broad collective of different individuals that also don’t necessarily have a Western institutional background. We rarely share the same values of much of the spaces in Berlin. We don’t share the same values of time in general, and of time concerning curating. We collaborate with various curators and producers and acquire new knowledge from different perspectives that we try to apply in the field of art and music. Most curatorial decisions are taken as a collective, and we spend much time conversing and researching, but also being extremely critical about our positions and privileges. For us, untraining and listening extends itself from the individual to the collective – from the singular into plural, as Adrianna Cavarero would underscore – it concerns the politics of listening and the politics of caring for each other, but also often crying for and with each other.

KH: Could you give an example of what you have learned from one of your artists?

KM: A good example is a collaboration which is now a friendship with Tara Transitory. With Transitory, I personally learned much about the importance of what is known as ‘backstage’ in the world of music, what happens before and after the ‘show’. I also started withdrawing myself further, as the curator in the public eye, towards gaining more focus for the intimate constellations with the artists, structuring the audiences’ experience and shaping spaces of listening. Meeting Transitory was quite interesting; almost everything before the session was a big debate, around all the topics we discussed here. Such as decolonization, a fetishization of the other, tokenism, expectation, whiteness in sound art and festivals across Europe, the decay of such institutions, and how can we do things differently, and engage with different sensibilities. So we entered a much more interesting and yet frail space of friendship, of sharing how we feel about this world; not necessarily sharing the same struggles *per se*, but rather creating contact zones in which we can *be* honest. Each session of Untraining the Ear teaches us about concerns and experiences and different ways of working together. With Transitory, we learned that we are more interested in the process than the actual event; it was more about practising what you preach, and it was a powerful position that Transitory has engaged with, which had a lasting influence on us and shifted the whole series into another way of curating and working with artists. The performances and concerts are manifestations of these relations, but this specific rhythm of production is maybe even more important.

KH: Talking about sharing experiences and histories, at SAVVY you have a big library with an extensive collection of books and documents from all around the world. I imagine that it is often used as a source of inspiration?

KM: Yes. Our SAVVY library, or SAVVY Doc, is what we call the backbone of our work because it contains an extensive collection of books and journals – non-Western writings that originate from all over the world. It is an exceptional place and also carries a unique history. Each book is there for a reason and carries a history of its journey into SAVVY. Many of our guests are artists and researchers, and very often before their presentations they come by, read through the books, but also quite often give us unique books that might be hard to come across in a regular library.

SAVVY Doc has also recently opened its doors to the public – the library, mainly curated and organized by Elena Quintarelli, Jasmina Al-Qaisi and Laura Klöckne,

is officially open on Tuesdays for reading. One primary concern of SAVVY is to offer the possibility for artists from Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America not only to perform but also to talk and to write down their history.

We want to engage with the possibility of inscribing knowledge – generally, writing history creates a position of power and privilege. In our society, writing history has fundamentally been taken away from us by Western notators. It is therefore crucial that we have books, we write them, we read them, and we share them. This archive becomes a space of performing and living the knowledge, de-objectifying the archive and the documents it contains into a living matter.

KH: When it comes to programming the series, how do you choose your artists and what is your curatorial strategy?

KM: Untraining the Ear is a collaboration of SAVVY Contemporary with Jan Rolf from the CTM Festival in Berlin and Marcus Gammel from Deutschlandfunk Kultur and their Radio Art programme *Klangkunst*, which is one of the series' crucial elements because the works are commissioned both for the space and for the radio, which automatically requires a different perspective on the work. The artists not only have to think about the radiophonic [element], but also try to engage with the idea of deconstructing or challenging radio art and its production formats. Around the world, we find multiple different radio formats and various approaches towards radio art, but still, when we hear the term radio art or the German term *Klangkunst*, we automatically associate it with a specific timeline and a few known names. With that collaboration, we are trying to bridge that situation and are glad to be supported by a profiled institution such as de DLF and the expertise of Marcus Gammel.

Our curatorial strategy is based on sharing expertise, on recommendations, and engaging with all sorts of networks and a collective process of thinking. After working with one artist, many new ideas and interesting questions arise out of the conversations, and we always ask our guests whom they would suggest as a next invitee.

Another interesting source of inspiration is the cooperation with the DAAD – Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst and their residency Artists-in-Berlin. Every year the programme invites interesting artists from different artistic disciplines for an up to one-year long residency in Berlin. Their former head of music,



Tape music pioneer Halim El-Dabh in Cairo, 1930s.

Julia Gerlach, helped us to reach out to Carlos Guitérrez and Tatiana López from Bolivia, who at that time were staying at the residency in Berlin.

One of our biggest concerns at SAVVY is creating more possibilities of 'aware listening' in which unknown, less privileged or less fortunate artists find a place to present their work in a city like Berlin; and not only invite people that are already part of other well-known channels.

KH: Since SAVVY is, first of all, an art gallery, what difference does it make to curate a music- and sound-based series in comparison to an event of visual art in the context of decolonization? How do music and sound have the possibility to be part of the process of decolonization?

KM: Since time immemorial, we are bound to rely mostly on our visual abilities to experience, and validate our surrounding through seeing. How would we perceive our world if we relied on our ears too? I think music, listening, and sound are crucial because they give you a different history and a different perspective.

With our listening sessions, we would like to use our ears to gain knowledge. I think there is a lag when thinking about sound arts in specific and contemporary music scenes in terms of decolonization. Even in countries such as Egypt, where sound is one of the prime sources of communication, most music that is being performed is in the context of a hall, the opera house, or highly classical European venues built during imperial times. I think there is more to be done; at least we need to open the conversation on decolonizing musical institutions much more openly and sincerely.

Secondly, it is necessary to challenge the art institutions in which the visual still dominates, in which the sonic is still considered as a footnote to the visual. I'm talking specifically about art galleries and institutions in which the majority of the curation is focusing on visual art. This is quite challenging because it would require a fundamental shift in thinking also *through* sound, it would encourage curators to create different approaches and methods in their exhibition-making, which includes different ways of exhibiting sound. To include sound does not mean to just add a set of headphones, or an isolated event, or to curate a sound art-only zone for a work. It would rather be much more interesting to engage with the experience of sound, and also the technical tools needed to embrace that experience.

During the colonization of the region, and the transcriptions of both music and sounds into Western formats such as notation systems, as well as the fixation of the written, we have been attuned to a specific mode of vision and validation of the world. It shows us the dimension of how colonizers treated sound abroad, treated musical traditions abroad and of course, how the looking also occupied the listening. In this regard, reading and writing can be seen as an elitist way of narrating and experiencing the world, notably because it excludes the sonic environment and other ways of transcending and sharing. If we think about that in the context of exhibition-making, I find it very interesting that we are still lagging in understanding sound. Sometimes I would hear a comment of someone saying that sound is not their expertise, but I think that sound is no one's and everyone's expertise. In SAVVY, we talk a lot about creating different rhythms for exhibition-making, of how to integrate different senses into the art space and not isolate them.

Further information about the Untraining the Ear: Listening Sessions: <https://savvy-contemporary.com/en/projects/2019/untraining-the-ear-listening-sessions-1/>

Katja Heldt is a musicologist, author and music manager based in Berlin. She studied musicology in Cologne, Berlin and Montréal and her research specialized in transculturality and decolonization in new music. She writes as an author for music magazines such as *Positionen*, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, *Dissonance* and *circuit – musiques contemporaines*. She works for the festivals Darmstadt Summer Courses and Donaueschinger Musiktage and is project manager of the research projects DEFAGMENTATION – Curating Contemporary Music and Donaueschingen Global.

Kamila Metwaly, born in Warsaw in 1984, is a music journalist, electronic musician and curator based between Berlin and Cairo. Metwaly founded an independent art and culture publication in Egypt, which specialized in music, arts, and cultural writings from 2004 to 2009. Later, she worked in radio and the independent film scene, maintaining a strong presence in Cairo's cultural and activist scenes for many years. Since 2014, Metwaly has specialized in music journalism for various independent Egyptian and Arab publications.

In 2017, Metwaly joined SAVVY Contemporary and is currently curating an ongoing sound project titled *Untraining the Ear: Listening Sessions*. She has been involved with various sound-based exhibition projects in the space, including *What Has All This Got To Do With Coconuts And Rice: A Listening Exhibition on José Maceda*, *We Have Delivered Ourselves from the Tonal: Of, With, Towards, on Julius Eastman*; and has co-curated a retrospective exhibition *The Dog Done Gone Deaf: Exploring The Sonic Cosmologies of Halim El-Dabh* with Bonaventure Ndikung in the Dak'Art Biennale in Senegal (2018). She has been appointed as a guest music researcher for the Donaueschingen New Music festival 2021 edition.

Affirmative Critique

Patrick Frank

Translation: Wieland Hoban

1. Affirm what you thematize

The term 'affirmation' has been given a variety of meanings in philosophy and in the arts. What is referred to also in logic as affirmation, namely a positive statement that something is the case – such as the sentence 'Zurich is a clean city' – was extrapolated by Adorno¹ to apply to the social: for him, acting and living affirmatively meant uncritically affirming the reality of life. Adorno profoundly distrusted the conformist mentality often associated with affirmative speech. He vehemently opposed such an attitude to life and showed how, in its interplay with the culture industry, it also left its mark on art. Hence Adorno's understanding of affirmation is not a logical-descriptive definition, but a moral one: *you must* critically oppose the totality of capitalist-controlled life. Because he considered 'affirmation' a sign of that conformist mindset, the term 'affirmation' appears in the most diverse contexts. He writes, 'During the first phase of Romanticism, an artist like Schubert, who was later so exploited by affirmation [...];² Among the human rights of those who foot the bill of culture is to polemically oppose the affirmative, ideological totality';³ 'Works that are pleasing to the affirmative ideology',⁴ and so forth. Adorno subsumes everything under the concept of 'affirmation' that characterizes a powerless, alienated society guided by habit and the pursuit of pleasure, and its subjects. Because of the significance Adorno still enjoys in New Music, the Adornian spell of the concept of affirmation continues to be in effect there to this day. That 'affirmation' need not automatically be uncritical is demonstrated by Nietzsche's philosophy, however: his life-affirming philosophy, which opposes all escapism – whether through religious concepts of the hereafter or philosophical concepts of metaphysics – understands 'affirmation' first of all as a fundamental embracing of what constitutes our life: we and our mysteriously functioning body (which Nietzsche gave primacy over reason) in the face of approaching death, from which there is no escape.

2. Expose yourself consistently to affirmation, i.e. –

Our interpretation of the concept of affirmation, by contrast, is not a moral one – we do not know what *you must do*, and are not concerned with this. 'Affirmation' here re-approaches the descriptive use of the term and first of all describes the direction of movement of the (compositional) material that can develop a critical effect *today*. Since critique is intended, and thus addresses social matters, a moral option is *eo ipso* implicit; this does not, however, lead directly to the choice of which compositional material should be preferred and which denounced. The categories of 'abstraction' and 'concretion' are no longer easy to define; atonal is no more 'abstract' to our ears than tonal music is 'concrete' (to use a very simplified example). Rather, abstraction and concretion are determined in relation to their contexts.

3. Learn to affirm what you normally negate, i.e. –

Artists do not invent material; they find and (re)shape it. Every found material is taken from a context – whether material gained from a tradition native to art or material derived from non-artistic disciplines, activities or habits. But the context, which clings to the respective material as the atmosphere clings to the earth, cannot be erased:

there is no 'pure' material devoid of context. Certainly, however, the context is often concealed beneath the visible and audible surface of the material. Whether it is given attention, is explored and influences artistic thought and work is another matter.

We agree with the statement that 'only [the] vividness [of the sensuously unmediated] reflects the gaplessness and roundedness of artworks'.⁵ Affirmative thought abandons the assumption that it can positively or negatively influence vividness or intelligibility. We are in the enviable situation of being able to make the abstract seem concrete and vice versa. This only succeeds, however, if the context is brought out of its hiding-place: something concrete from an alien context seems abstract in our own one, just as something abstract from our own speaks concretely to us as a consequence of the familiar and the habitual.

4. Seek out painful affirmation.

The aim to address and criticize social matters remains. But the method has changed: because affirmative and negative strategies are equally valid, possibilities open up for new affirmative strategies that augment the familiar ones of irony and subversion. Negativistic and affirmative strategies can be schematically represented using the three categories of *presentation*, *intention* and *relation*.

Presentation refers on the one hand to the material of what is presented, and on the other hand to the manner of presentation.

Intention refers to the aim of the presenter. As the present reflections concern the examination of *critical* strategies, intention is always 'critical', initially negative.

Relation refers here to the connection between presentation and intention: in so far as the critical element forms part of the presentation, the relation between presentation and intention lies in making the aim of the presentation transparent; then we describe the relation as 'transparent'.

If the critical aim is concealed in the presentation, the relation is described as 'non-transparent'.

5. Seek out the self-evident and negate it affirmatively.

First, regarding (1) irony: the affirmative aspect concerns what is presented ironically. A specific content is presented – affirmed, in the language-logical sense – even though a negation is intended by means of ironization. The ironization in turn refers to the critical intention, which means that the relation between presentation and intention is transparent.

In (2) subversion, the affirmative aspect not only presents the content, but also the performative element of the actual presentation of content: the conveyor of content corresponds both in content and appearance (looks, behaviour, language, etc.) with what is *covertly* negated. The decisive difference – for our purposes – between irony and subversion lies in the relation between the presented and intended sides of the critique: for subversion, it is central that the negative intention remains hidden; in this sense, the relation between presentation and intention is non-transparent.

A third variety of affirmative critique has differentiated itself in roughly the last twenty years, first in the political sphere, then in an adapted form in the arts: (3) hyperaffirmation – structurally a hybrid of irony and subversion. In hyperaffirmation, the affirmed is not only presented, but *maximized* in its presentation using varying procedures. The goal of this specific maximalism is to push the affirmed to the point where it switches to the intended negation. What is critically intended is carried out performatively (affirmed), but in a maximized fashion (hyperaffirmed), in such a way that the absurdity and wrongness of the criticized are broken open. On the presentation side, in the field of art, this is a performative affirmation, like subversion; because



In use of the affirmative manifesto: Program choice and context (nature) affirms the underlying topic (parts from Nietzsche's affirmative philosophy). Scene from part 1, Incarnation. Stadtwald, Zürich, 2019.

of the tendency towards maximalism, we refer to it as a maximalist-performative affirmation. The relation, however, as in irony, is transparent; hence it is transparent that critique is intended. In its artistic form, hyperaffirmation can be read as a radicalization of irony, as *postmodern irony without irony*.

6. Compose with affirmations and negations; affirmative composition does not exclude negations

(0) Negation

Presentation and intention: negation; relation: transparent. Exclusion of the negated.

(1) Irony

Presentation: ironized affirmation; intention: negation; relation: transparent. Inclusion of the negated.

(2) Subversion

Presentation: performative affirmation; intention: negation; relation: non-transparent. Inclusion of the negated.



In use of the affirmative manifesto: Program choice and context (500th anniversary of H. Zwingli's) specifically confirms the underlying topic. Final scene from *Und was erlöst uns heute?*, Gessnerallee Zurich, 2018.

(3) Hyperaffirmation

Presentation: maximalist-performative affirmation; intention: negation; relation: transparent. Inclusion of the negated.

One can generally observe that affirmative strategies include the negated (criticized) in the material, while negativistic strategies exclude the negated from the material.

7. Seek out complexity in affirmations.

The application of the strategies for affirmative critique outlined schematically above, which often reveal themselves in practice as hybrids of irony, subversion and hyperaffirmation, are not only of concern to artists. We have known at least since Foucault, who characterized critique as 'the art of not being quite so governed', that critiques directly or indirectly thematize power structures. Curators in New Music, a relatively small number of individuals who run long-standing and important festivals more or less as the sole decision-makers, hold considerable power.

Curators and artists are connected by a hierarchical power structure. The curator gives the artist the chance to present their art; it is the artist's task to design the work and the curator's task to design the (festival) programme. The traditional hierarchy can only be upheld if the boundaries of the work and the (festival) programme are clearly separate. Both curators and artists play with those boundaries; the result is that the roles of 'artist' and 'curator' become more fluid: the curator becomes an artist and the artist a curator. If a curator carefully stages performances of the complete string quartets by Shostakovich in different spaces, played by several string quartets, he or she adopts the mindset of an artist.⁶ If a composer receives a commis-

sion and decides that the work they present requires further premieres by other composers (and they choose these themselves), he or she becomes a subversive artist-curator.⁷

Curators both support and do not support composers' careers. They support – simplistically put – what is considered worthy of support. In terms of the categories outlined above, this means that the curator supports (affirms) what they judge as worthy of affirmation. As a consequence of thinking artistically, curators could apply the outlined affirmative thinking more extensively to curation. It will not have escaped the attentive reader that the headings here have been spread across the text and are not directly connected to it. Headings 1-10 are to be understood as an *affirmative manifesto* and can be applied to curatorial work:

8. Your taste is not a judge: if your topic demands it, affirm music that you negate.

The strategies of irony, subversion and hyperaffirmation include (affirm) the criticized (negated). In concrete terms, this can mean that a curator might affirm what they are *actually* negating – that they choose something for presentation that they would reject for aesthetic, political or other reasons. But why should they do so?

Let me give an example from my artistic-curatorial work. The Zurich Ensemble Tzara invited me to curate the programme for their 2019-20 season. Because I am not a curator, however, I turned down the curatorial assignment – but carried it out nonetheless, compositionally. I declared the curatorial task a meta-composition; it consisted of several compositions, performed at three 'concerts' referred to here as 'parts'. The meta-composition (the season programme) is entitled *Das Glück des*



In use of the affirmative manifesto: From *Freiheit – die eutopische Gesellschaft*, scene from the *subcontract* to T. Reinholdtsen. Gessnerallee Zurich, 2016.

Ja-Sagens, consisting of *Menschwerdung* (Part 1), *Affirmations* (Part II) and *Das Glück des Nein-Sagens* (Part III). The meta-composition is based on a chapter from Deleuze's book about Nietzsche (*Nietzsche and Philosophy*), 'Knowledge, Morality and Religion'. I transposed these three fields to New Music – how did they manifest themselves there? Religion became the imperative of truth, morality became the imperative of critique and knowledge became the imperative of structure.⁸ These subjects led to the choice of works, concert locations, texts and performance. In order to present the given subject artistically, it was also necessary to have performances of works that I would not *actually* have performed for musical reasons.

All speech thematizes (includes) what is criticized; not to affirm it but, on the contrary, to negate it through exposition. If curation is understood as speech, or as the narration of a story, it is logical to enrich the story with points 3, 4 or 5 of the affirmative manifesto (no story without a villain!): 3. *Learn to affirm what you normally negate, i.e. – 4. Seek out painful negation, 6. Curate with Affirmations and negations; affirmative curation does not exclude negations – etc.*

9. Your taste is your judge: you decide how the music you negate should sound.

The automatic assumption, especially in New Music, that a work is composed by *one* author, shows a clearly attributable authorship determined by a clearly defined beginning and end to the work – framed by the ritual of applause – cannot be aesthetically justified.⁹ Rather, this perpetuates the tradition of the primacy of the *genius*: they stand out from the crowd of working composers and must develop alone and purely, undisturbed by the all-too-worldly. Yet where the ghost of genius lives on, all the hopes placed in genius also live on: it paints a musical picture of truth more directly than any philosophy could conceptually define it. In this picture, it is serious and hates humour; it is male; but above all, it must be pure: that is why it cannot embark on experiments with others. We suspect that here too, the negativistic-exclusionary perspective reveals itself: negation and exclusion of the other in order to preserve purity.

If we turn our view towards an inclusion of the negated as an *affirmative-critical* act, automatic aesthetic assumptions begin to shift. And that's the point – to challenge aesthetic thought through a shift of perspective. It is anything but easy to artistically present the paradoxical – the affirmation of the negated – *as* paradoxical. If no questions arise, if the paradoxical is weak or undeveloped, the side of intended negation vanishes and the (ironic, subversive, hyperaffirmative) affirmation is simply a plain affirmation – and loses all critical force. When it comes to the success of affirmative critique, nothing is certain.

10. Seek out hidden affirmations and uncover them.

Notes

1 He is still considered the philosophical-aesthetic reference for New Music.

2 Theodor Adorno: *Ästhetische Theorie*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, S. 66.

3 Ebda., S. 78.

4 Ebda., S. 162.

5 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), p. 95 (translation modified).

6 See Wien Modern 2017, with the curator-artist Bernhard Günter.

7 See the 'theory opera' *Freiheit – die eutopische Gesellschaft* by the artist-curator Patrick Frank, 2015-2016.

8 I am currently working on a book whose aim is to deconstruct New Music from a Nietzschean perspective. There too, the starting point will be the aforementioned chapter by Deleuze.

9 Damit sei nicht behauptet, singuläre Autorschaft sei obsolet; vielmehr liegt für die Neue Musik erhebliches Potential brach, welches Multiautorschaften mit sich bringen.

Born 1975 in Rio de Janeiro, **Patrick Frank** is a composer and cultural theorist. For 15 years has been creating art projects dealing with contemporary issues: *SEIN / NICHTS* (2003), *Project Limina – zur Indifferenz in Kunst* (2007), *the law of quality* (2010), *Project wir sind aussergewöhnlich* (2013), theory opera *Freiheit, die eutopische Gesellschaft* (2015), for the 500 anniversary of Zwingli's *Und was erlöst uns heute?* (2016), curation / meta-composition of the season programme of the ensemble Tzara, Zurich: *Das Glück des Ja-Sagens* (2019–20).

He has conducted workshops at the Darmstadt Summer Courses 2016 and 2018, held numerous lectures at festivals of New Music and has regularly published cultural theoretical texts in *Positionen*, *MusikTexte*, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, *dissonance*. Currently is writing his PhD at the Collegium Helveticum, Cultural Analysis at the University of Zurich with Prof. Sylvia Sasse.

He has received numerous prizes, including from the city of Zurich (2007). He also operates the only existing analogue photo machines in Switzerland.

Who Owns Asian Culture? Not Me Du Yun

I don't really know what Asian Culture is. Who owns Asian Culture? Who can be its Ambassador?

Culture is an ever-evolving state of mind. My name and my background don't give me automatic claim to ownership or authority. As an artist and curator, I'm not interested in import or export, but instead want to encourage deep collaborations—cross-regional ones.

I'm also tired of the saying "East meets West"—I would have thought we have met enough times throughout history. When land has been lost and land has been gained, someone else's land dissipates. Despite people migrating from their homes, people migrating between countries and nations, and people being born into refugee camps, our cultural memory is something that persistently thrives and is not easily erased.

Our collective future interests me. What you hear and see is exactly the heritage of a future. What we are making is a lineage for the present. And this present, however challenging in all its splendor and all its agony, is our honor for many generations to come.

Cultural Ownership

Our children—from New York City to Fergana Valley, from Shanghai to Waghan Valley, from Tibet to Hindu Valley to Berlin—all have equal claim to their curiosity to all things that have been created before their time. We cannot suppress their curiosity by 'purifying' our traditions. Curiosity, by nature, means learning something by touching and making errors. And, most importantly, by being allowed to touch and experiment with such errors. There is no such thing as 'pure traditions.' In the case of vast ancient Chinese operas, it has always been a by-product of cultural and linguistic clashes and assimilations. In the case of *ragas*, from their historical provenance in the Pre-Islamic period, and subsequent migration through space and time (Arabia, Persia, Central Asia, Indo-Pakistani desert and the global South Asian diaspora), its migration through genres, forms, and techniques, by both genders and in settings both devotional and secular, has always manifested itself.

It often alarms me that we pride ourselves in saying this is a multicultural encounter, branding such multicultural hybridity into one umbrella of ready-to-sell products put on stage to create a dialogue through the act of curation. And curating can be a dangerous thing. It's as if one is to operate a water-gate that allows energy to pour down on an audience. Oh, yes – that word is 'gatekeeper.'

But again, we have also the rigidity of cultural sovereignty. In fact, a too-thoughtful plan will only sanctify ideas bred in a region. That which allows us our defense can also cause our bruises. Culture has a tremendous inertia. In some communities and societies, culture endured because it worked for the community. Yet sometimes, the inertia of culture strangles innovation in the crib.

It's often a conversation about how to build on mutual trust and respect: taking into account the fundamental (and often impossible) knowledge of traditions, while still allowing a certain freedom to incubate new ideas and spirits, while not afraid to make mistakes or encountering a backlash.



Du Yun and Ali Sethi at the dress rehearsal of the world premiere *Where We Lost Our Shadows*, London Southbank Centre in January 2019

Curating is a place of ever-growing confluence, conflict, assimilation, clash, and cultivating a land of what Homi Bhabha called ‘Third Space’ in his book *The Location of Culture*, referring to the interstices between colliding cultures, a liminal space ‘which gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation.’¹ In this ‘in-between’ space, new cultural identities are formed and reborn. It is the gap, the transgression, the break, the lacuna, that act as a foil to the narrative implicit in time. Existing in this nexus of perpetual becoming, the thought process is never on one polarity or another.

Monopolistic Values

Aesthetics are as subjective as the notion of art itself. Aesthetics and their subsequent context go in and out of fashion in every decade. Some artists are interested in violating the preciousness of the folk tradition as an equivalent to what might be considered an anti-heroic gesture. At the same time, the meticulous care taken through process, labour, time, traditional skills, technical virtuosity and formalism are just as, if not more, vibrant than what might be called ‘experimental music’. Despite investment in understanding and studying the folk tradition, we should be equally irreverent, disrupting it in many unorthodox ways. If we were to equate ‘beauty’ with ‘authenticity’, a subversive attitude – one that is open to contamination – would most accurately define our relationship to it.

Conceptually, metaphorically, and in terms of process, the contradictory nature of tradition is as much about accumulation as removal. Layers are built and abraded; paths are preserved, their history etched in the work itself. As folk traditions become stale, the contemporary transitions to antiquity. And so, these definitions are significant. How one defines what is ‘folk music’, what is ‘contemporary music’, and what is ‘experimentation’, in turn defines the work that claims a relationship to it. Examination of the canon and the discourse is critical. New ways of resonance will emerge.

The Tyranny of Contemporary Music

As part of re-examining the canon, we should also understand music is not just about scales, timbres, harmonies and textures. Music has long been used as a spiritual guide, a beacon for human activities and connections. By reducing music to only these bare theoretical bones, I don’t see music any more; rather, just the fragments of a beautiful

whole. What if we study how people who live in a particular locale practise these arts? Make music? And (bear with me) keep experimenting with such practices?

Experimentation is a necessary part of exploring the humanity of tradition. Maybe sometimes mistakes should be encouraged. Risks should definitely be embraced and celebrated – risks that also include economically miscalculated ones, including outreach to the audience. Yet, when you actually do reach out, especially as an organization which does not usually represent a certain group of people, you are selling the stories to a community who might only resonate with a fraction of their cultural memory, but not their current life status. Current lives are often messy and never as wonderfully packaged as they may seem. A didactic, abraded representation can only be insulting, if not laughable.

When we have understood the lineage of an artistic practice, a dialogue can begin. Examination of the canon and the discourse surrounding what constitutes that canon is important. For the spirit to grow, new ways of contextualizing become necessary, and we have to risk our sense of self in the process.

Just as the definition of the West should be shattered, the tyranny of defining ‘contemporary works’ should be rejected. The European tradition of composed music emphasizes notation; hence the composer assumes a significant role. The audience for this tradition of music creation almost functions as a score follower; here, notation drives the experience of audience and performers alike. In many types of music rooted in oral traditions, the person documenting the music is invited into the process, creating the music together with the master musicians in the same place. The audience then becomes an inseparable part of the experience. To open the knowledge base to all is to open a wild vulnerability. The more artists and musicians involved in creating, experimenting, and sharing knowledge, the more one can peer over the precipice of creation into a thinly, but brilliantly illuminated locus as we risk our sense of self together.

This is why betrayals of body and mind that threaten to erase our character and memory remain among our most awful tortures. The battle of being mortal is the battle to maintain the integrity of one’s life: to avoid becoming so diminished, or dissipated, or subjugated that who you are becomes disconnected from who you were, or who you want to be. And cultural memory is included in the same thing. How we keep this integrity moving forward is vital to the human spirit.

Allowing for Experimentation

It is said that in China there are more than 300 regional opera styles. At the end of summer 2017, I brought a team with me to Xinchang, south of Zhejiang Province. *Diaoqiang*, one of the oldest Chinese opera styles dating back to the Ming Dynasty (around 1330 CE), originated there. In summer 2019, I went to China’s Anhui province to visit the Huangmei Opera Troupe, and to interview the 92-year-old opera composer Shi Bailin, who invented the opera style particular to that region. The Huangmei style takes its name from the folk tunes of Huangmei County in Hubei Province. According to Shi, a Western orchestra was not available to him in 1950s Anhui. So he freely borrowed local folk tunes, pairing them with modern orchestration techniques that he learned on a two-year exchange programme at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, to be performed by orchestras comprised solely of Chinese instruments. The result was a spellbinding new opera style called Huangmei Opera that has been made into films. The Huangmei Opera has been massively popular in China because, though dialect-based, it is easy to understand in addition to satisfying traditional operatic form. In travelling to places like Xinchang and the Anhui province in my home country, as well as Palestine, the United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Mongolia, and Cambodia, I have often found that most traditional folk artists are eager to

introduce their traditions, to showcase the sophistication of each style that they have learned for their entire lives, and to show audiences the hidden, secret meanings of its provenance. But it often stops at that introduction. How do we craft new works that reflect today's world using these traditions?

In today's world, where our sexuality, the dynamics of our geo-political boundaries, and clashes between economic classes have been shifted, the mould of gender practices, storytelling in gender roles, and 'who gets to practise what' are still quite rigid in many regions of the world. The barrier between us and others must be shattered. At the same time, the barrier between us and ourselves should also be re-examined.

One method of shattering these barriers is to encourage artists who are not from a particular region to create new works using regional practices and knowledge. No one bats an eyelid when Chinese kids play the piano, or when Korean composers write symphonies. The question, however, seems to remain: how do we encourage more people out of a particular cultural heritage to not only adapt, but *create*, as if that language is one's own language?

How do we negotiate between being averse to taking the time for a deep introduction to a cultural heritage, and the guilt of creating something without fully belonging? How do we communicate such a need to the artists within a community? The artists who might think 'you don't understand' or 'you don't get that nuance and subtlety'? The first phase of creating a hybrid language involves confronting these questions. And to do so, we need to think beyond scale and modality.

I used to think the Chinese language was not best suited for rap – rap was too tonal. Then, in 2000, it took one young kid, Zhou Jielun (Jay Chou) from Taiwan to experiment with the tones of the Mandarin language. Since then, rapping has swept the whole nation. In 2017, national TV broadcast the live show *The Rap of China*. The overtly powerful popularity of rap has become deeply embedded into today's young Chinese generation. One very exciting example for me is that we begin to see regional rap battles where dialects meet, and artists keep experimenting with these dialects by using traditional poetic terms to paint a contemporary life lived in China. The hybrid arts gain such an organic fluidity, so that people encounter it as if it has always been there, rather than a practice that has recently entered the mainstream. There is no 'pure tradition'. Pure tradition often reflects how people experience life within their community. The youngest generation will always make adaptations to their lifestyle, and with equal claim to their world.

Curating is Not a Tour Guide

Unlike many traditional music styles, I have often felt our music-making has looked away from the spiritual quest. Its own spirit is no longer aligned with the region of the people, like an outdated 'Lonely Planet' guide where one cannot find the appropriate entry point to the stories told, even for the local young generation. To an extent, in today's classical music world, folk traditions have become 'lost in translation'. Because folk music doesn't have a composer, it seems as if the material is ready-made. Yet it is not the case that folk practitioners 'don't write music'. These traditions come from generations of people who write and practise music day-in and day-out. Nothing is ready-made.

Deep collaboration is inviting people to let go of the insecurity of not knowing each other well enough. In my practice, it's always about letting go of insecurity in a way that opens conversation and invites all parties into a dialogue. In my experience, sometimes it takes many years of effort to make one idea happen.

In an article for *The New Yorker*, South African scholar and librarian Peter Van der Merwe attempts to address why the popular music of the twentieth century

sounds the way it does. He notes it was often Islamic song traditions that acted as the connecting tissue in the history of music.² Just as people migrate, storytelling narratives travel with the people who carry them. These narratives are never clean, and should never be understood as abbreviated talking points.

I have collaborated with Ali Sethi, a Pakistani singer based in Lahore, on multiple projects. Ali was taught by both Ustad Naseeruddin Saami and Farida Khanum, both revered singers in Indo-Pakistani classical music. In conversing with Ali, we exchanged the idea of the Islamic principle of one god, the idea that 'one' is actually not a limitation, that 'one' is actually an invitation to eternity. When you envision a 'one' that accommodates everyone and everything, then you can find multiple interpretations and multiple truths within that 'one'. So actually when you split it up into, say, two, or three, or four, that is when you get into issues of finitude – finite duality, or contradiction, or conflict, or assimilation. That this is Indian, or this is Pakistani.

Future Tradition

In experimenting with folk traditions, what if we invited a manifestation of the 'one' into our creative practice? It allows us to really explore our subjectivity. No note is false to the interpretation. Everything has a root to grow. For instance, the *taanbura* is a corruption of the original word, which is *tambura*. It has the same root as 'tambourine', with its origins in a Turkic instrument made from a pumpkin. But one thing I found very interesting is that the sound of *tamboura* is essentially not one sound. Its sound has so many complexities and layers to what seems like a single sound, to where its entirety exists between the affirmative one-ness born to complexity.

We have analyzed the overtones, microtonal systems, and the cloud of the 'sonority' as a composing tool. Nowadays in contemporary classical music, we composers can use the cent to notate and dictate the microtonal pitches in precision. But we have failed to examine why that cloud of sonority was used in the first place. Historically, it functioned as a means to the divinity, to understand the universe, to find the precision within the elegance of an energy that is larger than ourselves. That everything is existing in between this. And in-between-ness existed in this vast universe. In such a world, spirituality for me is really about awareness, vigilance; transcending partisanship by constantly questioning one's own assumptions. Redrawing another space of the individuating techniques of the personal-is-the-political; the world-in-the-home.

In talking with collaborators like Ali Sethi and people who work in humanitarian crisis relief, I have learned that there is a difference between the words *Muhajireen* and *Musafereen*, where *Muhajireen* is 'refugees, migrants', and *Musafereen* is 'travellers'. Those two words exist in Urdu as well, in exactly the same way, and this duality is what translates to performance and crosses boundaries.

To Ali, dualities shed light on how, through the very act of travelling and migration, through refugees and migrants – his ancestors were refugees from the Mongol invasions 700 years ago – we still live with these stories. His ancestors came through Central Asia, through Persia, and into the subcontinent, and his family still keeps this history very much alive.

Music has made Ali especially sensitive to these linkages, to the point of insisting that such linkages are vital. He told me:

'They're not just abstract linkages. They allow us to emotionally connect, and to find those parts of ourselves, either through philosophies, or through the travelling of motifs and language, or through sounds, physical instruments like the *tamboura*. The fact that this is shared history enables linkages in our present and our future. It makes the possibility of conversation more creative, allows you to be more creative in how you think of yourself as part of a community in

the world. So, that moment for me when I thought, There are these ragas which are right now which would be classified as “Indian Classical”. But there’s already a complication with that because I’m Pakistani. I don’t belong in India. I don’t get a visa to go to India. So what am I doing with these ragas in the first place?’

Out of the conventional, and into the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent. But then the moment you think of that, it’s like, what is Indo-Pakistan? It’s made up of thousands of years – It’s made up! It’s made up of thousands of years of conquest, of interaction between the Dutch, the French, the British, Arabs, Persians, Turks. It goes back to the earliest of civilizations, so one is simultaneously inhabiting all of these disparate selves and communities. For Ali,

‘That assumption certainly, in my experience, comes from different kinds of audiences sometimes, so that those who think that I should be representing them have a certain set of assumptions about what I should be representing, and those who think that I am “other” also have a set of assumptions about what I should be representing or doing. What I’m seeing myself creating in this story of travel, of exile, of displacement, of many kinds of movement, is exploring not only what those words mean, but also updating the musical language. So I’m updating my own classical, Indian, Eastern, Pakistani musical self, and saying that it’s more dynamic than I have been allowed to think. It’s not conceptual for me. My musical tradition apparently does not belong to me because I am not allowed to go to India. India won’t accept me.’

So how do we embrace artists who practise the cultural means who are not from the region? Curating is not an process of ‘mix-and-match’, of branding under a theme and glossed ‘Instagrammable’ filter. Defy a theme and defy the myth of a concept. Defy the myth of curators’ ownership over their broad curatorial statements and their featured artists they select. It has to come from understanding the absolute necessity, understanding why every moment, every element should come and how they converse with each other. It should not just subscribe to a *mode du jour*, or fit into one man-made category, because then it just leaves you feeling good while being a tourist in someone else’s lineage, history and agony. These borderlines – whether aesthetic, political, economic, or social – are all man-made with the intention of examining the layers of history embedded within a cultural zone.

Not an Ending

What matters to me more as a practising artist is to connect with communities and other artists. To be an artist is to share the divinity of what makes us human, and to curate is to invite more people into dialogue, allowing that incompleteness of understanding to happen. And I believe just to know that is allowed to happen is also a huge freedom, a sense of humility, and submission to each other’s divine spirit. We are not here to find a panacea to cure us all. This is not about coming together, but to provoke – and to provoke us back too. Curating in today’s world should not be a doctrinal megaphone for an aesthetic and a trend. I never thought it should present *us* to *them*, because once you position yourself that way, you become that paradigm. And to be alive is to be appreciating that state of in-between-ness at all times, of being more than an animal, or plant, or more advanced animal capable of reckoning, but always being less than perfect. And that incompleteness is where all beauty, morality, struggle, and knowledge lie: all the highlights of the human experience are born inside that incomplete-ness. In our musical concepts and our social dynamics, it is essential to have incompleteness – a treatment versus a cure.

Without the blank space, you will never get the full picture. Such blankness, silence in thinking, acknowledging its inherent chaos, is a nod to mortality. There is a Chinese saying that being a human, unlike the trees, you have to move so you will thrive and it will be easier to see the roots. Folk-tradition art, no matter what the provenance, may seem on the surface to have many rules and restrictions; these limitations are often added later.

To me, these liminal spaces where experimentation happens are the most purified divinity that the human species has been hungry for, no matter where you come from.

Who owns culture? Not you. Not me. It is here, an ever-evolving presence to be created and lived together.

Notes

1 Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, 2006 (1994).

2 John Jeremiah Sullivan, 'Rhiannon Giddens and What Folk Music Means.' *The New Yorker*.

Known for her 'relentless originality and unflinching social conscience' (*The New Yorker*), **Du Yun** works at the intersection of orchestral, opera, chamber music, theatre, cabaret, musical, oral tradition, public performances, electronics, visual arts and noise. Her second opera, *Angel's Bone* (libretto by Royce Vavrek) won the 2017 Pulitzer Prize; in 2018 she was named a Guggenheim Fellow; and in 2019 she was nominated for a Grammy Award in the Best Classical Composition category. An avid performer and bandleader (OK Miss), she has appeared in many assorted holes and halls, sites and museums. Her onstage persona has been described by the *New York Times* as 'an indie pop diva with an avant-garde edge'.

Du Yun is currently Professor of Composition at the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University and distinguished visiting professor at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music.

As a curator, she was a founding member of the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE); served as the Artistic Director of MATA Festival (2014–18); conceived the Pan Asia Sounding Festival (National Sawdust); and founded a FutureTradition Initiative in China where she works with folk musicians from around the world in order to champion more cross-regional collaborations. In 2018, Du Yun was named one of 38 Great Immigrants by the Carnegie Foundation.

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Executive Editor
 Dorothee Richter

Editors at Large
 Dorothee Richter, Ronald Kolb

Editor Issue 44
 Lars Petter Hagen, Rob Young

Editorial Coordination
 Katja Heldt

Contributors
 Heloisa Amaral, Patrick Frank, Kennth Goldsmith,
 Lars Petter Hagen, Katja Heldt, George Lewis,
 Kamila Metwaly, Du Yun

Proofreading
 Stephanie Carwin

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