

No Cure: Curating Musical Practices



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Anja Wernicke

No Cure: Curating Musical Practices

Editorial by Anja Wernicke and Michael Kunkel

Cultural practitioners in the field of contemporary music find themselves in a complex situation. On the one hand, there is obviously a great aesthetic freedom of “anything goes.” On the other hand, there is a fast pace of renewing social and political discourses at work. And in between, there are audiences who become more fragmented, hard to track down, and less willing to commit. Institutions seem to be crumbling and losing power (which is welcome), but it also leaves freelance musicians with a lot of responsibility of their own. They are in charge of conceiving and implementing meaningful projects, including administrating and organizing, as well as staying on top of current social, political, and scientific discourses. They must keep an eye on their career development and their professionalization. They are often in a leadership position in middle-size companies. Furthermore, they should not lose their playful, critical, artistic spirit that inspires their peers and audiences.

How is it possible to fulfill all these tasks at once when the professional training of musicians provides little to no space for these kinds of issues, leaving young musicians unprepared and exposed to a difficult learning-by-doing or trial-and-error process in the early stages of their careers.

Of course, curating is not the ultimate solution, let alone some miraculous cure to all of this. But when ten young practitioners from the field of contemporary music came together in 2021 for the first “Curating Contemporary Music” at the Music University of Basel, it became clear that active engagement with these issues in a group with like-minded peers can certainly contribute to developing adequate skills. One of the participants concluded during the course that the term of “curating” summed up all her problems and made tangible the challenges she faced being a musician who conceives programs, directs an ensemble, organizes projects, fundraises, administrates, etc., all at once.

In this sense, curating is actually just a term summing up a variety of necessary tasks and steps in a cultural/artistic project and points towards perceiving all of them as part of the same creative process or practice. Curating makes us think about the interconnection of the aesthetic/conceptual aspects and the socio-political dimension of what we are doing. It offers us the opportunity to analyze what is actually happening when people come together in a room to experience music together. It allows us to reflect on the meaning of the relationships that we create between the different agents (music, audience, technology, etc.).

This collection of texts reflects experiences from musicians’ practices and hopefully helps contribute some meaningful written traces to this still relatively new discourse in contemporary music. And hopefully it will trigger new ideas and ways of acting curatorially.

This issue contains texts by lecturers of this first course edition in 2021 and by experienced practitioners beyond. It starts with an imaginative proposition by **Michał Libera** who wants to record ambient noises, labeling it with the title “Sounds from Earth” and sending the compilation into space. It goes on with **Jennifer Kessler**, who is executive director of an organization that aims to put social change into practice. Following that, **Bernhard Günther** points out the necessity of considering the audience’s desires while curating. A more sociological perspective on the relations that are created while curating is elaborated by **Irena Müller-Brozović**. Meanwhile, in his text, **Will Dutta** reflects on how the creative and distributive processes as a curating composer are intertwined in his work. **Thomas Burkhalter** puts his own role as a curator on display. One of the Curating Contemporary Music course participants, the composer and curator **Ioannis Paul**, analyzes curatorial decisions that were made during the pandemic to set up different online projects. A more general reflection of how we actually approach the act of listening in relation to ancient practices from the Sápmi culture is proposed by the sound artist **Elina Waage Mikalsen**. Finally, the **Sonandes** collective from Bolivia establishes a straight line between curating sound art in public spaces and researching the social and cultural consequences of lithium extraction in Bolivia.

Please remember that curating can also be the subject of an artistic creation in itself, as displayed by **Trond Reinholdtsen** during his online lecture on Donaueschingen 2121 for students of the Next Generation program at the 100th edition of the Donaueschingen Festival in 2021:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tnoFg46hp00&t=3s>.

What will the future of curating look like? Trond’s response suggests that an all-healing remedy is not in the cards.

Anja Wernicke completed master's degrees in cultural studies with a focus on music in Hildesheim and cultural mediation in Marseille. An internship at the Gare du Nord brought her to Basel, where she has been involved in various projects and organizations, including the festival ZeitRäume Basel – a Biennial for Contemporary Music and Architecture (2014-2021) – and the research department of the Hochschule für Musik FHNW (2016-2021). She teaches courses on music curation and published the book "Musik machen" in 2023 (Vexer Verlag). Since 2022, she has been working in the music department of the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia.

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Everyday Workouts in Minor Curating

Michał Libera

Let me start with a straightforward confession. When I started organizing concerts almost twenty years ago, to introduce myself as a music curator—to use the very word—was at best a pretentious maneuver putting me in front of a long, flat silence; at worst—a starter of a usually meandering discussion leading me to desperate analogies, reckless metaphors, and far-fetched arguments. I think people simply did not know what curating could possibly mean in music. Or rather, whatever it was that I was doing, I think they did not know why I wanted to call it music curating. I still remember I would do anything to set up a theoretical construction showing differences between organizers and curators; managers and curators; promoters and curators—up to a point where I thought curating was anything *but* organizing and promoting. The last distinction I heard that agitated me was at Donaueschinger Musiktage. One of the Very Important Persons ruled: “Es gibt keine Kuratoren in der Neuen Musik – es gibt nur Festivalmacher.” More or less around that time, I decided not to think about this word anymore.

Until quite recently. It was not that long ago when I realized things had changed. Not that the Festivalmakers [festival makers] disappeared, no, not at all—but curators definitely did arrive at New Music festivals. And nobody raises their eyebrows anymore when I happen to introduce myself as a music curator. Nobody is even asking what that is. People really seem to know now what the job is. I don't. But they do. That scares me. It was a blink of the eye—fifteen years, actually less—for music curating to emerge from ridiculed non-existence to an established job of a fixed range of competences. It all happened too quickly, just a little too quickly not to get suspicious. Will it take another fifteen years for curators to become Festivalmakers? Or has it already happened?

The only thing I have to say here is very simple: I think know-how of festival programming, podcast mixing, album producing, or playlist making does not exhaust the curatorial area. Nor does it exhaust the questions curating brings about. As simple as that. I think, for example, that Vitruvius was an amazing curator when he hid resonant vessels in ancient amphitheaters making voices of actors more present. I think Franco in Spain was a perfidious curator when he was trying to silence people with unique posters promoting secrecy and with horrifying gossip spreading fear. I think that a cross-generational board of 16th-century Spanish urbanists and 20th-century Italian motorbike distributors unintentionally curated the soundscape of the Spanish Quarter in Naples. Or earbuds producers, which have turned today's cities into ghost towns. I also think “4'33” is an amazing piece of curating—is it not even more a piece of curating than a piece of composing? Or the cards of George Brecht? Like the one for three gap events: missing-letter sign, between two sounds, meeting again? Where are those happening, the gaps I mean? Do they happen in the presence of the audience? Or what is it anyway? And who is the performer? What is the sonic material? Is there any? Can it be missing, too? And if we are here—I think Franz Kafka is among the greatest sound curators who chose writing to deal with the sounds which are fundamentally inaudible. From architecture to writing, from sound design to politics, this is all management of vibrations in the air; they spring up from various utilities and tools, they set stages anew, they find audiences that we never dreamed of, they refine the sound, they deepen the silences, they change relations between people—they simply reconfigure

processes of hearing. And they are pieces of curating that belong to the same milieu as selecting line-ups of festivals.

In a kind of homage to all of those mentioned above, I obviously don't intend to pin the notion of curating down, I don't want to set a definition or fix it in any other sense; my intention is the contrary—to complicate it, to take it out of the scheme of what is associated with curating these days, of what people know when they hear the phrase “music curator”; my intention is to perplex it or to blur it to some unreasonable point where it becomes uncommunicable, maybe useless, stupid, or even imaginary, hoping that this would also be the point where curating means proliferating possible relations in the sound field rather than in music business.

In order to do that, I decided to do everyday workouts or exercises in minor curating. I find this term—minor curating—quite useful, even if slightly misinterpreted. It rests on major curating, for sure. It uses the same vocabulary. It is by all means neglectable. But it can only be neglected in that entirely different way that an unattended gig can be. It can also be used in major curating. But it rarely is, and this is for serious reasons, I believe. Perhaps it is a kind of natural fertilizer, hummus, of which the majority fades out unnoticed. Or it is just entertainment. It can also be killing time. Or none of those. But at least it is free, in a financial sense, of course. And it can have an intellectual backing, in a paraphrase of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: minor curating is about the impossibility of not curating, the impossibility of curating in a major way, the impossibility of curating otherwise.

Here comes one of the workouts.

*

I am sitting in a mustard-colored armchair, in a small room, on the second floor of the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra in Katowice (NOSPR). In a few days, I will be in Kraków, attending a couple of concerts and lectures within the framework of *Unsound* festival. Yesterday, I was two floors down from where I am now, for the opening of the season, in the Main Hall. They played Beethoven's 9th. Can there be a better moment to practice a bit of minor curating?

Yesterday, everything went fine. What particularly got stuck in my memory were the four gigantic SUVs just in front of the building, one of them red. There were also four young women in short skirts and high heels, kind of in the back of the cars, just in case somebody decided to buy one of the latter ones, I guess. All the cars had engines on, nice sound, actually—and a nice mix it was, not too dominating, more like an “under-sound” of a pack of animals ready to jump any moment. I have to say, when *Ode to Joy* had its first prefigurations in the concert, I regretted that the Main Hall is soundproof. But since it is, we can hope that the exterior world will never interfere with Beethoven and the other pieces performed there. Speaking of which—when introducing the concert, the director of NOSPR said she chose this piece for the opening of the season because it brings hope. I guess it was referring to COVID-19, but I couldn't help wondering what would be the social content of the kind of hope that sounds like *Ode to Joy*. To be very honest, I thought there was more hope and less imperialism in the sound of the engines. Or at least I knew exactly what this hope was for. Ah, and the music—yes, it was performed well last night.

I am here not as a curator. I was not invited to do any project for NOSPR and given a room upstairs. I came here with my girlfriend, who is just now mounting her sound installation in a foyer. There, it is not so easy to forget that the music is only rarely surrounded by silence. But this silence—not only or even not mainly acoustical silence—I guess it is a *sine qua non* of the major kind of curating. It is the silence of the surrounding world. The world needs to disappear to some extent, even if only to be mirrored from the stage, just like it always does during the time of the carnival. There are, of course, different sorts of silences; I guess I will experience an entirely different one at *Unsound*, in just a couple of days. It is indeed a funny combination of festivals that I am in the middle of. The music, I am sure, will definitely be different in Kraków, a different world will need to be silenced. But years ago, when I was at one of the *Unsound* concerts in ICE (Kraków Congress Centre), I also passed by a huge Volvo in the foyer of the building. As far as I remember, it was silent.

This, in some twisted way, brings to my mind one more advantage of blurring the notion of curator. If it is not defined by the precise scope of job competences, you can start to question who really is curating. A very simple question. Surely, the curators-curators. But I think the choices are somehow restrained, for example, by journalism, in particular so-called influential journalism. And labels—another example—which functionally speaking have a similar status for a festival. We all know there must be a star at the festival. A headliner. And emerging artists. Rather not the real unknowns. All this is not really decided by the curators. They alone don't have that power, even if some of them may dream about it. Just like they alone cannot decide about the money. There are festivals that are turned into national showcases. I understand that. It is a serious money issue. But the point is that even if you understand curating as a job, it is a strongly colonized territory. And so I do wonder what is the real content disseminated by this kind of cross-sectorial curating. Or if there is some higher intelligence in this tacit curatorial alliance? I am wondering if perhaps beyond declarative festivals' themes and curatorial statements, there is a kind of über-curatorial idea or statement that is communicated via the very concept of today's festival as such—with such important roles for PR, marketing, journalism, fundraising? And could it be possible that this über-curatorial idea is much stronger and more influential than any theme or topic reflected by the artists? I am not trying to be nasty here. And it is not about resentment. I also organized festivals. I am an addressee of these questions, too. Actually, I really do think that curators tend to be overestimated in exactly the same way politicians are. Simply for the fact that most important things that get communicated through their job are something completely beyond their control. Is it not some kind of basic, inert, usually passive competitiveness—not necessarily on a personal level, actually not at all on that level. The competitiveness I am seeing is rather akin to the one we face on the supermarket shelves, which have a magic ability to make all the washing powders look exactly the same, despite all the apparent differences. You have a slot now, this stage, 45 minutes, next. Next. Surely in the end you choose the best one. Is anyone capable of organizing a festival and bypassing this feeling these days?

I am sitting in a guest room of NOSPR, on the second floor, it is furnished with a bed, a mustard armchair, a music stand and a corkscrew—musician's essentials. On one side, there is a small window overlooking the highway which—even if closed—lets in a constant roar of the cars. From the other side—with no windows directed towards the Main Hall—comes only a profound silence. Yesterday, it was the silence of Beethoven's 9th. But I wasn't here, in the room, I was down there. Today I am in the armchair, and I will be here while they will be playing Telemann. The topic of the concert, I learn while reading the program, will be gender issues in his music, so I can't help thinking that

the cars with women in high heels are here today, too. I just can't see them. Nor can I hear the hum of the parked cars—in my armchair, there is only the roar of the passing ones, everybody knows the kind of sound I mean. There is also a low and pleasing ventilation hum, like everywhere, not very interesting though, just pleasing; sometimes a creak or crack, like in any other room; rarely a reappearing fridge, perfectly ordinary. All utterly boring yet inconspicuously selective. They could all be recorded with highly advanced audio gear; they could be marketed as “The Real Sounds of the Philharmonic.” I can even see it in Deutsche Grammophon layout, released, 180-gram vinyl, red, I guess. And then someone mixing it live at Berghain.

But then I think these are all useless ideas. The problem I find crucial is that we are no longer culturally able to hear these sounds, not anymore. I don't only mean that we are unable to appreciate them or to enjoy them. I quite literally mean that we are unable to hear them. We are either getting bored too fast or—even worse—we are getting too involved with the sonic qualities of the sounds. This is the aftermath of the experimental music approach, or the particular undercurrent of it that fetishizes sound. These sounds need time, and they need a reaction somewhere in between boredom and excitement. Very difficult and unusual kind of listening. Can it be enhanced by curating?

I am imagining a kind of non-fetishistic field recording listening, a kind of listening that would do justice to the boredom and anonymity of the soundscape of this room, a kind of listening that would not get too active or too passive, that would always be in line with the reality of the soundscape of the architectural spread of organic and inorganic life on earth. How to turn these rooms into this kind of experience? The only idea that comes to my mind at this very session is to change the audience, to find a strange form of life, somewhere in the cosmos, a strange form of life that by some miraculous coincidence can react to sound and is able to imagine a different kind of life than itself. Yes, I am thinking of a new Voyager expedition that would carry an mp3 player including hours of the acoustic life of this room on the second floor of NOSPR, an mp3 titled “Sound from Earth,” even if I know they would not be able to read, most probably, or handle an mp3 player. Still, I am considering writing an email to Elon Musk proposing this amazing idea, but I give up on it because things start to change.

I am sitting in this room called “Sounds from Earth,” and everything is white or grey, all neat, except the armchair, of course. It is now 5:30 pm, and I start to hear a slight murmur upstairs, with seldom taps and clicks that I did not notice before. Actually, I only realize that in retrospect after a shocking outburst of the PA system informing me that I was requested on stage. Of course, it is not me. I am not a musician here. But it is a relief to be a misaddressed audience. It rarely happens that it works, but if it works—it is a bliss. To find an audience and address it with something they immediately decode as unimportant. And keep their attention. Or some kind of attention. This would be the ultimate curatorial challenge, a non-fan-like curating, or curating not for pleasing—and here I am in the room, subject to this kind of curating, taken for someone I am not, listening to a signal I do not have to react to, a kind of listening that does not lead to a reaction but remains a provocation.

The signal is a classic electronic tam-tam-like sound with a long reverb. One at 5:45 pm, two of these at 5:50 pm, three—followed by a little childish melody tail—at 5:55 pm. Before that, I didn't even realize there was a loudspeaker here. Even looking for it now, I cannot find it, but a feeling is already irreversible: this room is only a minor part of a major factory. As in all factories, there is order here. And where there is order, there is composition. It is only now that I listen to the roar of taps, and I realize they

are all high heels—rushing on the corridor upstairs, passing very close to the ceiling of the room I am in now, on their way down. Unconceivable rhythms. Unique colors. Complexity beyond reason. But not beyond pleasure. Are all philharmonics around the world about high heels? An album called “The Real Music of Philharmonics” pops in quickly followed by a disappointment. We had that, I am sure. Or we *did not* have that, but we *could have had that* already, even worse for an idea.

Sometime around 5:58 pm, it gets silent again and I can start to prepare for my listening to Telemann. The room instantly changes into a private auditorium, filled not only with a bed and a mustard armchair but also a bottle of wine—opened. There could be a curatorial series called “Distant Musics – Close(d) Silences.” This would be always for a single person, invited for a concert 45 minutes before it starts, given a room for herself or himself and a bottle of wine (chosen from a short menu—maybe?) to enjoy whatever piece is played in the Main Hall, here always in four movements. Movement one, 15 mins long: irregular hum. Movement two, 15 mins long: three parts, each starting with an electronic tam-tam, filled with various high-heel textures. Movement three: The Silence of the Piece. Movement four: high heels again, coming back to rehearsal rooms with a long and less restrained murmur. A laugh or two, not too many. The question is: should there always be a score to follow in the room, just in case one does not want to get lost? But what is out of the question is the price of the tickets: they should be very expensive.

But this kind of silence—the one that would be difficult to record as such—together with the fact that there is a global decrease in the number of listeners of national radio make me think of the so-called new audiences. Perhaps non-human. Project concerts from stage to empty guest rooms, extreme volume. Or, better yet: install a precise frequency gate set at exactly the frequencies that would be resonant in the room or make the corkscrew tremble on an aluminum plate. The only risk being that a musician gets locked in the room wfor some strange reason, a perfect nightmare, missing the show, not showing up on stage, and then listening to the playback, without his or her presence, loud, extremely loud.

As I already mentioned, I am here with my girlfriend, and we are talking quite a lot about “missing the show,” especially when mounting her installation. It is mostly about the audience missing the show, being completely unaware that they are part of it, that the situation they are in is really made up, that this is art, but they do not know it. We are also talking about performers missing their shows—there could be so many ways to do that. Not only because you are locked in a room. Also missing the show by refusing to perform, being on stage but making a statement of not performing, by leaving one voice unheard in the piece, or making it inarticulate or impossible to articulate—having everything performed except your own voice.

I am still in this very same room, still white and grey, but now I am lying on the bed, waiting for the deafening loud Telemann to burst out from the loudspeaker. And in this waiting, I am of course feeling a double lack of Telemann: acoustic lack as I hear nothing from the stage two floors down; and broadcast lack in the loudspeaker. In this waiting, I am actually looking for Telemann, a kind of hypohetic listening or phantom listening. It becomes easy just when I have a look at the music stand. It hosted music scores. It faced practicing musicians, many times. Yesterday, three musicians of the orchestra said goodbye; they left the orchestra after 42 and 37 years. Perhaps at least one of them was here in this room where I am lying now, lying with my laptop on my lap, watching the music stand. Perhaps one of them used this very same stand, maybe

once; perhaps he or she was practicing Telemann. And now I know for sure—I am in a room which is by all means a single one; actually, this is not only a single room but a room that makes you single via architecture and sound. This is a room that hosts singular voices—bricks that later build an orchestra. This is a room which is an architectural machine for separating performers, a kind of anti-stage. Just like I am now in an anti-curatorial position, imaging myself as curator, so do musicians practicing here imagine themselves on stage. Would it be possible to intensify this feeling without changing the room for the stage?

As I am lying here, in the single room with a white and grey kitchenette and a bed you can only approach from one end, I am imagining a music rendition of the Jérôme Bel piece “Véronique Doisneau.” This would be a proper goodbye for those three performers who had their last stage appearances yesterday, perhaps even a good idea for a small tradition: the final performance of every musician in the orchestra is always in the guest room, on the second floor; the departing musician is asked to play his or her part of the very first piece they performed on the stage downstairs. This could be the third violin of Beethoven’s 9th. Here, on this occasion, played as a solo, like in a concert: no breaks, no mistakes, perfect rendition, for their own ears only. No audience. Of course—paid as a soloist, a kind of 13th salary.

As I am still lying on the bed, now much later, having breaks in writing, keeping my eyes closed from time to time, I realize my girlfriend is downstairs mounting her sound installation, and as I am not there with her, I am realizing I am indeed not a curator here, not even in this basic not necessarily understanding of the word. Part of her installation is the vocal sounds mimicking wind sweeping in through a leaky window. During the break of Telemann’s concert, we were checking the levels; the wind sounds mix with the crowd so well that they can be very loud and completely unnoticed at the same time. We were talking about the effects a sound makes when unnoticed. And at the moment, when lying on bed, on the second floor, I do as much as I can to actually not listen to anything that is there to listen to. I try to simply let the sounds do the job. I try to turn myself into an anti-audience. Try not to listen. Try not to hear, against all odds, here, now. Of course, you always hear something, there are physical aspects of sound, yes, I also read those books. But try and go beyond what you read, cover yourself with a thick quilt, in a pretty quiet room, this should be just about enough. Then there are only the internal sounds, you will manage with those. Do not listen, as much as it is possible, just concentrate on anything else, smell, afterimages on the inner side of your eyelids, and most of all—get rid of this stubborn voice that reminds you, word by word, not to listen to anything. It is not exactly mute—this voice—not exactly entirely inner, almost like something else in you; surely, think of three gap events by Brecht, perform them, perform them in order to blunt your hearing, but start with getting away from listening, imagine this missing-letter sign, just get rid of the letter in the word you hear now when reiterating do not listen one letter less each time one letter less do not listen and one more until more or less this point here where lexemes are not sounding anymore and you cannot get cheated by anything curated by words.

Notes

1 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, [1975] 1986), 16.

Michał Libera is a sociologist, curator, and musical dramatist interested in theorizing by means of sound, music beyond the audible, listening and non-listening. He has curated dozens of albums (mainly in the conceptual-pop series “Populista” and a Polish Radio Experimental Studio run), countless concerts for art galleries, theaters, music festivals (incl. HCMF, Donaueschingen), and the Polish Pavilion at the 13th Architecture Biennale in Venice (honorable mention). He is working on a sound monument at the former German Nazi concentration camp KL Plaszow.

A Multi-Layered Approach to Equity in the New Music Field

Jennifer Kessler

For the past ten of my eighteen years as an arts professional, I have sat through a myriad of meetings devoted to the topic of diversity, equity, and inclusion in Western classical music. Until recently, I would see an initial investment in diversity initiatives, but nothing that would fundamentally empower people who have not historically had leadership agency to play a lasting role in deciding what gets performed on our world's stages. What was lacking was a comprehensive approach to equity by addressing all entry points to an organization. Very few organizations asked: What are **all of the ways** we uphold the status quo? And what are **all of the changes** we should consider making if we want to create a truly equitable and diverse future?

"Equity" is often understood in different ways. The Annie E. Casey Foundation defines equity as "giving people what they need to enjoy full, healthy lives, regardless of race."¹ I once heard philanthropist Ayo Roach say that equity is not just giving a person a seat at the table for decision making, but making the table bigger so that more people can participate and benefit from whatever is being offered. As an extension of his article "A Small Act of Curation," George Lewis gave a keynote at a Chamber Music America conference, discussing his concept of equity as "investment." He said:

Decades of curatorial, commissioning, and academic employment decisions proceeding from what bell hooks has called white supremacist capitalist patriarchy amounts to an investment in a certain sector of the society, and a complementary disinvestment in others [...]. The complementary disinvestment in other segments of the population expresses itself in the very low number of women and people of color that I find in applications for graduate school, grants, academic employment as a composer, and more. Despite decades of effort, the system does not allow these people to build up equity, and the myth of absence dovetails with ersatz meritocracy to support the spurious claim that these people, in fact, do not exist. Yes, they do exist—but fixing the problem will take more than just opening the doors and proclaiming, "Y'all come."²

I understand equity as a combination of these things: a commitment to making the proverbial table bigger and fairer to effectively investing in more people who have decision-making agency. It is also a commitment to interrogating and changing the practices around the table that have historically prevented certain people from living their full lives, and making specific choices beyond "just opening the doors."

Now in its 20th year, the International Contemporary Ensemble is a collective of musicians who advance experimental music by commissioning, developing, and performing the works of living artists. The organization has always valued equity as part of its mission and has commissioned and programmed composers and sound artists from many different, often under-represented, backgrounds. Since I began as the Executive Director in January 2020, we have taken a multi-tiered approach to assessing and improving all aspects of the organization with a focus on equity, inclusion, and diversity, building on work the Ensemble had started previously.

We started by asking: Why is it important to us that we become more equitable and diverse? Research can help make the case for organizations to embrace diversity initiatives, but we need to understand why it's important to us personally and as a community in order to fully prioritize supporting diversity in the workplace and in our field. To me, it's a matter of fairness and humanity: in the U.S. and Europe, resources have historically flowed to predominantly white institutions, and the funders, presenters, staff, boards, musicians, and other partners have all been complicit at keeping the white status quo. Adapted from the Ensemble's guiding principles, **we live in a mosaic world with an extraordinary depth and breadth of human experience**. I believe that what is presented on our stages should reflect the world we live in. It is time to change the status quo.

At the International Contemporary Ensemble, we believe that in order to contribute to a thriving mosaic musical ecosystem, we need to make changes to all of our practices, **in addition to programming and curating**. We identified multiple gates of access to our organization and created actions to address areas that we believed prevented inclusion. At the time we launched this work, our staff, board, and musicians were primarily people who identify as white and cisgender, but that has changed, and we continue to discover other gates of access that we have historically ignored. Part of what's important in this process is staying open and curious, and, when discovering another entry point for growth, we lean into addressing it.

While we have yet to formally evaluate the outcomes of all of our actions, we continue to assess which areas of our work need more attention in terms of equity and inclusion, by way of conversations with staff, board, musicians, funders, and collaborators. From early 2020 through May 2022, these areas and actions have included the following:

Workplace culture: We believe that for an equitable workplace to exist, we must create and uphold a culture of belonging, and set expectations that everyone will contribute to a positive workplace culture. Through multiple meetings with small groups from our board, staff, and Ensemble members, along with outside counsel from labor attorneys, we examined and updated our codes of conduct, fundraising policies, and processes for grievances. This is ongoing work, and some of our policies still need updating.

Examining policies is an important way to align an organization's values and mission with mechanisms for implementing those values. For example, in October 2020, we implemented clearer protocols for administrative employees and musicians to submit grievances to management. As we became more intentional about receiving grievances to understand where improvements and reconciliations were needed, many people in the organization who had previously felt afraid to come forward felt trusting enough to share concerns. Some of these conversations have been painful for everyone involved, and we hadn't anticipated the volume of concerns to address.

As a mid-sized non-profit, we had historically not invested in human resources expertise, instead relying on whomever was in the Executive Director and Artistic Director positions to manage most complaints. I believe that leaders have a responsibility to take action and be held accountable for steering the organization in a way that fits with its mission. I also believe that the idea that senior leaders should be martyrs for their organizations is problematic, and that dealing with and healing from an organization's faults should not be solely on the shoulders of one or two people. Yes, leaders need to take responsibility for steering the organization; **and** to truly transform and

become an equitable space, many more people in the organization need to understand the underlying issues that perpetuate inequities and play a role in improving them.

Although our organization has reporting structures in place, and a Musician's Committee which liaises with our musicians directly, we began to notice that each complaint required multiple hours invested in investigation, documentation, reconciliation/healing, and decision-making about next steps. It required much more time than we had prepared for. We could instead address each situation with more care and in a timelier manner with regular access to human resources (HR) expertise, and in fall 2022, we secured an HR legal expert on retainer. Our goals are to address acute issues as they arise, to acknowledge and lead trainings around larger systemic issues that are pervasive in our organization and field, and to set an expectation in our organization that everyone can show up and enjoy the dignity they deserve.

We also learned through investigating workplace culture that musicians and staff wanted to improve their skills of resolving interpersonal conflicts. We hired a conflict resolution consultant —Tania Clerisme—to host a training workshop on how to have brave conversations, and the musicians, staff, and board members who participated have reported that they're using the skills they learned in the workshop to address conflicts that come up in rehearsals, at the office, or even in their personal lives.

Other actions we took to improve workplace culture included updating employee job descriptions and hiring and recruitment practices, with an emphasis on our commitment to equity. These hiring changes led to more diverse applicants in every job position we've posted since 2020. We also revisited our practices around how musicians join the Ensemble, which is an ongoing process that is occasionally met with resistance. However, the conversations helped us better understand what gatekeeping mechanisms we had been upholding that might have prevented us from inviting extraordinary musicians to join the Ensemble.

One advancement I'm especially excited about is that we recognized that musicians who are parents were not always able to join a project because all of their earnings would go to childcare. We are now piloting a caregiver stipend for musician parents to offset their childcare costs when joining a project with us.

Learning: We committed to ongoing learning and growing around anti-racism and anti-oppression. We launched an anti-oppression book club for the staff in early 2020; researched and learned from others in the field such as the Arts Administrators of Color Network, Black Opera Alliance, university scholars, and local Native American organizations; and engaged several facilitators to lead workshops for the board, musicians, staff, and collaborators on topics around equity, including Dr. Derrell Acon, Tania Clerisme, Rania El Mugammar, and Dr. Durrell Cooper. For more information on our approach to learning, please see our website.

Our book club has been a generative way for staff to share ideas and questions around equity that show up in our personal and professional lives and has been a way for us to get to know each other better outside of our regular agenda-driven meetings. In 2020, one staff member expressed concern that once we were back to more live performances, we might not have time to continue these discussions. In fact, it has become more difficult since 2021 to carve out time amidst our artistic production schedules for these discussions and for the readings leading up to them, and the pace of our book club conversations has waned. However, the staff is still committed to discussing top-

ics centered on equity, and we're exploring new formats for our book club that involve listening to podcasts, reading shorter articles, and meeting less frequently but consistently.

Commissioning and education programs: We examined our commissioning and education application, recruitment, and adjudication practices through an equity lens. We invited artists to make recommendations to our application processes, and based on their input, we changed the language we use to invite people to apply, the formats we ask for submissions, the ways we collect demographic information, the questions we ask of artists on applications, and we increased our artist honoraria for commissions. Since we made these changes, we have seen the most diverse pool of applicants by far compared with previous years: racially, ethnically, artistically, and by gender and age. We also continue to design our Ensemble Evolution program to include an arc of learning around equity and racial justice (see videos from Ensemble Evolution here: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLO3rqa3pAfUJnANDxQ-tkqhukTnUJwWbV>).

Board development: Early in 2020, we began to reassess which board leadership skill-sets and qualities were important to advancing our mission. We have since welcomed six new board members, including artists and other professionals with diverse professional and life experiences, skill-sets, backgrounds, and networks.

Programming/curation: While we have programmed composers from diverse backgrounds from the organization's beginnings, we now need to acknowledge the rest of our practices, and to recommit to programming composers from diverse backgrounds whom our field has historically ignored.

As an Ensemble that performs and develops new work, with relationships to presenters, artists, funders, and audiences, we wanted to better understand what practices we might adopt to influence what gets performed on our world's stages. In late 2020, we invited seventeen artists (Ensemble members, collaborators, and artists we hadn't yet worked with) to join a Curation Task Force. They met monthly for six months and agreed that the problem to address was **shifting power structures and decision-making in our field** to create spaces where artists have the agency, support, and resources they need to make long-term sustainable changes to curation and production. The Task Force's main recommendations were for us to consider expanding upon programs such as Ensemble Evolution to create more practical experiences for artists to curate, so that they see themselves as part of a curatorial profession, and to hire a senior curator for the organization.

In late 2021, we shifted some of our budget and secured new funding to change our leadership structure from two people to three people: an Executive Director, an Executive Producer, and a revised Artistic Director role. In April 2022, we hired a new Artistic Director, George Lewis, whose "New Music Decolonization in Eight Difficult Steps" framework has been guiding many of our practices and protocols.

George Lewis's scope of curatorial ideas around Creolization and Afro-Diasporic new music is a thrilling inflection point in our organization: we are merging our institutional work with his vision to realize many more artists having their pieces developed and presented. I hope that what we create under George's leadership will be a model for ensembles and presenters around the world, for generations to come.

How has all of this work affected our artistic initiatives?

As a result of changes to our commissioning program, we are presenting many artists whose artistic practices were new to us, and we're proud to build relationships with and develop new works by sound artists including Lesley Mok, Kevin Ramsay, Mazz Swift, Chris Ryan Williams, Sandra Kluge, Bonita Oliver, Cleo Reed, and Sylvain Souklaye. We welcomed new Ensemble members/artists-in-residence, including Fay Victor, Vimbayi Kaziboni, Clara Warnaar, and Gabriela Diaz, who perform with the Ensemble and also join conversations to shape our organization's policies. Our productions from 2018 – 2022 were largely envisioned by our former co-Artistic Directors Rebekah Heller and Ross Karre, who were dedicated to presenting Afro-Diasporic artists, as well as with curatorial input from Ensemble members. To pilot the idea by the Curation Task Force to provide artists with more curatorial and produciorial opportunities, we invited my colleague eddy kwon, whose work creates, expands, and reframes spaces of home, transformation, and transgression, to curate a series with artists with dynamic and varied connections to diaspora. The series, SOUND IS AN OPENING, premiered in New York City in June 2022.

Under George Lewis' leadership, we are planning to feature fifty more artists of all ages, backgrounds, and career stages, who represent the thriving and diverse musical ecosystem in the US and beyond.

There is not a one-size-fits-all multi-layered approach to building equity. Our organization's size, agility, and supportive board of directors and funders make it possible for us to invest in these kinds of changes. The musicians and staff have been willing to do the hard work of change. We still have a lot of work to do, including probing our inclusion practices around gender expression and identity, sexual orientation, and disabilities.

Regardless of an organization's resources, I believe that anyone can and should explore biases and take action to contribute to a fairer, just world. **This work starts with us personally.** As arts leaders, and especially if you are not from a marginalized group of people, ask yourself: **Why is this work important to you personally?** If you can't answer that question, it's time to do so. It is all of our responsibilities as arts workers to do our part to contribute to a thriving, diverse cultural ecosystem.

To me, it is reckless for arts institutions to receive public funding if they are not representing the diversity of artists in their communities on their stages.

I live in New York City, and I experience an extraordinary range of diverse artistic experiences across our five boroughs. To be sure, arts presenters in many communities across the US and Europe aim to present local artists, and artists who have historically been underrepresented on their stages. However, if we examine who is in top decision-making roles at US presenting institutions, it is largely male and white. As Antonio C. Cuyler reports:

Arts managers connect audiences to the greatest artistic achievements of humankind... The US population is ethnically and racially diverse. Roughly, 63 percent is white; 17.1 percent, Hispanic/Latino; 13.2 percent, African American; 5.3 percent, Asian; 1.2 percent, American Native; and .2 percent, Native Hawaiian (US Census Bureau 2015). The most significant finding from this survey question is that 78 percent of arts managers identified as white

[...]. These results show that the arts management workforce does not accurately reflect US society.³

In a 2022 article about Opera Australia using yellowface in their production of *Turandot*, Cat-Thao Nguyen points out that, “It’s time to look at the stories we are telling and retelling over again and ask if they are racist.”⁴

It would help [...] if the country’s leading performing arts companies were more diverse: a 2019 report by Diversity Arts Australia found just eight per cent of leaders in music and opera were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds compared to thirty-nine per cent of the population.⁵

While these excerpts focus on racial diversity, there are many more identities not represented in leadership positions as well. What happens when leadership basically remains homogeneous? Even if every single white, cis-male arts leader were working diligently to shift practices in their organizations to be more welcoming to more people, examine and abolish racist practices in their organization, and present a season comprised of artists from many different backgrounds and identities (which I’m arguing they should all be doing anyway), we would still be missing out on new ways of operating and communicating and, ultimately, sharing art by not positioning more diverse leaders to make key decisions about what gets presented on our stages.

As curious art lovers, what wonderful art have we been missing over the years?

Presenting organizations might argue that they need to sell tickets, and they might point to data that shows what their audiences will pay for. But they could also learn more about what art is out there and play a major role in shaping what audiences hear and who they hear from. What about the myriad of composers whose works never got funded or programmed because the artistic directors at that time made decisions based on racist ideologies?

Equity and inclusion are personal to me: I have experienced discrimination and harassment in past workplaces as a woman, a mother, a Jew, and when I lived in Europe, as an American. I have also perpetuated practices that have done the opposite of promoting equity, and I’m examining where I’ve failed and what I can do better in the future. It is unconscionable to me that anyone should not receive dignity and respect as a result of their identity, and too many extraordinary artists have been shut out of having their art seen and heard because of discrimination. This should be unconscionable to anyone who enjoys the arts, and **equity and inclusion should be personal to everyone.**

This is true not just in the United States, but the world over. Which communities in your area do you rarely see on your stages? In many countries, public funds go to supporting the arts. What barriers exist to people from benefiting from those funds and opportunities to have their works developed and performed? Who is making the decisions that determine who benefits from arts opportunities (like commissions, performances, and awards, and starting even earlier, with education opportunities)? Who is being left out of decision-making, and on what basis?

A multi-faceted approach to equity means that we are actively assessing all of our actions as participants in our field.

In a thriving arts ecosystem, everyone should have a chance to participate, and as a community of listeners, we should get to hear from diverse voices representing the world we live in, and not just one slice of it. Imagine a world in which every artist and arts worker could stretch their imaginations

and activate their creativity to grow a garden of new art that we all benefit from. It will take many small steps, but together, if we work towards a more equitable arts ecosystem, we can put into practice more compassionate, human-centered ways of daily living that could extend to the rest of our lives. What role will you play in those small steps?

I am proud of many of the actions we've taken during my time at the International Contemporary Ensemble, and I hope that our multidimensional approach is an inspiration to others in our field to make changes to their practices. We have much more to do, and while this will be a lifelong journey for me personally, I believe there are changes we all can make much sooner that will more urgently shift what we hear and whom we see on our world's stages.

Notes

1 "Equity vs. Equality and Other Racial Justice Definitions," updated on April 14, 2021, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, accessed June 1, 2022, <https://www.aecf.org/blog/racial-justice-definitions>.

2 George E. Lewis, "Reflections on Music, Equity, and Our Future," Keynote address, Chamber Music America Annual National Conference, The Westin New York at Times Square, New York City, January 16, 2020.

3 Antonio C. Cuyler, *An Exploratory Study of Demographic Diversity in the Arts Management Workforce*, Grantmakers in the Arts, *GIA Reader* 26, no. 3 (October 2015).

4 Matthew Knott, "I felt sick': Opera Australia under fire for using 'yellowface,'" *The Sydney Morning Herald*, February 26, 2022, <https://www.smh.com.au/culture/opera/i-felt-sick-opera-australia-under-fire-for-using-yellowface-20220221-p59yet.html>.

5 Ibid.

Jennifer Kessler is a New York-based arts leader. As Executive Director of the International Contemporary Ensemble, Jennifer steers the organization to align with its mission and commitment to equity. Previously, Jennifer served as Executive Director of Willie Mae Rock Camp, and in education positions at Carnegie Hall, the League of American Orchestras, and Orchestra of St. Luke's. As a consultant, Jennifer has led projects for the Los Angeles Philharmonic; Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra; Bang on a Can's OneBeat; and the jazz ensemble James Farm with Joshua Redman. Jennifer began her career as a French horn player, and holds a bachelor's degree in music from Northwestern University in Illinois; a master's degree from Hanns Eisler Musikhochschule in Berlin, Germany; and a graduate certificate of nonprofit management as an El Sistema Fellow at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston. Jennifer is an Adjunct Professor at SUNY New Paltz, New York.

Bringing People Together is the Core of Curating

Bernhard Guenther

Curating is a transitive verb: somebody curates something.

(Curating is also an increasingly non-specific verb: everybody curates everything. But that's another story.)

This "something" has traditionally been the focus of curating: curators curate works of art / music, mostly by selecting them and putting them into a specific space / time / context. Curators curate concerts / programs / festivals / biennials / exhibitions, mostly by putting together selected works.

However, one of the main goals of curating has always been for the curated works to be perceived by an audience. Artists have gotten away, more or less elegantly, with a complete disregard for the audience. Curators are expected to take the audience into the equation.

While there are some famous examples of concerts / programs / exhibitions with virtually no audience, they only got famous by being talked about to large audiences. There are many not-so-famous examples of concerts / programs / exhibitions with virtually no audience due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which is one of the reasons for this text.

Curators curate works / compositions mostly under the tacit assumption that artists and curators have superior knowledge about art / works, compared to the audience. Unlike dramaturgs or stage directors in theatre or opera, who traditionally have some license to abridge, translate, or otherwise alter works, curators typically will claim not to alter any works / compositions.

Altering the audience, on the other hand, is not only accepted but widely regarded as a selling point of good curating. In mild cases, curators might promise the audience a transformative experience of art and music. In severe cases, the audience has been told by curators what to do and what not to do, as famously instituted by Hans von Bülow, first Chief Conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic from 1887 to 1892: food, drinks, smoking, talking, moving, even just moving a fan to fight the heat in the concert hall were all strictly forbidden in what turned out to be the standard classical concert experience.

So, it's fair to say that curators typically operate with the highest respect for artists and works, while their respect for the audience is at a significantly lower level.



The old skating hall from 1876 in Berlin-Kreuzberg (at Bernburger Strasse, bombed during WWII, destroyed in 1952) before it was transformed into the first “Philharmonie” in 1888. The transformation from freely moving skaters to disciplined concertgoers seated in rows can be traced back to the insistent curatorial efforts of Hans von Bülow (1830–1894).

*

After a deeply transformative ban on public get-togethers during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., in Austria for a total of 249 days in 2020 and 2021), the focus in the field of curating seems to have shifted in many ways. The audience has shifted its focus away from public get-togethers around art, music, theatre, films, etc. Cultural workers and artists, like hotel and restaurant workers, have shifted their professional focus to other fields like education, health care, or business. Cultural institutions are looking for alternatives for their focus on (attendance) numbers. After a few attempts to rescue the arts, governments, funding bodies, and sponsors are shifting their focus towards coping with inflation, war, and climate change.

While, as of 2022, the pandemic, war, inflation, and climate change are far from being over, it’s too early to predict whether, when, and how public get-togethers around art, music, theatre, films, etc. will be “back to normal.”

But if there’s something that’s worth saying about curating, it’s this:
it’s about time to shift the focus onto the audience.

Compared to the existential importance of bringing people together around art, music, theatre, films, etc., the classic practice of putting selected works together looks more and more like collecting stamps.

That’s not to play art off against people or artists against non-artists. It’s also not meant to trigger the old reflex against “populist” programming. But curators should be modest about what they find important and interesting as soon as—and as long as—there are other people in the room.

By the way: “people” includes not only artists, composers, musicians, and audiences, but also, e.g., board members, press, sponsors, team members, and colleagues, from ticket sales and accounting via tech to catering, security, and cleaning.

If that means that soon the audience will be doing more to alter curators than the other way around, that's only fair.

*

Notes to Self¹

Try to take everybody and everything into the equation. (Don't expect to be more precise than a weather prediction in times of climate change.)

Take everybody and everything seriously. (In a playful way if that seems appropriate.)

Treat everybody and everything with respect. (Even more so when, statistically, considerateness seems to be on the decline after people had to spend 249 days on their sofa / in a state of emergency.)

Be aware that anything that looks like superior knowledge about artworks / compositions might seriously get in the way if you want an audience to share the experience.

If you think you know what grants curators and artists any authority or influence, think again.

Consider, in a humble and relaxed way, the superior knowledge of any potential "audience member" concerning not only art / music, but also, e.g., architecture, design, fashion, typography, food, and drinks. Or social situations, diverse cultural contexts, languages, privilege, otherness. Oh yes, not to forget about education, health care, and business.

Think about the cultural field you are a part of as a changing ecosystem in search of balance.

Wherever you can, help readjust the balance from a mainly economic process (which, even fifty years after Adorno, "continues to perpetuate domination over human beings") towards ecological processes, against the dynamics of cultural management in late capitalism.

Think about curating not as determining key parameters of a cultural field at will, but more as acting responsibly, as a humble part of a complex environment.

If you think curating is about power, forget about it.

Try to develop communally responsible modes of curation. They have more in common with enzymatic activities, fermentation, or organic agriculture than with the sometimes quite toxic ingredients which made opera, Hollywood, and other parts of culture look cultivated in the past.

Try to listen carefully to what this cultural field will need to get back on its feet.

(Listening is not a transitive verb.)

Notes

I I'm not especially interested in manifestos, but I do recommend reading Emilie Pine.

Bernhard Guenther (born 1970 in Thun/CH) is primarily active as a curator, producer, and director of contemporary music festivals (Wien Modern since 2016; ZeitRäume Basel – Biennial for new music and architecture 2012–2021; rainy days 2004–2016, as Chief Dramaturg of the Philharmonie Luxembourg). Apart from that, he works as an author, editor, curator, dramaturg, panel and jury member, typesetter, occasional amateur cellist, and small-scale natural wine producer. He is married, has a daughter, and lives in Vienna.

Curating Resonances through Creating Relationships

Irena Müller-Brozović

Curating has undergone a relational turn. From putting different artworks in a relationship, curating today consists of creating a large network of relations. But what is the nature of these relations, how can curators create good relations, and what role does music play within these networks?

These are questions that are familiar to me as I address them as part of my *Musikvermittlung*¹ practice and research. Musikvermittlung and curating music are related practices, and they share similar goals, as they aim at creating, deepening, and expanding musical relationships. In my dissertation,² I investigated how musicians can foster musical relationships. In this paper, I place my research in the context of curating studies and propose a model for curating concerts and music projects. In the first section, I explain the concept of Musikvermittlung and clarify my understanding of music before discussing the relational turn in curating studies. The second section examines the nature of resonant musical relationships and addresses their preconditions based on Hartmut Rosa's³ resonance theory. In the third section, I illustrate my thoughts with a concrete example of a concert performance and finally show how resonance theory can be applied to the practice of curating with a dynamic model. My contribution is intended to encourage curators to reflect on their own practice and to take up suggestions for practice.

Musikvermittlung and Curating Music: Two Sister Disciplines

Musikvermittlung and Curating Music are sister disciplines. As Chaker and Petri-Preis put it, "Central concerns of Musikvermittlung include bringing people into contact with one another by means of music, and getting them involved in shared discussions and interaction with, through and around music, in short: to instigate social communication and entice them towards new kinds of music experience."⁴ Musikvermittlung is understood as an artistic practice⁵ and as a field of action with multifaceted interfaces, among others with dramaturgy and journalism.⁶ Musikvermittlung always has a social reference and is articulated in performative, participative, installative, transdisciplinary, intermedial, and communicative formats, both within institutions and the independent scene. As a collaborative practice, Musikvermittlung works with people from very different contexts. A key principle of Musikvermittlung is the change of perspective. This creates a diversity of perspectives on music and many ways of listening. Even if demanded again and again (especially to justify subsidies), Musikvermittlung does *not* pursue the goal of educating about musical taste, generating an audience of tomorrow, and thus legitimizing the supremacy of Western classical music, but it wants to enable "personal, socially significant aesthetic experiences with music."⁷

This requires an examination of the existing tradition. In this respect, Musikvermittlung exercises an affirmative function: it deals with given practices, performance methods, and existing norms and structures. At the same time, however, Musikvermittlung changes all these specifications and therefore has a transformative function, too. This requires critical self-reflection and discourse with the artistic and strategic leadership of music ensembles and institutions.⁸ An example of the transformative function of Musikvermittlung is the change that the Beethovenfest in Bonn is undergoing. For

artistic director Steven Walter, Musikvermittlung does not count as a by-product, but is part of the main artistic program. He understands Musikvermittlung as a cross-sectional task of the entire festival.⁹

As an interface practice, the action field of Musikvermittlung can be characterized as a messy place. In the resonance-oriented Musikvermittlung described here, the focus is on cultivating a network of relationships rather than on gaining attention and interpretive authority (*Deutungshoheit*) which is fought out in an arena, a place of combat. The place of resonance-oriented Musikvermittlung, on the other hand, resembles a forum.¹⁰ Such a forum originally arose in Rome in a marshy area, where in the course of the centuries very different public buildings were (re-)built in a very confined space. The forum as a messy place is used in very different ways: it is a place of exchange, trading, pleasure, politics, contemplation, reflection, development, and transformation.

Music as a Relationship Builder

In such a forum, music itself is considered an actor and relational facilitator (*Beziehungsstifterin*). According to Georgina Born's Mediation Theory,¹¹ music creates diverse forms of relations: a) among musicians, b) within communities through musical or other identifications, c) in wider collectives, and d) in institutions on which their (re)production and transformation are founded. According to Georgina Born's Mediation Theory, music is a mutual interaction: it changes and shapes subjects and socialities, but music itself is also formed by human practice, discourse, groups, and socio-technical arrangements. Born conceives music as "an aggregation of sonic, social, corporeal, discursive, visual, technological and temporal mediations—a musical assemblage, where this is understood as a characteristic constellation of such heterogeneous mediations. In Deleuzian thought an assemblage is defined as a multiplicity made up of heterogeneous components, each having a certain autonomy [...]."¹² In concert situations, therefore, a network of relationships is woven. Its quality, according to Christopher Small, can only be evaluated situationally and subjectively by the involved participants: "Any performance, [...] should be judged finally on its success in bringing into existence for as long as it lasts a set of relationships that those taking part feel to be ideal and in enabling those taking part to explore, affirm, and celebrate those relationships. Only those taking part will know for sure what is their nature."¹³

The resonance-oriented Musikvermittlung described here, though, is not about merely affirming certain (supposed) performance traditions; its focus is on exploration. Accordingly, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson asks: "What is our problem with innovation, or even imagination, in musical performance? Why are we so horrified at giving classical music the same licence we give classical theatre? [...] Perhaps because we practise classical music as Utopia, a perfect society, walled off from the rest of the world, which it would be unforgivable to disrupt."¹⁴ It is precisely such a disruption that Leech-Wilkinson calls for: a move away from "Doing History in Sound" towards an artistic and creative independence of musicians that does not please the gatekeepers and the "performance police" but corresponds to a "radical performance" that will "turn concert life into something less competitive, less predictable and less routine."¹⁵

Within the musical network of relationships, it is not a matter of preserving and representing certain traditional values, but rather a personal and creative approach to music in which music is contextualized with very different social perspectives. From this emerges an individual meaningfulness of music. This practice of mediating corresponds to Brandon Farnsworth's view "that curating is connotated with a renewed emphasis on the relationship between contemporary music and society, and a break in

some form with the status quo.”¹⁶ Thus, Musikvermittlung and curating music also have in common that they both see themselves as rebellious practices. Accordingly, a performance is not a representation of works, but a co-construction of the participants.¹⁷ This requires a mediation process, as Farnsworth points out: “The concept of mediation is key in that it describes the process of providing context and framing, connecting an artistic practice with particular histories, audiences, and places. The transdisciplinary and transculturality that define 21st century artistic practice require this explicit constitution of connections in order to not be lost in the deluge (of information, of ideas, of entertainment).”¹⁸ Within this network-based approach, the curator has the role of a mediator¹⁹ who considers personality a key factor, because it is not only about working as efficiently as possible, but about an affective performative practice.²⁰ At the same time, the mediation and inclusion of different perspectives demand ethical curatorial responsibility.²¹ With the relational turn of curating music, its similarity to resonance-affine Musikvermittlung intensifies. Both disciplines need an open, discrimination-sensitive attitude, build networks, give impulses, but also take up ideas and concerns of the partners.

Curating as Relationship Work (*Beziehungsarbeit*)

Now that I have outlined the similarities between curating music and Musikvermittlung, I will take an in-depth look into the relational turn in the field of curating, referring to Beatrice von Bismarck²² who emphasizes and concretizes the relational turn of curating studies. By “curatoriality,” she refers to the “relational dynamics of the curatorial.”²³ The curatorial makes art and culture public and is based on a “web of relationships among all human and non-human participants” where the relationships are both aesthetic and emotionally affective.²⁴ Changes occur through dynamic relationships and new linkages.²⁵ The analysis of the curatorial situation as a structure of relationships makes it possible to examine and reshape “traditional hierarchies, fixations, dependencies, privileges and ways of acting.”²⁶ The claim for a transformation towards practices and structures that are critical of power and sensitive to justice also shows the proximity of curatoriality to Musikvermittlung and follows demands of cultural policy and cultural management.²⁷ However, the question arises whether these concerns are not utopian in light of reality. Do von Bismarck’s claims remain wishful thinking, or do practical examples exist in the art field in which curatoriality is implemented as institutional critical practice (like the mentioned transformation at Beethovenfest in Bonn)?

The essence of the curatorial is characterized by three aspects: first, transpositional processes, from which, second, certain situational and temporary constellations emerge, and, third, the *dispositif* of hospitality on which transposition and the constellation are based.²⁸ Transposition means movements, displacements, and entanglements of human and non-human actors.²⁹ Through these practices, dynamics and contrary orientations emerge, for example, gathering inwardly and showing outwardly (in public). When the transpositions take an open-ended course and unexpected encounters arise, new relationships emerge.³⁰ Through transpositions, however, previous relationships can be separated or exclusions can take place.³¹ Von Bismarck calls the dynamic network of relations a constellation.³² Each constellation is characterized by “aesthetic, social, political and economic lines of force [*Kraftlinien*].”³³ Hospitality therefore corresponds to a field of tension between reception and exclusion. This contrast already lies in the range of meanings of the Latin verb *curare*, which on the one hand means to protect, respect, and support, but on the other hand also includes to determine and control.³⁴ The hosts determine who is allowed to be a guest under which conditions (which in turn has to do with attributions of identities and status), who receives which

resources, how roles and their functions are defined, and how spaces are used.³⁵ Sometimes, being a host is also about improving one's own status.³⁶ The curatorial therefore needs an ethos, which von Bismarck understands as a dynamic principle: "The curatorial is not to be understood as an ethical application, but rather as a situational, transformative ethos. In curatorial hospitality lies the potential of a mutual becoming-hospitality [*ein gegenseitiges Sich-Zu-Gast-Werden*]."³⁷ Who is a guest with whom in which role? These questions are decided temporarily in the respective situation. Von Bismarck therefore speaks of a "threshold situation that, due to specific freedoms, allows the roles and functions of hosting and being hosted to change continuously."³⁸ These negotiation processes are a matter of power. Von Bismarck therefore describes the curatorial situation as an arena in which a struggle for attention is fought.³⁹ Crucial to the curatorial, according to von Bismarck, is not winning this battle, but the dynamics of negotiation, what she calls "interplay in the curatorial."⁴⁰ Thus, the curatorial, with its relational dynamics, undergoes a change of perspective, because the focus is no longer on specific aspects (such as exhibits or presentation formats) or individuals (such as artists or curators), but on the relationships between the various (non-)human participants.⁴¹

At this point, it should be remembered that when the battle in the arena of the curatorial is about attention, privileged individuals and institutions have a great advantage. Other individuals, on the other hand, are not noticed at all. They are silent actors who are forgotten in the loud struggle for attention. When von Bismarck uses the image of the arena only as a metaphor, she removes the tension from the negotiation process. The struggles are named, but to a certain extent they show themselves to be appropriate to the situation and are therefore downplayed. One way to escape this approach would be to use the arena not as a mere metaphor but as a method.⁴² In this way, the struggle for attention could be critically investigated, and silent actors and blind spots within the curatorial could be uncovered.

Resonance as a Successful Mode of Relationship

Before this article illustrates the theoretical thoughts on a curatorial practice with a practical example from music, the next step is to show how the nature of relationships is ideally shaped. Such an ideal case happens only rarely and cannot be conjured up. But in the description of ideal, resonant relationships, certain aspects emerge that can be fostered. Knowing these aspects leads to a resonance-oriented practice of curating music. This is the purpose of the following theoretical deepening. It gives an answer to the question: How can relationships in the curatorial be made as successful as possible? To answer this question, I refer to sociologist Hartmut Rosa's theory of resonance (2016, 2018a, 2018b).⁴³ Before I discuss his resonance theory, I point out that, for Rosa, music reveals a certain world relationship and a specific mood. Music, for him, negotiates various relational qualities.⁴⁴ According to Rosa, instrumental music resembles an "experimental field for the appropriation of different patterns of world-relationship."⁴⁵ Music thus offers us humans a playing field for entering into different relational constellations and trying ourselves out in them. For Rosa, however, music is also a "*stubborn* material" because it can never be "completely controlled, calculated, and predicted," otherwise it becomes "pure routine" or there is a danger of manipulation.⁴⁶ In addition, music has high social relevance. Rosa even finds that without music, society would have collapsed long ago.^{47 48}

Resonance in the sense of sociologist Hartmut Rosa⁴⁹ is not to be understood as a resonating feeling, attention, recognition, approval, or harmony, but as a mode of relationship: resonant relationships are reciprocal, vibrating, successful relationships. They are

responsive relationships (*Antwortbeziehungen*), a living dialogue of different voices with an open outcome. The designation of this mode of relationship with the term resonance is problematic, because it is neither the physical phenomenon nor a metaphor of resonance. Rather, resonance for Rosa means a risky interaction process with an open-ended transformation where all participants change. Moreover, when it comes to music and art, resonant relationships produce an aesthetic surplus that implies a non-understanding. Resonance shows up in concerts as “dynamic, processual events. [...] Resonant relationships are established when *the spark is ignited*, when a collective resonance develops between the artists on the one hand and between the artists and the audience on the other. [...] In such an experience, a form of self-efficacy can certainly be experienced [also for the audience], because here *it works* at least within the recipient. Often these two forms of collective resonance develop a reciprocal contagious effect: resonance between the artists is transferred to the audience and vice versa.”⁵⁰

Defining Characteristics of Resonant Relationships

At the beginning of resonant relationships, there is an interaction between an affection and a response in the form of self-efficacy. Affection corresponds to being gripped and touched, which is connected with the belief that one’s own enthusiasm and passion is connected with something important and that one can affect others with it. Affection, then, involves not only enthusiasm but also an inner conviction. Musicians, curators, and mediators not only feel like putting on a concert, but they consider their activity to be something urgent, necessary, important. Resonant relationships are therefore based on sensuality⁵¹ on the one hand and meaningfulness on the other.⁵²

The person addressed is not only touched by fascination, or affected as Rosa says, but also wants to bring about something in him- or herself. The affected person is triggered, so to speak, and develops an expectation of self-efficacy. This means that he or she has the desire and confidence to take on challenges and assume responsibility. Self-efficacy, too, is associated with intrinsic interest. The affected person acts out of his or her own motivation and classifies his or her actions as important. Sensuality and meaningfulness therefore also play an important role here. Intrinsic interest does not increase with personal “success or the ‘reward’ for a commitment, but with the experience of being able to *bring about something oneself*; to achieve the world. It is not the effected *results* that are decisive, but the *experience of the interaction* that results in the process.”⁵³ So it’s not about being successful on your own, but rather about the quality of the interaction. A resonant relationship corresponds to a living dialogue. To conceive resonance not as a mere metaphor but as a mode of relationship, in addition to the first two criteria of resonant relationships, namely 1) affection and 2) self-efficacy, there is also a need for 3) transformation and 4) uncontrollability.⁵⁴

Transformation corresponds to a temporary or even lasting change: this can be a change of mood, a feeling of aliveness, a changed situation, or even a key biographical experience. Transformation cannot be planned, controlled, enhanced, or captured, nor can it be disposed of. Since resonant relationships are interactions, the transformation affects all those involved. However, for transformation to occur, resonance as a responsive relationship needs a different voice. This different voice results in an irritation and thus a dynamic in the relationship structure. Resonance is not a tune-in or an echo but depends on a certain dissonance to trigger a transformation. Therefore, dissonance is not the opposite of resonance but a constitutive element of it.⁵⁵ Because of this mixture, resonance-oriented Musikvermittlung overcomes dualistic thinking in dichotomies and locates itself in an intersection of diverging aspects.

In the interaction with another, the independent voice involves uncontrollability, which is a prerequisite for resonant relationships because “we can only get into resonance with something or someone out there that is insurmountably different from us and non-controllable. Therefore, it is not about the ‘nostrification’ of another, and not about the reinforcement or affirmation of one’s identity, but about its transformation.”⁵⁶ Any transformation needs a certain irritation, therefore “resonance contains and, at least at times, requires contradiction, friction, disagreement [...]”⁵⁷ That is why resonance means neither consonance nor harmony. Through an encounter with something that is different, an unexpected transformation might occur and lead to an experience of strong resonance.^{58 59} In the realm of music, this means that a strong, lively response relationship to a hitherto unknown or unappreciated music arises, even against the previous habitus and field.⁶⁰ Transformation involves overcoming given opinions and practices. Rosa emphasizes that, “Violating the meaning of one’s interpretive horizon can clearly constitute a major experience of resonance! More than this, I claim that an element of transgression of this horizon is necessary for resonance to happen. Resonance is the result of an encounter with something that is not (entirely) captured by my standard interpretive frames.”⁶¹ As far as interpretive frames are concerned, resonance is “not a culturally specific, acquired aesthetic sensibility, but the most basic, constitutive and essential form of human self-world relations.”⁶²

However, resonance is uncontrollable.⁶³ The transformation might happen or not. If it occurs, it happens in an unexpected way, for the nature of the transformation is unpredictable and open ended. Being affected and experiencing resonance always involve a risk and a vulnerability. Therefore, “there is also a danger in transformation: resonance is never free of risk.”⁶⁴ This also applies to the establishment or possible failure of resonant relationships: if nothing comes back from fascination and affection, the relationship is indifferent, or even repulsive. Hartmut Rosa calls the state of relationshiplessness alienation.

Rosa underlines that resonant relationships are connected to power, and therefore an ethics of resonance is needed. In his words:

This is an ethics that tries to let the other be, to preserve its voice, but nevertheless seeks to reach out and touch it and let it transform itself: The resonant subject does not try to transform the other, but it might try to open routes for self-transformation for the other. In this sense, the autonomy of the other is always respected: It is a consequence of accepted inaccessibility. I believe this sense of care for the other even extends beyond subjects: When we are in resonance with nature, or a piece of art, for example, we try to preserve it carefully [...].⁶⁵

Resonance as a responsive relationship also implies a responsive empathy and responsibility. Rosa creates a neologism for this: “I owe him or her responsibility: I let myself be touched and transformed by the voice, perhaps the cry of the other.”⁶⁶ In other words, an “ethics of resonance requires listening to the other, not telling him or her what to do.”⁶⁷

Preconditions for Resonant Relationships

What conditions resonant relationships need can be explained with four mixing ratios: first, as already described, there is a need for simultaneous meaningfulness and sensuality. This can be illustrated by the example of a resonating body: the body of a violin not only has the function of producing a sound (thus it exhibits meaningfulness), but it

also contributes to the quality of the sound (thus it also provides sensuality). Resonant relationships are meaningful and sensual. They are characterized by high relevance and at the same time joyful aesthetic experiences. Second, like a resonant body, resonant relationships need simultaneous openness and closedness. Openness implies an inner vulnerability. Therefore, a resonant relationship needs social recognition and appreciation and, besides openness and empathy, also a certain closedness, which is expressed in self-confidence and in an expectation of self-efficacy.⁶⁸ For with too much openness, one's own voice is lost, and there is the danger of an echo or even of manipulation. Too much closedness, on the other hand, prevents one from engaging with the other person, with the context, and with the unforeseen. So, on the one hand, empathy for the new is needed, and on the other hand, an agile, dynamic stability. The mixture of simultaneous openness and closedness is what I call medioordination. An example of medioordination in the realm of curating music is when the musicians and the audience can be flexible with a given space or clear time constraint.⁶⁹ A third prerequisite for resonance is an attitude of mediopassivity, which could just as well be called medioactivity.⁷⁰ This refers to a form of acting in the in-between of passivity and activity, a simultaneous listening and responding. Chamber music making or improvising occurs mediopassively. A fourth mixed relationship, I call medioconjunctivity. For resonance is based on relationships that are binding and yet loose. At the intersection of these four mixing ratios, there is a great potential for resonant relationships.

Rosa distinguishes a total of four dimensions of resonant relationships: horizontal for social relationships, diagonal for intense relationships with objects and work, vertical for existential relationships with nature, history, religion, or art,⁷¹ and additionally a self-relationship.⁷²

Based on Hartmut Rosa's understanding of resonance, which cannot be planned but only fostered, I speak of a resonance-oriented Musikvermittlung and of curating *possible* resonances. I call the four mentioned dimensions of resonant relationships in the realm of music resonant (1) relationships *with* music, (2) relationships *to* music, (3) relationships *in* music, and (4) self-relationships *through* music. If a relationship succeeds, however, exclusions in the form of indifference or alienation always take place at the same time. Resonance-oriented Musikvermittlung and curating possible resonant relationships therefore require an awareness of diversity, hierarchies and agency, an openness to different, individual spheres of resonance, as well as a sensitivity to discrimination and the handling of human and non-human resources.

Different Resonant Relationships in a Performance

I will now describe in a concrete example how the four dimensions of resonant relationships can occur in a performance. In order to be resonant, these relationships need the defining characteristics mentioned above, namely, an affection, self-efficacy, uncontrollability, and transformation. The example can also be used to show the basic principles of resonance (cf. the four mixing ratios and the other aspects described above). However, the described performance is by no means a prime example of resonance; rather, a great deal of alienation was also observable. But this is exactly what makes the example interesting. The description serves to concretize resonance theory and shows its relation to curating music.

The performance *Überläufer** on the subject of migration was conceived and performed by students of the Basel Hochschule für Musik together with students of scenography at the FHNW Hochschule für Gestaltung und Kunst under the direction of composer Hannes Seidl. The students developed the piece in a process that spanned

several months. Some found it difficult that the process remained open for so long and that Hannes Seidl did not simply make decisions and issue instructions (so there were obviously different expectations regarding openness and closedness). Through the collaborative development of the piece and the execution of their own dramaturgical ideas, the students engaged with the music in an intense way; they experienced self-efficacy and developed relationships *to* music.⁷³

The concerts took place in a former customs hall as part of the ZeitRäume Basel 2019 festival.⁷⁴ Outside the hall, every audience member was welcomed by a student and was ceremoniously dressed in a transparent, shiny cape. This preparation gave the event a meaningfulness and sensuality and raised expectations for the performance. When the doors of the hall were opened, the audience was immersed in the ongoing performance that spanned the entire hall. There were many sounds and places to discover, fostering simultaneous affectation and self-efficacy. The cape was also worn by the performers who moved through the hall and didn't play all the time. Therefore, it was not visually clear who was performing and who was listening (cf. mediopassivity). The musicians and scenographers were oriented to a fixed time schedule, but they also had free spaces that they could shape individually (cf. medioordination). Sometimes they strolled individually through the hall, sometimes they met for group actions, and sometimes they had solo performances (cf. medioconjunctivity). In the concert, not only did the musicians perform, but so did the scenography students, e.g., with smartphones. The two groups of students were connected through the social interaction with music, they were in a relationship *with* music.

The customs hall was divided into changing transit spaces by students moving huge transparent mobile walls. The audience thus experienced a constantly changing space and sound, freely choosing their way through the hall, but sometimes also being pushed in one direction (cf. medioordination). There was no stage nor recognizable spatial separation of performers and audience; everyone was on the move, voluntarily or involuntarily making intermediate stops and encountering each other (cf. medioconjunctivity). Thus, the dynamic space also generated social interactions. This shows that other non-human actors, such as space, equipment, and staging, were also involved and created or prevented relationships. On a balcony outside the hall, audience members were invited by a computer to answer questions about migration and their own biography. The answers were filmed and streamed shortly afterwards in the concert. Individual audience members thus became performers; they participated and became part of the performance in a personal way (cf. self-efficacy). For the makers of the performance, this audience action also meant a risk. It was not clear whether the audience would get involved and what contributions would come (cf. uncontrollability). The actively involved audience members positioned themselves in the computer-filmed interview on the concert's theme, migration, and established a relationship *to* music. But even those who were involved only as listeners were able to experience a relationship *to* music if they were willing to engage with the music in an exploratory way and put different musical aspects into context.

Due to the continuously changing setting, all participants were in motion and met each other. Through these social interactions with music, everybody experienced relationships *with* music. The scenographic and performative staging of the performance's theme, migration, contributed to the fact that the participating students and the audience also experienced the music in an existential and performative way. The participants, if they were open to it, could build a relationship *in* music—for example, in a cabin furnished with large cushions and bright lights, where electronic music was

played very loudly. Furthermore, during the performance, musicians and audience members experienced themselves in a different way than in everyday life. They experienced a special self-relation *through* music in the concert setting.

As the piece was about migration, the students generated inclusions and exclusions that were not objectively comprehensible and revealed an arbitrariness and injustice. In order to concretize exclusions, the audience was shifted with huge transparent mobile walls, and a gatekeeper let some people into a cabin or onto a viewing platform, but others were denied access for no reason. All participants therefore also experienced exclusion and alienation and were sensitized to discrimination processes. During the performance, space and sound transformed in many ways. What form of transformation the participating students and the audience also experienced internally could not be observed from the outside. The individual experiences would have to be brought to light with interviews.

Dynamic Model for Curating Resonances

In my dissertation, I developed a dynamic model for resonance-oriented Musikvermittlung in the form of a turntable that could also be used for curating potential resonances.⁷⁵

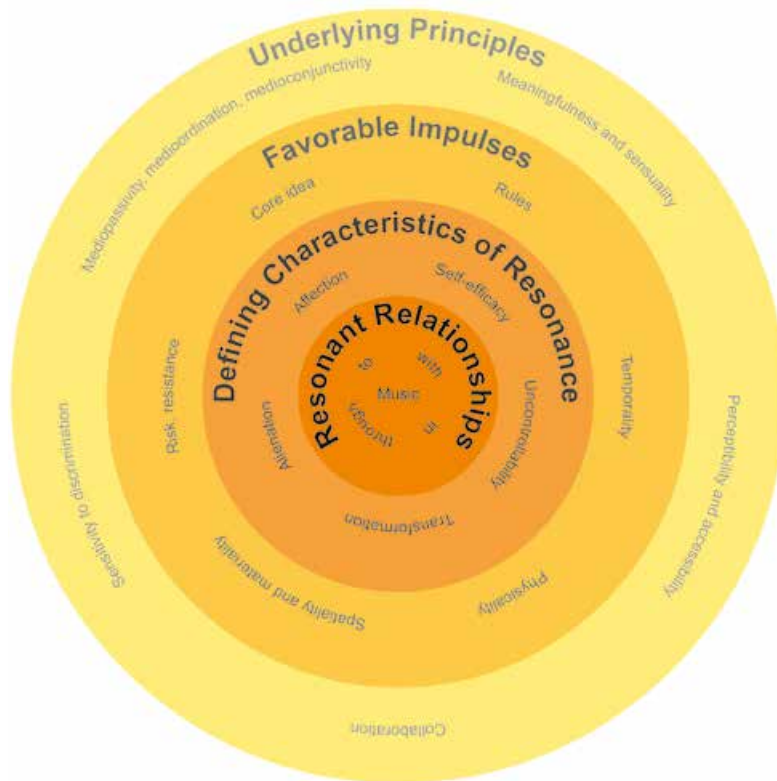


fig. 1 Turntable of resonance-oriented Musikvermittlung and curating music (Müller-Brozović, forthcoming).

In addition to the defining characteristics of resonance mentioned above (affection, self-efficacy, transformation, uncontrollability, potential alienation), the four dimensions of resonant relationships (relationship *with* music, *to* music, *in* music, and *through* music) and the underlying principles (including meaningfulness and sensuality, mediocoordination, mediopassivity, medioconjunctivity, sensitivity to discrimination, perceptibility, accessibility, and collaboration), the model also identifies favorable impulses for curating music. Here, an existing core idea, its rules of play, and the handling

of temporality, physicality, spatiality, materiality, and risk are addressed. For each of the twenty aspects in total, curators can formulate questions with which they can conceive, discuss, and reflect on their projects.⁷⁶

In order to spin the turntable as a tool for curating music, I refer once again to the described example and bring into play guiding questions for some aspects of the favorable impulses that support curators in their work. To curate music with the help of the turntable, one selects a certain aspect, e.g., the core idea, turns the individual discs, and brings the selected aspect into relation with other aspects. In this way, the core idea can be further developed and questioned in relation to all the defining characteristics of resonance,⁷⁷ the four possible resonant relations,⁷⁸ and the mixed forms of mediopassivity, medioordination, and medioconjunctivity⁷⁹. In the example above, I have already described the artistic means with which the questions about these aspects may be answered.

Regarding the favorable impulses for resonant relationships mentioned on the turntable, curators may address the following questions, among others, concerning the core idea: What artistic intention and social urgency does the core idea contain? What is at stake? With these questions, the core concept gains dynamism and the turntable starts spinning. By answering, the curators' artistic idea becomes connected to a social context and acquires relevance and urgency. The curator becomes aware of what the core of the artistic idea is, what negotiation processes are occurring, and what risks are consciously taken. In the example mentioned above, these questions are answered as follows:

Borders are fictitious—regardless of whether they are the borders between countries or continents, between ethnic groups or between classes: they only come into being in a language that strives for order and division. In the project *Überläufer**, the ideas of students from the fields of music and scenography on the themes of migration and change come together in an unusual sound-space composition. Based on the remarkable cultural diversity of the students in Basel, several months of joint development resulted in a space and music that are in constant flux – a kind of organism in constant motion, a marketplace full of people with the most diverse connections.⁸⁰

If the core idea on the turntable is now placed in relation to, for example, the aspect of discrimination sensitivity (one of the founding principles), the core idea can be questioned on the following points, among others: How can the responsible individuals distance themselves from their own wishes and intentions and include other perspectives? In the case of *Überläufer**, this was done during the development process as part of the collaboration with the very different students (diversity in terms of age, origin, field of study, musical preferences), and during the performance through audience participation via the described audience interview on the subject of migration. However, if one reflects on the artistic idea of *Überläufer** not only in terms of content, but also in its implementation with regard to possible discrimination, it becomes apparent that access to the customs hall is not barrier-free, and people with a walking disability cannot participate (to mention just one possible kind of discrimination).

The core idea can also be questioned in terms of its rules, e.g., with the following questions: How do the rules create clarity and trust? How do the rules allow for creativity, openness, and flexibility? How do the rules encourage encounters and exchange? To what extent is the approach resource-oriented? In the performance *Überläufer**, there

was a clear time frame with a precisely defined entrance, a predetermined duration, and a clear time for leaving the room. The musicians followed a strict timeline and time brackets for certain actions. Other actions, however, did not follow any time constraints. This mixture had a clearly structured and yet open effect on the performers and the audience. As the spaces in the hall constantly changed and closed again and again in different formations, encounters with different people were created. In the collaboration between the students of music and scenography, they were able to contribute their potential,⁸¹ and the audience was able to participate with their own statements, if they wished.

Another favorable aspect for resonance concerns physicality. In this regard, curators may ask themselves questions such as: Are bodies perceived not only as a performing medium, but also in their sensuality and statement? At *Überläufer**, the glittering transparent capes worn by both musicians and audience transformed the bodies into flowing magnets that attracted, grouped, or repelled and isolated themselves. The bodies formed proximity or confinement. Musicians and audience members on a platform looking down on the action in the hall were exposed on the one hand, but also had an overview and control of the people on the other. Entering the wooden hut, the audience landed in a bright white cloud with huge cushions on which they listened to very loud music while lying down. They not only perceived music in a different bodily position, but they were also exposed to extreme sensory stimuli. The audience and the musicians exposed themselves to an extreme physical situation, which at the same time took place in a protected and exclusive setting, as a doorman granted entry only to selected people for no reason. From this situation of exclusivity, experienced exclusions and an endurance test of sensual perceptions, an individual meaning, perhaps also a non-understanding, emerged for each participant. Not only the audience, but also the musicians, changed positions. Some of them traveled as a swarm while playing with their cell phones; others gave a concert in an open freight car converted into a stage, while one musician on the platform screamed full of anger into a megaphone, and another was invisible, purring the song "Strangers in the Night."

In a similar way, the curators can take up further aspects on the turntable and develop their core idea towards resonant relationships. For relationships to be truly resonant, the defining characteristics of resonance must all be present. The four dimensions of resonant relationships (with/to/in/through music) can occur singly or in combinations, and the underlying principles and facilitating impulses may have an influence. With my model, I specify the nature of musical relationships and their influencing aspects and thus contribute to a reflective practice of curating resonances. My theoretical foundation of a relational approach in curatorial studies supports the practice of curators on the one hand and on the other hand offers a starting point for future empirical research. This paper aims to show that curating resonances as a network practice is a dynamic open process, an art of balancing, and a venture in which, in the best case, vivid interactions occur in a network of relationships, transforming all involved.

Notes

- 1** *Musikvermittlung* is a very broad term that has no equivalent in English. Musikvermittlung does not only mean outreach projects, audience development or music education, but, as an artistic practice, realizes cultural participation and social cohesion, which comprises two of three main funding axes of Swiss cultural funding. Following Chaker and Petri-Preis (Sarah Chaker and Axel Petri-Preis, eds., *Tuning up! The Innovative Potential of Musikvermittlung* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2022)), the term Musikvermittlung will be used in German in this paper.
- 2** Irena Müller-Brozović, *Das Konzert als Resonanzraum. Resonanzaffine Musikvermittlung durch intensives Erleben und Involviertsein* (Bielefeld: transcript, forthcoming).
- 3** Hartmut Rosa, *Resonanz. Eine Soziologie der Weltbeziehung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2016).
- 4** Chaker and Petri-Preis, *Tuning up!*
- 5** Matthias Rebstock, "Strategien zur Produktion von Präsenz, II," in *Das Konzert II. Beiträge zum Forschungsfeld der Concert Studies*, ed. Martin Tröndle (Bielefeld: transcript, 2018), 159; Barbara Balba Weber, *Entfesselte Klassik. Grenzen öffnen mit künstlerischer Musikvermittlung* (Bern: Stämpfli Verlag, 2018).
- 6** Irena Müller-Brozović, "Musikvermittlung," accessed September 6, 2021, <https://www.kubi-online.de/artikel/musikvermittlung>.
- 7** Wolfgang Rüdiger, "Zum Begriff Musikvermittlung und zu den Beiträgen dieses Bandes," in *Musikvermittlung - wozu? Umriss und Perspektiven eines jungen Arbeitsfeldes*, ed. Wolfgang Rüdiger (Mainz: Schott, 2014). (English translation by the author.)
- 8** Carmen Mörsch, *Zeit für Vermittlung*, ed. Institute for Art Education der Zürcher Hochschule der Künste im Auftrag von Pro Helvetia, 2013, als Resultat der Begleitforschung des "Programms Kulturvermittlung" (2009 – 2012), accessed August 11, 2022, https://www.kultur-vermittlung.ch/zeit-fuer-vermittlung/download/pdf-d/ZfV_0_gesamte_Publikation.pdf.
- 9** Steven Walter, "Was bedeutet Musikvermittlung?," Podcasts Beethovenfest, audio, June 26, 2022, <https://www.beethovenfest.de/de/magazin/sonderfolge-musikvermittlung/9>.
- 10** Irena Müller-Brozović "Von der Arena zum Forum. Unterschiedliche Spielformen in Musikvermittlungsprojekten," in *Zusammenspiel? Musikprojekte an der Schnittstelle von Kultur- und Bildungseinrichtungen*, ed. Johannes Voit, Diskussion Musikpädagogik. Sonderheft (Hamburg: Hildegard-Junker, 2018), 30–47.
- 11** Georgina Born, "Mediation Theory," in *The Routledge Reader on the Sociology of Music*, eds. John Shepherd and Kyle Devine (New York: Routledge, 2015), 360.
- 12** *Ibid.*, 359–360.
- 13** Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 49.
- 14** Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, "Classical Music as Enforced Utopia," *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 15, nos. 3-4 (2016): 329, accessed September 6, 2021, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1474022216647706>.
- 15** Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, *Challenging Performance: The Book* (2020), accessed July 17, 2020, <https://challengingperformance.com/the-book/>.
- 16** Brandon Farnsworth, *Curating Contemporary Music Festivals* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2020), 19.
- 17** *Ibid.*, 103.
- 18** *Ibid.*, 281–282.
- 19** *Ibid.*, 105.
- 20** *Ibid.*, 89.
- 21** *Ibid.*, 30–31.
- 22** Beatrice von Bismarck, *Das Kuratorische* (Leipzig: Spector, 2021).

- 23** Ibid., 11. (English translation by the author.)
- 24** Ibid., 13;19. (English translation by the author.)
- 25** Ibid., 15.
- 26** Ibid., 43. (English translation by the author.)
- 27** Philippe Bischof, “Transformieren statt transformiert werden: Chancen für den Kultursektor,” Kulturpolitische Gesellschaft e.v., accessed August 9, 2022, <https://kupoge.de/blog/2021/01/29/transformieren-statt-transformiert-werden-chancen-fuer-den-kultursektor/>.
- 28** Bismarck, *Das Kuratorische*, 93.
- 29** Ibid., 153; 155.
- 30** Ibid., 157.
- 31** Ibid., 159.
- 32** Ibid., 87.
- 33** Ibid., 187. (English translation by the author.)
- 34** Ibid., 205–207.
- 35** Ibid., 201.
- 36** Ibid., 211.
- 37** Ibid., 215. (English translation by the author.)
- 38** Ibid., 221. (English translation by the author.)
- 39** Ibid., 67; 75–77.
- 40** Ibid., 15.
- 41** Ibid., 15–17.
- 42** A research method to analyze a situation as an arena is described by Clarke, Friese, and Washburn, *Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory After the Interpretative Turn* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2018).
- 43** Rosa, *Resonanz*; Hartmut Rosa, *Unverfügbarkeit* (Vienna, Salzburg: Residenz, 2018); Hartmut Rosa, “The Idea of Resonance as a Sociological Concept,” *Global Dialogue. Magazine of the International Sociological Association* 8, no. 2 (2018), accessed July 14, 2022, <https://globaldialogue.isa-sociology.org/articles/the-idea-of-resonance-as-a-sociological-concept>.
- 44** Rosa, *Resonanz*, 161–163.
- 45** Ibid., 483. (English translation by the author.)
- 46** Ibid., 396. (English translation by the author.)
- 47** Hartmut Rosa, “Musik als zentrale Resonanzsphäre,” Vortrag am Kongress des Verbands deutscher Musikschulen, 2019, accessed September 6, 2021, https://www.musikschulen.de/medien/doks/mk19/dokumentation/plenum-1_rosa.pdf.
- 48** Rosa often uses music in his resonance theory to illustrate his thoughts. However, in my opinion, his musical examples are unfortunate (a resonating tuning fork lacks resistance, there is no independent voice nor an uncontrollability—all constitutive elements of resonance). Rosa’s musical examples seem to correspond to his personal musical preferences and, in my opinion, are rather an expression of emotion (*Rührung*) and affirmation, but not resonant relationships.
- 49** Rosa, *Resonanz*.
- 50** Ibid., 491. (English translation by the author.)
- 51** With sensuality, I relate to the gratification of the senses, the desire or the indulgence, but not in a sexual way. See <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sensuality>, accessed December 19, 2022.
- 52** Rosa, *Resonanz*, 463.
- 53** Ibid., 274 (English translation by the author.)
- 54** Hartmut Rosa, “Beethoven, the Sailor, the Boy and the Nazi: A reply to my critics,” *Journal of Political Power* 13, no. 3 (2020): 397–414. Accessed July 23, 2022, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/2158379X.2020.1831057>.

55 Ibid., 398.

56 Ibid., 399.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 The interaction with a different voice and uncontrollability also ensure that resonance corresponds neither to an echo nor to a manipulation.

60 Rosa, "Beethoven," 399–400.

61 Ibid., 400.

62 Ibid., 406.

63 Rosa differentiates uncontrollability and emphasizes that resonance needs a semi-uncontrollability. Resonant relationships need perceptibility and accessibility to emerge. Rosa, *Unverfügbarkeit*.

64 Andreas Reckwitz, Hartmut Rosa, *Spätmoderne in der Krise. Was leistet die Gesellschaftstheorie?* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2021), 246. (English translation by the author.)

65 Rosa, "Beethoven," 410.

66 Ibid., 411.

67 Ibid.

68 Rosa, *Resonanz*, 298.

69 A flexibility in terms of space and time is by no means a "recipe" for resonance, because resonance cannot be planned with individual "ingredients." Therefore, resonant relationships also occur in a traditional concert.

70 Hartmut Rosa, "Spirituelle Abhängigkeitserklärung. Die Idee des Mediopassiv als Ausgangspunkt einer radikalen Transformation," in *Große Transformation? Zur Zukunft moderner Gesellschaften*, eds. Klaus Dörre, Hartmut Rosa, Karina Becker, Sophie Bose, and Benjamin Seyd (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2019), 35–55.

71 Rosa, *Resonanz*, 331.

72 Rosa, "Musik als zentrale Resonanzsphäre."

73 However, according to their professor, some of the scenography students could not develop a relationship to the music. They did not experience any affection, and the music remained alien to them.

74 The trailer of *Ueberläufer** can be seen on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-JL-GF2xEQ0>, accessed July 15, 2022.

75 Irena Müller-Brozović, *Das Konzert als Resonanzraum. Resonanzaffine Musikvermittlung durch intensives Erleben und Involviertsein* (Bielefeld: transcript, forthcoming).

76 My own guiding questions will be published in the context of my dissertation (Müller-Brozović, forthcoming).

77 For example, with the questions: How do we show our enthusiasm for the music, the people, and the situation, and do we let them inspire us? How do we give the audience a space for interaction? How do we relate to the unexpected? How can we contribute to an openness and liveliness of the situation? Where and to what extent do echo chambers and exclusions exist in the situation?

78 For example, with the questions: How do we and audience members engage with the making and context of the music? Do we communicate and interact with music? In what way do audience members experience the music in an immersive way? How do they engage with themselves through the music and gain new ideas?

79 For example, with the questions: How clear and yet flexible is the conception, how binding and yet open? How can we create situations in which all the participants listen to each other and interact?

80 Hannes Seidl, "Überläufer**", accessed August 26, 2022, <http://www.hannesseidl.de/pieces/uberlaufer/>. (English translation by the author.)

81 The scenographers made a huge effort. Large steel frames, covered with a huge transparent shimmering foil, were made, as well as walkable wooden constructions,

which had to meet very high requirements both acoustically and statically. The commitment of the scenographers bordered on excessive demands, which also contains a potential for conflict.

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The Curating Composer

Will Dutta

I. Introduction

In the following article, I introduce and set out the “curating composer” as a new role in 21st-century music making with a distinct set of practices. For over a decade, my way of making has seen artistic creation and curatorial processes converge, and it was in 2017 with the release of my second studio album, *bloom* (SWD, 2017), that I reached a point where I could define a workflow and draw out principles. What follows is a case study for how we might construct the role in a body of work I made with Plaid, Manuel Poletti, and Max de Wardener.

I want to show how a curating composer can *make and distribute new artistic work using a mobile and networked creative and curatorial process*. Let me unpack that statement by setting out some general principles.

The role is marked out by two principles that dovetail across the curating composer’s workflow:

- **Mutual exchange:** the reciprocal relationship between creative and distributive processes
- **Mobility:** the free movement between creative acts and the curatorial situation

The curating composer might choose to take the following position:

- **Networked:** distributed structures where creative responsibility is shared between collaborators¹

It is my contention that music creators (and recreators) should be equipped with curatorial skills if they are to generate paid opportunities, sustain careers, and enable the artistic ecology that goes with it to thrive. I believe this playbook should be available (embedded in education pathways, for example) to a new generation to provide aesthetic, mediation, and entrepreneurial direction.

Since 2017, I have been doing just that with students and early-career professionals, and the data I have collected reaffirms the urgency of the task: 92% of the 27 composers I recently surveyed expect some of their work to come from DIY/self-producing activity; over three-quarters can imagine one or both principles hav-

ing relevance to the way they create; and yet only 58% feel confident in how they curate programmes.

Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic has radically affected cultural production (and who gets to produce it). The headline results of a composer survey published in the UK by Sound and Music and Ivors Academy in 2021 are stark: over half of respondents earn under £10k for composing in a normal (non-pandemic) year; and the three areas where composers earn most are DIY/self-producing, concerts including commissions, and education. As the then-Chief Executive of Sound and Music, Susanna Eastburn MBE, and Graham Davies say in their supporting narrative, “The financial circumstances of the vast majority of composers are incredibly fragile.”² Add to this the rapid technological developments since the late 1990s (beginning with the launch of Napster in 1999, then Apple iTunes and iPod in 2001, and social media in the mid-2000s), which has released an astonishing scale of digital creativity.³ The pandemic has, if anything, accelerated this further.⁴

How can composers begin to compete for opportunities and attention in and among this?

A Brief Stylistic Analysis of Non-Classical Music

Before diving into the case study, I will put forward a brief stylistic analysis of non-classical music because it closely aligns with my approach to music making in *bloom*. The idea for a non-classical music is something the composer Gabriel Prokofiev and I talked about often when we were working together on his *Concerto for Turntables and Orchestra* (2006/7). I have adapted the use (and spelling) to reference a particular music that has its beginnings on the Nonclassical record label.

There are a limited number of what I describe as non-classical musical texts. The music is still far from integrated into music culture, the market, and literature, so it is too early to explore as a technique. Is it a new aesthetic? Thom Andrewes suggests “the Nonclassical [sic] aesthetic is all about displacement [...] displacing one style of music into the frame or context of another.”⁵ But this does not require a new way of listening in the way that Steve Reich describes minimalism as a gradual process. Consequently, I argued in my doctoral research

that non-classical music is a new style with a focus on rhythm and texture.⁶ Where it gets particularly inventive (and exciting to listen to) is in the music's shared characteristics with electronic club music. It is in the very fabric of the string quartets, concertos, and piano scores that I reviewed. The composers are not using electronic club music as an occasional effect, such as Thomas Adès (1999) and Dai Fujikura (2006) might, or as crossover.⁷ It is idiomatic of their compositional language.

We also see for the first time **mutual exchange**: the reciprocal relationship between creative and distributive processes. Non-classical music was written for and first heard in the club context. For example, Prokofiev's *String Quartet No. 1* (2003) and *Concerto for Turntables and Orchestra* (2006/7) premiered at Cargo and Scala in London, respectively.

Non-classical music lies on the continuum of musical postmodernism which has its roots in the counterculture of the 1960s and in turn on experimentalism in the UK. I would even go as far as to say it continues the hardcore continuum as an example of dub's instrumental turn.⁸

Case study: *bloom*

Now, let's turn to the case study. In this section, I bring to life the general principles of **mutual exchange** and **mobility** through the creative and distributive processes of the studio album project to construct the curating composer role. *bloom* is many-shaped, open-ended, and evolving. It is a composite of six manifestations. The following sections suggest the workflow, although it is inevitably more entangled than this.

1. Production

Research and Planning

From the very beginning, I sought to establish a web of reference points to interact with at each stage of the production and distribution of *bloom*. I chose to collaborate with others so creative responsibility would be shared (i.e., my process was **networked**). My first curatorial act then was to create the situation for everyone to come together.

I looked to Brian Eno's idea of "edge culture"⁹ to frame the narrative of the project and followed his logic when composing. Edge culture works like this: where a more traditional curatorial position might be to follow the linear art historical method of canon-forming that tends

towards the *grande histoire*, Eno offers another way. He prioritizes temporary connections and asks us to confer values that are negotiable, interchangeable, and that avoid single narratives. It is a postmodern position and more accurately represents how an individual confronts and engages with art in the contemporary information society. In my edge culture, I pencil lines between myself, Cooly G, David Lang, and many others.

Defining the Sonic Entities

I set out to develop software technologies to modify the spectral components and sonic properties of the piano. I wanted to design a flexible system where the electronic output (e.g., the real-time processing of the piano) could change within set parameters. Early in the writing phase, I could foresee a way of exploiting this flexibility through the process of remixing, which would become a way of mediating the work with the public. I will return to this idea later. At the same time, I was also composing with a black box performance space in mind (the new work was first heard at the ICA in London).

2. Distribution

bloom is a composite of six points of distribution, three of which are ancillary in function (D-F). These are:

- i. Recording
- ii. Performance
- iii. Interactive digital space
- iv. Newsletter
- v. Film
- vi. Artist development workshop and programme

i. Recording

I released *bloom* in limited-edition vinyl and streaming formats on November 2, 2017. Cutting the vinyl would inevitably fix the running order, but streaming offered some flexibility.

Casting the studio album for release

I worked with the stylistic features of the new works to plan the running order of the studio album. I considered the shape, flow, tonality, and balance of durations of the complete listening experience. Importantly, I used the stylistic features of non-classical music in choosing to record particular existing repertoire. For example, I selected *this was written by hand* by David Lang¹⁰ as an example of notated minimalism. It has a restless character, and the stuttered rhythms echo the break-beats in *A Higher Sense of Time*. The slowly thinning texture of the last eighteen bars acts as a natural outro, so I positioned it at the end of the record.

Album as curated playlist

Usually, the public release of vinyl and streaming formats would complete this first point of distribution. However, I have since turned my attention to exploiting streaming technology to deliver *bloom* as a curated playlist. Gavin Wade says the artist-curator applies “curatorial strategies as a way of presenting themselves, alongside other artists, to create composite public outcomes.”¹¹ I selected existing material and recorded new pieces (guided again by the research network, edge-culture frame, and stylistic features of non-classical music) to extend the listening experience of the original studio album and widen the context and historicity of the works. This is an open-ended process and something I continue to add to and change today. In doing so, I momentarily connect different music, hopefully illuminating my own, while knowing that audiences elsewhere will be doing something similar on their playlists.

ii. Performance

In partnership with Treatment Studio, I created the audio-visual show, *bloom LIVE* (fig. 1). The aim was to materialize my edge culture on the one hand while exploring audio responsive and real time visual effects on the other. I followed an iterative curating model¹² where outcomes from other manifestations (workshops and remix competitions, for example) or previous performances-as-versions have a dynamic effect on the next performance. *bloom LIVE* shifts and morphs over time. The different performance contexts (e.g., club, white cube, concert hall) provide another opportunity to foreground the historicity of the new body of work and its visual language with electronic club music, minimalism, and more. The breadth of music encountered in *bloom LIVE* interrelates with the album and website content. New material is gradually introduced into performance (which in turn folds back into the playlist and vice versa). This all the while reinforces my temporary narrative.



fig. 1

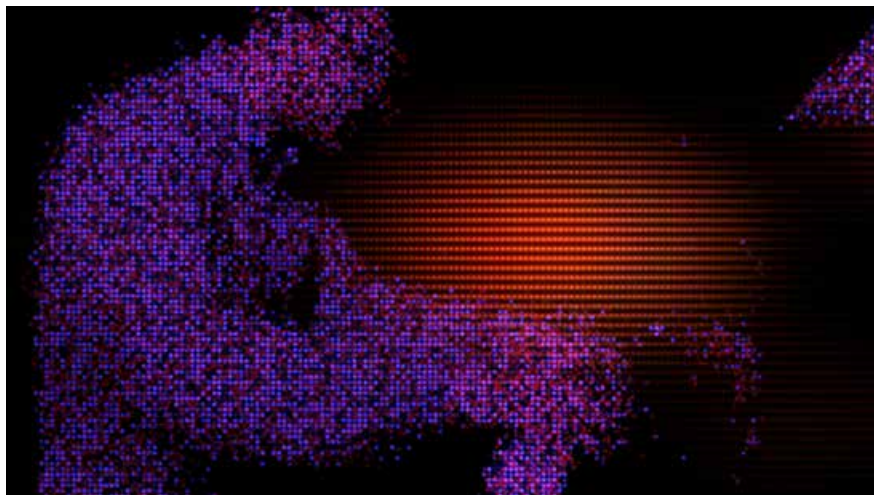


fig. 2

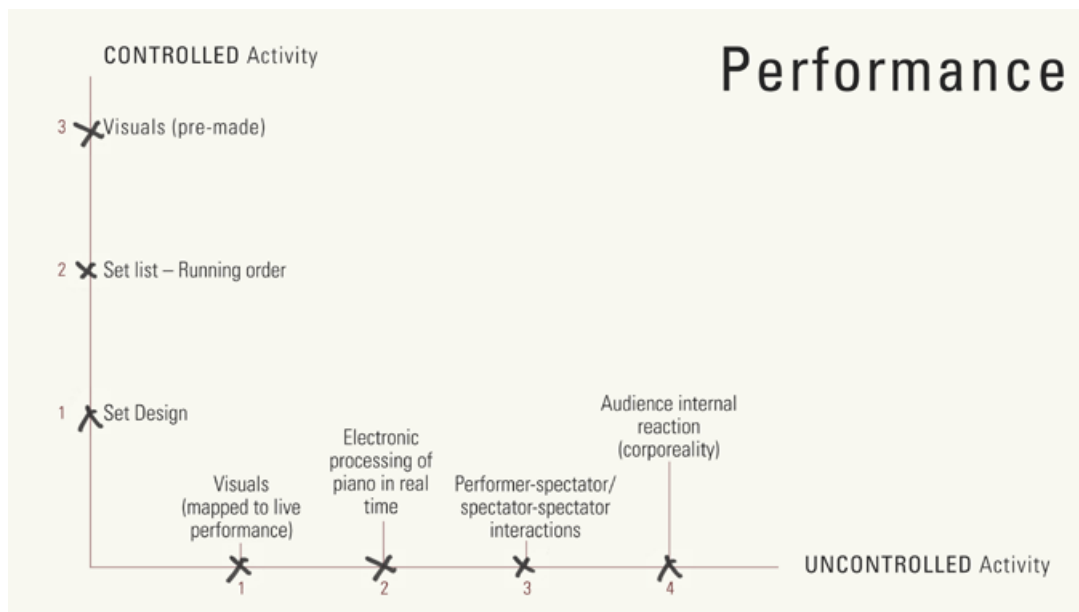


fig. 3

I found a rare opportunity in the pandemic to devise a new iteration, *bloom LIVE/STREAM*, which was broadcast in November 2020 just prior to the second lockdown here in the UK. Where in the live show visuals were generated and mixed in real time in reaction to audio data, for *bloom LIVE/STREAM*, we pulled apart the original visual content and brought a live camera into the mix, so I became a part of the visual experience (fig. 2). At the time of writing, we are developing a third version, our “show in a box,” that combines elements of live streaming with in-person performance.

The diagram in fig. 3 shows how I thought about (un)controlled activity to create a degree of mutability at each live and broadcast event.

iii. Interactive Digital Space

The interactive website “bloomworks” is the hub of the project, and audiences enter from a variety of pathways. It has four main functions:

- Documentation (presenting materials in their optimum format)
- Research (providing critical and historical context to create meaning)
- Pedagogy (examining organizing structures of the project and select works)
- Interpretation (inviting user interaction and engagement)

An invitation to participate and co-create is expressed through an open-ended call for remixes.

Remixing as open-source music making

Earlier I spoke of building a system of real-time processing that is inherently flexible and that at the point of recording the state of the electronics becomes fixed. To navigate this, I look to the virtual space as a way of mediating the work: I invite audiences to submit their own remixes of the piece. They can either use the stems provided or create their own following a similar aesthetic approach. I believe this gets around the problem of a fixed recording because there is now a selection of versions of equal value to listen to. The original is the genetic precursor,¹³ and the remixes are many different forms (mutations). This is another example of **mutual exchange**, where the distributive process affects the compositional act. I see this as a small-scale, open-source response to music making. Remixes are uploaded to the site over the lifespan of the project, and contributors get their own page complete with revolving vinyl audio player. Some remixes are rearranged for live performance and worked into *bloom LIVE*.

iv. Newsletter

My quarterly newsletter, *Edge Culture*, is a long-form journal that I use to communicate ideas and context directly to my audience. Each newsletter is edited jointly with a featured guest—an example of a collaborative curatorial platform. My role is to choose the guest in line with my research interests set out in the beginning and to edit the text. The activity is unregulated (it sits on the uncontrolled axis). Once the topic is agreed, guest editors are responsible for selecting material and writing text.

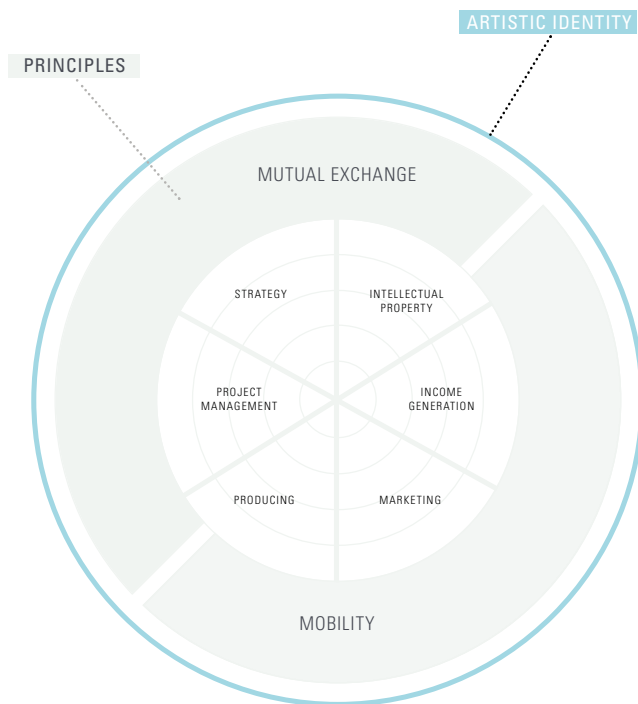


fig. 4

v. *Film*

Film is another medium where I can bring to life stories that relate to the research context. I am currently working on a series of shorts that explore “Dub, Migrations, Pirate Radio and UK Sound System Culture,” “1960s New York,” and “Experimentalism in the UK.” I do not foreground my work in these films, so in a way this distributes my work only indirectly.

vi. *Artist Development Workshop and Programme*

The final area is the *Curating Composer* workshop and artist development programme. The workshop is a standalone introduction to the role through the prism of *bloom*, while the soon-to-be launched programme sees an annually selected cohort of music creators work towards a collective endeavor with training, progression, and leadership opportunities. Both are a means for participants to reflect on and contribute to the project: their ideas provide further instruction for its development and evolve the role more generally.

Self-Producing

Behind the theoretical ideas and creative acts lie the more mundane aspects of the curator’s role. *bloom* could not have happened without a fundraising strategy, the logistics of project, event, and tour management, or a promotional campaign. As I have become more experienced, I know where my strengths lie and when I am in danger of overreaching. Inevitably, the

curating composer develops a wide set of skills, which is incredibly useful but a drawback to do this can be the tendency to think you can do it all yourself! I cannot recommend enough the benefits of building a team. That said, if you do go it alone, I have presented, in the doughnut model (fig. 4), the curating composer’s workflow in the context of the delivery skills required. I find this a useful teaching aide and personal resource to reflect on over time. How do I currently score myself in each category? Where are the gaps in my knowledge and understanding? What do I need to do or where do I look to overcome these?

Abstracting General Principles

In this case study, I hope I have now shown how a composer might use curatorial design to produce and distribute a new body of work. My role in *bloom* sees the two principles of **mutual exchange** and **mobility** in action, showing the curating composer to be original with a distinct set of practices. I chose a **networked** position this time because I wanted the curatorial function to bring about a unique and temporary situation for others to respond to. We see evidence of this in the significant and original contributions of Plaid, Manuel Poletti, Max de Wardener, Treatment Studio, and the many remixers who have submitted music to the project so far.

Next Steps

What might the curating composer look like in the future? In my position as Chief Executive of Sound and Music, the national organization for new music and sound in the UK, I have seen an increase in composers opting to self-produce their work and that of others. I am currently researching “the curating composer as scene maker” because the act of self-producing goes to the heart of DIY culture, and the sector needs to understand them better if it is to provide impactful financial and professional support. The role also has the potential to be further defined by underrepresented, underserved, and marginalized voices, as their contributions are needed to revitalize the institution.

I will finish by saying that I want to show the curating composer to be significant in historical terms and that institutions (including training pathways such as conservatoires) ignore them at their peril. It is vital a new generation of curating composers provide aesthetic and entrepreneurial leadership in what has become a bewilderingly fragmented landscape. If this speaks to you, then go on and be a creative force in 21st-century new music culture.

Notes

1 I take the view that the curatorial function in this instance is active in bringing about a unique and temporary situation for others to respond to. However, this might not always be the case and is therefore not a principle.

2 “Impact Survey, Joint Response,” Sound and Music, accessed March 3, 2021, <https://soundandmusic.org/post/sound-and-music-and-the-ivors-academy-covid-19-impact-survey-joint-response/>.

3 Lev Manovich, *Cultural Analytics* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2020).

4 Julia Haferkorn et al., *Livestreaming Music in the UK*, 2021, <https://livestreamingmusic.uk>.

5 Thom Andrewes, *We Break Strings: The Alternative Classical Scene in London* (London: Hackney Classical Press, 2014).

6 Will Dutta, “The Curating Composer: Mediating the Production, Exhibition and Dissemination of Non-Classical Music” (PhD diss., City, University of London, 2018), <http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/20394/>.

7 Tim Rutherford-Johnson, *Music After the Fall* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017).

8 Simon Reynolds, *Energy Flash: A Journey Through Rave Music and Dance Culture* (London: Picador, 1998).

9 Brian Eno, *A Year With Swollen Appendices* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1996).

10 David Lang, *this was written by hand*, (New York: G. Schirmer, 2003).

11 Paul O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 105.

12 Christiane Paul, ed., *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond: Curatorial Models for Digital Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 39-40.

13 Dan Fern, “An Ecology of Process,” *The Falmouth Illustration Forum: Hidden Agenda*, Falmouth Campus, March 20, 2015 (Cornwall: Falmouth University).

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<https://soundandmusic.org/>

<http://studiowilldutta.art/>

https://www.instagram.com/studio_will_dutta/

20 Years, 13 Curatorial Principles

Norient: From the World of Tastemakers to the Time of Identity Politics

Thomas Burkhalter

For twenty years now, Norient and I have been trying to get closer to cultural phenomena and movements in and around music. In this personal essay, I will suggest thirteen principles that seem important to me when writing about music, examining it in a documentary film, screening it at the Norient Festival, or exhibiting it. These principles have been cultivated through my experiences as an anthropologist, music journalist, founder of Norient, curator of the Norient Festival and various events, audiovisual performer, and former member of various funding boards. I am not claiming that these principles are exhaustive. However, what they do advocate for are in-depth, long-term, and self-aware research; fair collaboration with researchers from different disciplines and with journalists and artists from different places and of different genders and generations; endorsing artists, attacking stereotypical ideas of cultures as fixed entities, showing solidarity with people in war and crisis, and finding ways forward from the challenging demands of identity politics; searching for multimodal formats of representation that open up spaces for complexity and plurality; and consequently trying to create new ways of telling stories to keep reaching new people and audiences—and not handing over the power to define things to big companies and players.

1. Go Deep

Going deep is principle one for conducting strong, rigorous research, good curation, and high-level journalism. How do I get closer to music, closer to musicians, and closer to phenomena and moments in and around music? That is what I keep asking myself throughout all my endeavors. I spent two crucial years in Beirut in 2005 and 2006. This experience led to my PhD, my first monograph, *Local Music Scenes and Globalization: Transnational Platforms in Beirut*¹ and to the edited volume of *The Arab Avant Garde: Musical Innovation in the Middle East*.² In my attempt to understand things better, I interviewed over 100 musicians and non-musicians from different backgrounds. Since this early research, I have developed and refined an approach that looks at music from three main methodological perspectives: (1) examining the practice of making and producing music; (2) considering a musician as a human being in their personal, social, economic, and political environment; and (3) learning about music as a product circulating in music, culture, and media markets.

The principle of going deep links my and Norient's research to ethnomusicologist Veit Erlmann, who suggests that we should “analyze the ways in which histories of cultural, social, or political contexts are inscribed into music.”³ If we do not go deep, we risk telling superficial stories. We risk giving a platform to the artists who are best promoted or who shout the loudest on social media. We risk following the market, rewriting and ruminating on pre-existing stories, theories, and approaches.

Principle one leaves us with a question we must address in project after project: When is the right moment to publish, release a curated program, or speak about something? In our fast-paced world, this is not an easy question to answer.

2. Form Long-Term Connections

Forming long-term connections is principle two. It is fruitful to stay connected after a project has wrapped up: to catch up with the people you worked with and find out how they're doing.

In London in 2019, I interviewed the same musicians I had interviewed twenty years prior for the film *Buy More Incense—British-Asian Musicians in the UK* (2000). I had contacted them now and then in the intervening years, and meeting them again felt akin to a reunion of old friends and colleagues. The immediate depth of the conversations surprised and touched me. The musicians' openness led to interviews that would otherwise not have been possible—I plan to publish them as podcasts in the near future.

Maintaining long-term connections means you will understand how a scene changes over time, how one generation thinks and acts differently from the next, and how musicians deal with the ups and downs—how, for example, they tell stories differently when they are at the top of the charts compared to years later. Through long-term observation and connection, your mixtape, playlist, or curated program becomes more informed and layered. Meanwhile, we must also stay open to upcoming artists and continue to be surprised.

3. Stay Independent

Staying as independent as possible is principle three. When curating and researching, I try to distribute my dependencies broadly. I try not to depend on one person, artist, or agency.

I spent half a year in London in 2019 on the invitation of the Landis & Gyr Foundation. During this time, I felt very strongly that the independence of research and curation was more under threat than it had been in the early years of my career. Artists' management—and the artists themselves—have become very wary about their image, branding, and self-promotion. This is partly because the internet means that everything that is published could potentially reach anyone, and partly due to the loss of trust in journalism and, at times, academic research, too. Consequently, nuanced research seemed to have become an inconvenience.

In 2021, a label owner in Switzerland told me that journalists should pay artists to give interviews (and his artists were closer to underground than mainstream). He argued that artists reach more people in less time through ads via social media, meaning that an interview for an article in a newspaper, magazine, or journal that “no one reads” was a waste of the artist's time. They would rather publish their own press releases, thereby keeping control of the narrative. Management companies and agencies are also trying harder than ever to control who gets booked where, and what gets published. In 2016, the management of a European electronic artist prevented us from releasing and screening a documentary. This was because of the presence of a chained dog in the footage; the artist was against domesticating animals.

Hence, principle three, staying independent, is currently being challenged. Working as a journalist, scholar, and curator will become increasingly difficult in the future.

4. Be Aware That You Influence Your Research

My presence as an interviewer, researcher, or curator has influenced what musicians and people tell me, as well as what I hear and see (and get to see). Understanding this (and trying to minimize the “damage”) is principle number four.

In 2006, I found myself in Beirut in a crisis of representation, as the humanities call it. I did not trust my own voice or assessments. Many of the musicians I spoke to said that their musicality was shaped by listening experiences from their childhood during the Lebanese Civil War. Was this what they thought I wanted to hear? I thought back to my first field trip to London in 1998. An Indian student, a Norwegian student, and I conducted separate interviews with the same second-generation Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi musicians. Comparing notes, we found that their answers to us could not be more different. This was amusing at first, but ultimately disturbing.

In *Clash of Gods* (2016), a theatrical production that I co-directed, I played a white, male, middle-class god. In long monologues, I suggest to the audience how the world should be seen and heard. In the final scene, I die on stage while a quote from sociologist Jenny Fatou Mbaye blares through the speakers. During an interview, I had asked her, “As a privileged white man, what can be my role in researching and curating contemporary music from the African continent?” She responded with the following: “I think your role can only be a humble one. Take the back seat and feel privileged to take that back seat. Enjoy the view while recognizing all the luggage that you may bring with you. And if you have ways of making things visible, ask how you can be of use. You’re not driving here. And you’re lucky to be enjoying the view. Be curious. Be open-minded. Have your eyes wide open, your ears wide open. So don’t try to come with good intentions, because those good intentions are loaded with history, genealogy of violence and authoritarianism that goes beyond you. So yeah, take the back seat and feel privileged to enjoy the view.”⁴

It is important to be aware that we hear and see the world depending on who we are—and this is principle four.

5. Work in Multilocal and Multidisciplinary Teams

One way forward is to work in multilocal and multidisciplinary teams—principle five. We should not carry out our research alone. I strongly believe that we need to find new ways to collaborate and think about curation and research differently.

While in Beirut in 2006, I decided to conduct reception tests. I sent tracks that were part of my research to listeners in Europe, the US, and the Arab world, knowing that different ears would offer new interpretations. The listeners were musicians, ethnomusicologists, musicologists, and music journalists. Later, I included some of their responses in my book.⁵

I had founded *Norient* four years earlier, in 2002. Looking back, I remember already having doubts about my journalistic articles and broadcasts on the alternative music scenes in London, Belgrade, Istanbul, and Cairo. I had asked myself, “Did I represent these artists correctly? What did I miss?” With *Norient*, I wanted to create a blog (as it was called back then) to host the writing of many people, starting with freelance music journalists from Switzerland and Germany. Then, slowly, *Norient* became a more international space including international journalists, fellow PhD students, and artists. My goal was to publish articles—for example, about underground music in Beirut—from a variety of people with different backgrounds, positions, and perspectives. This goal



fig. 1 Thomas Burkhalter, *Sadat, Cairo*, 2014. Photograph by: Thomas Burkhalter. Courtesy of Norient.

remains important to this day. In 2022, Norient released *City Sounds Beirut*, a collection of articles, podcasts, video stories, and photographs produced by artists and writers from Lebanon, and curated by Lebanese writer Rayya Badran.⁶ Between 2014 and 2015, the team at Norient (comprised of Theresa Beyer, Hannes Liechti, and me) co-curated the first Norient exhibition called *Seismographic Sounds—Visions of a New World* (2015), which toured various European cities and culminated in a book of the same title. In total, 200 artists, scholars, and journalists from 50 countries contributed to this truly multilocal and multidisciplinary project. The exhibition and book introduced audiences and readers to the contemporary world of music, sounds, and music videos.

Principle five—working in multilocal and multidisciplinary teams—opens horizons, creates new networks, and sometimes builds friendships. It can lead to very strong research and curation. I strongly believe in this, and I keep trying to find new, different, better ways to collaborate and co-work with others.

6. Look After Yourself

International collaboration is often time consuming. It can be frustrating if people do not match. If communication is not extremely clear, misunderstandings can follow. The process can take a lot of energy. These potential downsides bring me to principle six: look after yourself.

In 2016, Norient had taken up so much space that I had no room for my own creativity. I had become an administrator of too many voices. I was close to burnout. International collaboration had taken its toll. Researching and curating with Norient or for other projects, I was continuously sending out hundreds of emails and messages, calling and re-calling people, and discussing ideas, workflows, and fees. If no one answered, I would search for alternative ways, stay positive, and keep moving forward. Meanwhile, though

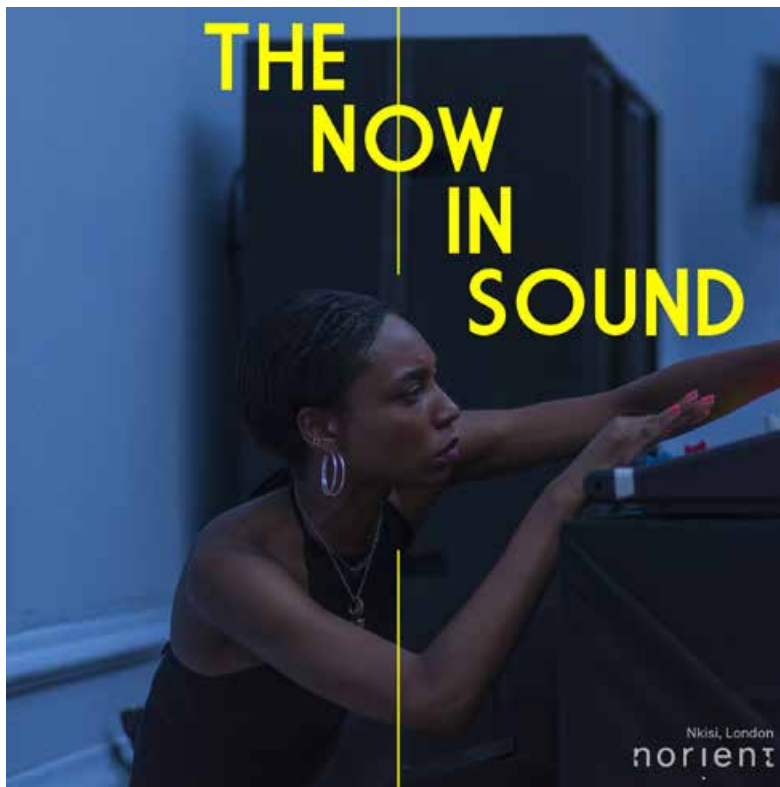


fig. 2 Thomas Burkhalter, *Nkisi, London*, 2019. Photograph by: Thomas Burkhalter. Courtesy of Norient.

Norient is full of potential, it was and is financially fragile. Without any structural funding or dependence on a university or other player, we finance our publications, curation, and research through funded and commissioned projects, memberships, curation, and presentations—and many unpaid hours. Hence, if you are an artist, scholar, or freelancer working in the creative field, principle six is to look after yourself.

A lot of these questions were central to the documentary *Contradict*⁷ which I filmed with Peter Guyer in Ghana between 2013 and 2018. I felt connected to the musicians in the film and their struggle to build a better life (while being aware that my own experiences came from another context). The musicians in *Contradict* demand a new role for themselves in their societies, and for Africa in the wider world. We followed these musicians through phases of euphoria and depression, watching them take three steps forward and one or two steps back. This raised questions such as, “What is the value of creativity and artistic production in today’s world?” Knowing so many young artists who have quit music, I wonder how cultural creation can survive. Creation requires time, deep thought, and concentration, and creative works often don’t shine after the first few attempts.

7. Help to Decentralize Power

Since 2021, one of Norient’s biggest steps has been not only to work with contributors, but to invite them to curate or co-curate our events. Principle seven is to decentralize power and authority. It is about letting in more eyes and ears to offer new perspectives: for too long, gatekeepers in international projects have been predominantly from the West, and male. We have pursued this path with the *Timezones* podcast series (2020, ongoing), the publication *Sonic Traces: From Italy*,⁸ and the *Norient City Sounds* series,⁹ which have been curated by people from Africa, Asia, and Europe who are outside our core team.

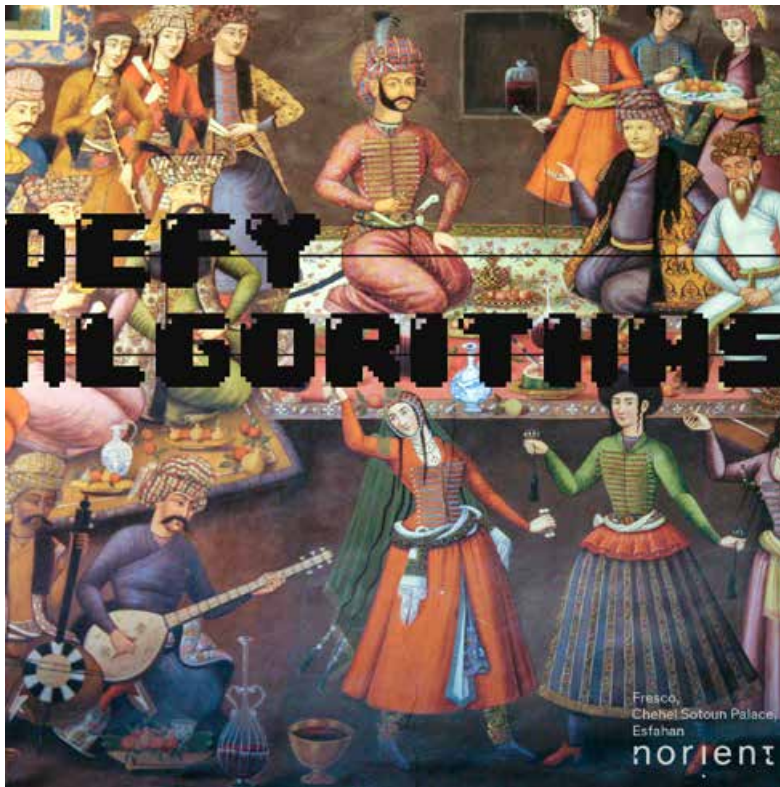


fig. 3 Thomas Burkhalter, *Fresco, Chehel Sotoun Palace, Esfahan*, 2010. Photograph by: Thomas Burkhalter. Courtesy of Norient.

A further step is being taken through the Norient Festival (formerly the Norient Film Festival). Founded in 2010 by Michael Spahr (video artist and co-director of editions 1–4) and myself, the festival aims to present deep stories, research, and thought from across the globe through captivating, experimental, and sometimes challenging films, AV performances, concerts, DJ sets, video lectures, and other digital formats. After the 10th edition, I decided to hand over the curatorial direction and decision-making to an international and multidisciplinary group of people who have been, since 2022, the artistic directors and new faces of the festival. The group works internationally from various cities in India, Lebanon, the UK, Germany, Kenya, Colombia, and Switzerland.

With ethnography, at its core, still being a colonial approach, we must keep thinking and reflecting on how to rewire power relations.

8. Pay for Research and Creative Work

Principle eight seems clear: creative work should be paid. This, however, is less and less the case. Internet radio stations and music magazines (even big ones) often make use of freelancers' work for free. The question is: Is that exploitation? Or is it voluntary work, as in an association, without which the world would be a poorer place?

With Norient, we try to pay according to our means. We raise fees when we earn more. We pay better than most of the established Swiss newspapers do today—which to me is kind of shocking. In the early 2000s, the *feuilleton* of the Swiss daily *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* would pay me 1500 Swiss francs for one page; today, it is around 400.

9. Endorse and Open Doors

Principle nine is about endorsing artists. At its best, Norient has been able to recognize artists and trends early, and it has helped to open doors many times. For example, Egyptian artist Mahmoud Refat started recording the sounds of Cairo on his mini discs in the early 2000s. In a journalistic feature, I wrote: “With his recordings of the everyday sounds of Egypt, he presents his homeland unfiltered, unadorned—differently.”¹⁰ Today, Refat owns the label and music studio 100Copies. He produces artists working in the popular music style Mahraganat, made by rappers and producers from lower-class suburbs. While the Egyptian authorities try to crack down on the genre, mainly because of what authorities consider frivolous lyrics and the use of words like “khomor” (alcohol) and “hashish” (cannabis), Refat sold the catalog of his label to the US music company Reservoir Media, along with UAE-based PopArabia, possibly making a lot of money.

There are many other examples. Queer New Orleans rapper and bounce artist Big Freedia performed at Norient Festival 2013 and has since featured on superstar Beyoncé’s 2022 single “Break My Soul.” Meanwhile, Gabber Modus Operandi from Indonesia, who directed the film *2021: Malam Berkah* for Norient Festival’s 2022 edition, collaborated with Icelandic pop star Björk on her latest studio album *Fossora*.

There are many similar stories. I include them here to indicate that independent curation and research initiatives that are ahead of trends in the market can build—and themselves have—value. It’s an important argument that can be deployed when politics and the public put pressure on funders to finance initiatives catering to bigger audiences—or when they expect a clear and direct benefit from academic research. Good research and curation can help talented artists progress, build a career, and sometimes change the lives of their loved ones.

10. Show Solidarity When Needed

In 2022, war broke out in Ukraine in full force. At Norient, we used our position to draw attention to solidarity actions via Bandcamp. We wanted to demonstrate support for the artists living in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odessa, and other places. To show solidarity, whenever needed, is principle ten.

Solidarity seemed important, too, during the wars and crises in Syria and Lebanon. Musicians, artists, and thinkers live in these places, people like you and me. This might be a political core of my curation and research. The name Norient was meant as a play on Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), in which the author uses a continental interdisciplinary approach to trace the relationship between the act of writing, cultural politics, language, and power. Norient stands for no “Orientalism,” and it seeks to look at diversity and cultural practices from up close, rather than through presupposed differences. The name was further inspired by the UK Indian and Pakistani musicians I met at the end of the 1990s, who complained about and made fun of the stereotypes with which they were constantly confronted (See Thomas Burkhalter, “East Isn’t East,”¹¹ and the film *Buy More Incense*¹²).

We are gatekeepers and advocates. I believe in what Lawrence Grossberg calls the position of a “political intellectual.”¹³ In his book, *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*, he offers a vision of contemporary cultural studies that embraces complexity, rigorous interdisciplinary practice, and experimental collaboration. He argues that it matters what we say and do as intellectuals “because bad stories make bad politics.”¹⁴ Tim Ingold proposes that it is about learning from others and gaining insights into other perspectives, experiences, narratives, and motivations for “getting under the skin of the world.”¹⁵

11. Find New Approaches to Identity Politics

Principle eleven is one of the most challenging tasks ahead: to take seriously and move forward from the claims of identity politics. A new generation, many of them millennials, call upon us to wake up, criticizing musicians, writers, scholars, and other creatives for cultural appropriation—and sometimes trying to forbid and “cancel” their works. One of the main arguments is that writers are allowed to write about phenomena from their own “culture” only—or, for instance, that musicians from Switzerland cannot play Jamaican reggae.

Although I do not agree with this argument, I agree that other claims made by this movement are important. I believe that in Europe (or in Switzerland, to argue from my own position), we never got a grip on how we relate to people, groups, and cultures from the so-called Global South. We fought important battles at home for women and LGBT+ rights and social welfare. However, we took less seriously the questions of Swiss money in the colonial past and postcolonial present. And we mostly looked at the non-West through differences. This was, in fact, another reason why I founded Norient in 2002. Norient was meant as an attack on world music. I was critical of Swiss bands wearing African fabrics and playing African music with their djembe and kora instruments. I felt that they reinforced stereotypes. I left many concerts, at times upset by this, but I would never have dreamed of getting a show canceled. This is what happened in my neighborhood, Lorraine Bern, in 2022 (and in other places, too). In a concert 200 meters from my house, a Swiss Reggae band was asked to leave the stage because some audience members felt uncomfortable with the white male band members’ Rasta hair.¹⁶ I think this goes too far. I prefer to leave the concert space myself rather than stop a band from playing.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, the term cultural appropriation “describe[s] the taking over of creative or artistic forms, themes, or practices by one cultural group from another. It is in general used to describe Western appropriations of non-Western or non-white forms, and carries connotations of exploitation and dominance.”¹⁷ The presence of exploitation and dominance is crucial, and explains why attacks on artists and scholars can go too far. Often, artists render homage to another culture when they play music from another culture. That they do so superficially at times makes it legitimate for us to criticize them, but not to cancel them online or throw them off the stage. Attacking books, music, and deep thought on the topic of cultural appropriation, or indeed attacking their authors and “canceling” them online, does not bring the world forward. It risks playing into the hands of right-wing politicians and dictators and could heavily backfire. It does not help overcome prejudices or fight racism. In fact, it risks segregating people.

However, many demands made by advocates of identity politics are legitimate. We need new ways of dealing with today’s world. We need more Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) in power—in cultural institutions, in the media, and at universities. We need to offer spaces for a multitude of voices and expressions, and give power to aspiring curators, journalists, scholars, and artists. This is what we are trying to do with Norient.

12. Publish in Fitting Formats

In 2020, we staged the fourth relaunch of the Norient website. We renamed it Norient Space “The Now in Sound,” signaling that we want to speak about our contemporary world through music, sound, noise, and silence. Norient became a curated audiovisual gallery aiming to provide space for scholars, researchers, journalists, and artists from many disciplines and backgrounds around the world, both young and established. I strongly believe that dialogue between different generations can be fruitful—and I see it happen rarely. Together, a young scholar (who is close to underground artists) and a professor (who is close to theory and methodology) might create stronger work than either of them could alone. The same applies to collaborations between curators, journalists, and artists.

The Norient Space consists of audiovisual media pieces (we call them snaps), articles, podcasts, photography, video, and film. We further plan to offer an academic archive for researchers and universities, including master and PhD theses from students. The content is held together with an index, giving it more the feel of a collage than a classic magazine or journal. This makes it possible to read and listen to topics such war, counterculture, and sampling across different geographies and musical genres. The collage approach helps avoid, to use Clifford’s words, “the portrayal of cultures as organic wholes, or as unified, realistic worlds subject to a continuous explanatory discourse.”¹⁸ I am convinced that only a patchwork of perspectives can offer real, deep insights into today’s world.

Publishing our research and our curation in fitting formats is principle twelve. What kind of representation will do justice to a phenomenon? The aim is to publish in formats that appeal to different senses and remain deep and multilayered. They should open spaces for plurality and multiple imaginations, embracing complexity, chaos, and contradictions.

Since 2020, I have asked myself: “Can interviews be transformed into music? Can interview statements become song lyrics, verses, and choruses?” Under the band name *Melodies In My Head*, I started collaborating with musicians on tracks that incorporated their interview statements, their music, and sounds from me and Bern-based musician Daniel Jakob. I also experimented with these ideas in Norient’s *Timezones* podcasts series, the first three episodes and prototypes of which were created by me, Svetlana Maraš from Belgrade, and Suvani Suri and Abhishek Mathur from Delhi. The vision is to bring ethnography, art, and journalism closer together and tell stories in new ways. It is also a next step in trying to collaborate more closely and fairly with artists from different places. Everyone involved will receive a share of any profit made by the published track.

13. Try to Reach People

These audiovisual stories, podcasts, writings, and curations should not be superficial and flat. They should be inspiring and attractive in order to connect with readers and listeners. Trying to reach people is principle thirteen. With Norient, we try to spread mixes, podcasts, texts, documentaries, and projects across many channels to reach people of different backgrounds and in different contexts.

I feel part of an international community. With Norient, we campaign for the value of creativity and creation in this world—for music, journalism, and research. We want to support and learn from each other and to tell new stories of our time through in-depth research and strong curated programs.

A Personal Summary

Today, I strive for a balance between my artistic projects, my research, and my role at Norient and the Norient Festival. I spend two days a week helping to move Norient forward. The project is a constant struggle that requires me to be active and on my feet. It brings me into contact with the younger generation, and collaborating with younger researchers, curators, and journalists affords me huge potential. The articles, playlists, podcasts, and publications collected, researched, curated, and published by writers from different places offer me and others great and inspiring insights into our contemporary world.

My goal is to maintain a stable platform on which people can improvise, take risks, and create—a platform where aesthetics, positions, and practices collide or come together. It is a long-term approach. I strongly believe that our contemporary world needs visionary thinkers and artists and strong, independent, nonprofit platforms presenting their work and their thinking to the public. Only together can we defy algorithms and filter bubbles, telling new stories that are heard far and wide.

Note

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Links

norient.com
 norient-festival.com
 www.contradict-film.com

Notes

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Dr. Thomas Burkhalter is an anthropologist/ethnomusicologist, AV-artist, and writer from Bern, Switzerland. He is the founder and director of *Norient* (Norient.com), has co-directed documentary films (e.g., *Contradict*, Berner Filmpreis, 2020), AV/theatre performances, and is the author and co-editor of several books (e.g., *Local Music Scenes and Globalization: Transnational Platforms in Beirut*, Routledge, *The Arab Avant Garde: Musical Innovation in the Middle East*, Wesleyan University Press). Currently, he is working on his new music project *Melodies In My Head*, and on the podcast series *South Asian Sound Stories* with musicians from the UK, Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan.

CURATING CONTEMPORARY MUSIC ONLINE

Premieres in Private Spaces and Muvid-19: Two Exemplary Artistic Responses to the Covid-19 Pandemic

Ioannis Paul

1. Introduction

December 2019 marked the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, which in a matter of weeks fundamentally changed life as we knew it. The art world did not remain untouched. For the first time in people's lifetimes, physical audience and visitor activities were prohibited, leading to the cancellation or postponement of all artistic projects. During these challenging times, the art industry had just two options: either a temporary hiatus or a kind of continuation through alternative digital pathways.

Curating contemporary music online, due to a temporary concert ban, is far from a simple task to undertake. The online world is a quite different cosmos and despite some concrete advantages that it provides, it can never really replace vital elements of the cultural experiences that are not inherently 'born digital.' Under considerable pressure, most new music curators decided to present video recordings of concerts online, a decision that was in some ways reasonable, but at the same time, it can be argued, quite problematic. On the other hand, some cultural actors chose a different path by focusing on the new means of communication and creating something new. In the following text, two projects of that latter category will be analyzed, one initiated by a freelance ensemble and one by an institution. After a brief description of them, an analysis of the creative responses by the participating composers and creators will follow, but also an analysis of the basic curatorial decisions made in each project. In the end, common detected patterns of both projects (from a curatorial perspective) will be elaborated in the hope that they could potentially serve as practice steps for similar future projects.

2. *Premieres in Private Spaces* by lovemusic

The response of the collective lovemusic to the pandemic was a new collaborative project, which involved working and creating with composers, without a live concert as a result. It included a series of five audiovisual works (each piece is accompanied by an interview) in collaboration with five composers, released online on various platforms from June to September 2020, which were created as virtual pieces and not intended for live performance.

2.1 The Basic Curatorial Decisions

One of the basic characteristics of the project was the curatorial decision to work in new ways and not recreate a concert experience but rather "a creative reaction to extraordinary circumstances,"¹ as it is stated in the general project description on the website. It furthermore explains: "We wanted to undertake a new project in which we

can once again engage creatively but without pretending or emulating ‘normal circumstances’—if we can’t play together in the same space, why pretend we are?”² The collective was not only aware of the problems of online concerts that were flourishing at the time but felt a sense of responsibility as well. Collective member Adam Starkie explains in his talk with Kelly Sheehan: “It seemed a shame to take away the live element of being in a concert hall with the musicians and we thought that might be detrimental to the future of the arts.”³

The project’s adaptability is showcased by two main decisions: 1) the time constraint, “because people’s online behavior is obviously slightly different to a concert hall”⁴; and 2) the “free-scored” form, to allow those who don’t have access to their usual instrumental equipment the opportunity to be part of the project.

Great importance was given to the element of collaboration. One basic question that led to the project was “how to keep a link between performers and composers with the audience and how to keep commissioning.”⁵ The considerable freedom that the composers had led to interesting and diverse results, as we will see below. This freedom, combined with a few well-communicated guidelines, allowed the composers to figure out the rules of this new kind of project for themselves.

2.2 What Glows Is Fuchsia by David Bird

<https://www.collectivelovemusic.com/ppp>

Concerning the pandemic, David states in the interview that he tried “to take advantage of the situation.”⁶ Some of the instructions given to the interpreters provide an interesting insight into his creative response:

- “Choir: sing long tones sitting at the computer at night, so only lit by the computer screen.
- Miscellaneous media: share four or more images, videos, or sounds representing something or someone you miss during Covid.
- Share two still video perspectives looking out of the window of your home. Nothing within the home should be in the frame.”⁷

For David, the exchange between composers and instrumentalists was important, and through the various instructions, he also tried to compensate for the impossibility of being physically together with the players and to make this pre-compositional material the piece, with him acting more like the one who creates the frame.

Further reflections on the impossibility of being in the same space could be seen in his treatment of the photographic material received from the players. He tried to place many of images in space, creating 3D illusions, also trying at the same time “to think gestural situations with these media that could reflect certain things,”⁸ but also a tendency toward the depiction of visual textures that evoke the feeling of “touching” to the viewer (i.e., the constant repetition of the image of a “digitalized fluid”) can be observed.



fig. 1. David Bird, *What Glows is Fuchsia*, 2020. Video still.

2.3 *digital love (remix)* by Raphaël Languillat

<https://www.collectivelovemusic.com/ppp>

The text of this piece is taken from *Venus and Adonis*, a narrative poem by William Shakespeare. It tells the story of Venus's unrequited love and of her attempted seduction of Adonis. This chosen text fits the pandemic, since the poem was written during a period when London theaters were closed because of Covid-19.

The pandemic is also reflected in the main idea of the piece, which “speaks also about people who have been separated, distanced, not only about people in love,” as stated in the interview. This subject of distance and the attempt to minimize it can also be experienced sonically in the piece due to two compositional decisions. First, the whispered reading of the text, which creates the illusion of closeness, and second the decision to keep various bodily events (like breathing and keyclicks) of the performers in the final mixing of the piece, which creates the illusion of closeness as well, but also provides to the listener with an experience that feels close to that of a concert.

2.4 *Ritual for Changing Times* by Tine Surel Lange

<https://www.collectivelovemusic.com/ppp>

The video depicts a beach sunset. After a while, the image splits horizontally into two parts and the same beach appears mirrored in the upper part of the screen as well. Lastly, the screen is mirrored again vertically, thus creating four mirrored versions of the same beach. Through the process of image-splitting, emerging arms and legs appear to perform slow movements. By watching the video, one gets the impression that the differently mirrored screens yearn to connect with each other through moving limbs, an impression that is hard not to perceive as a reflection of the pandemic situation.

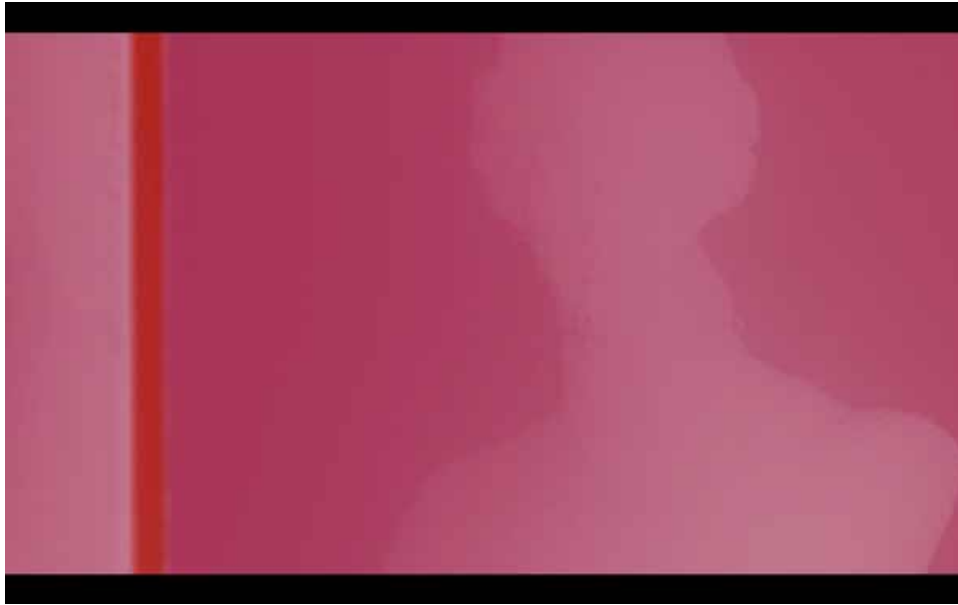


fig. 2. Raphaël Languillat, *digital love (remix)*, 2020. Video still.



fig. 3. Tine Surel Lange, *Ritual for Changing Times*, 2020. Video still.

The piece was written in the form of an open score with instructions. Each interpreter recorded their part separately and returned an audio file. Then, the composer added them together with the video. This working process, as in the other pieces of the project, was the only possible way due to the pandemic. The composer, after hearing the audio files, stated that “the personality of each player came out”¹⁰ of the described working mode. She stated that various unexpected, weird sounds and noises, which she didn’t know if they were done on purpose or not, were welcome and that she decided to keep them and not edit them, implying also that this was an attempt to maintain a live quality in the piece.

3. Muvid-19

Muvid-19 is also a project that emerged during the pandemic, sharing some interestingly common curatorial decisions with the *lovemusic's* project. It is a (still ongoing) project accessible on the Vimeo platform and initiated at the New Music Institute of the Music Academy of Freiburg.

The call is open to all as long as two simple rules are followed:

1. Duration: exactly 19 seconds;
2. For the entire duration of the “music video,” one or more loudspeakers that are clearly recognizable as such should be visible. Real loudspeakers, but also a drawing or similar, can be filmed.¹¹

Numerous artists responded to the call and created a very interesting compilation. The idea to put the loudspeaker (as an object) at the center of each little film kept the viewers excited as they watch in real time its concept expand and be reconceptualized by every new participant.

3.1 Common Motives in the Use of Loudspeakers

One frequent motive is the attempt to represent the loudspeaker as a separate personified entity. In the videos *Lovesong* by Clemens K. Thomas and *Romanze* by Meike Senker, a pair of loudspeakers flirt with each other; meanwhile, in the Covid-inspired video *Speakers meeting in the Corona time with Music* by So-Jeong Yoo, two loudspeakers try to communicate through a Skype call. In the video *Also Rückkehr zur neuen Normalität* by Sophie-Youjung Lee, a set of headphone wires play the role of a post-lockdown dog that strolls through a park, while in other videos loudspeakers are dancing, entangling the hand of a conductor, and giving distance-keeping orders.

Despite the concrete definition of loudspeakers, some creators responded quite creatively to the call and used objects that resemble their ability to amplify sounds naturally instead, thus leading to an expanded definition of the notion of loudspeakers, since they appear as music boxes, spheres, human bodies, and glass cups.

Although we are constantly surrounded by loudspeakers, for the most part we don't actively reflect on the way the sound is actually produced, that being through the vibration of a membrane. That bodily aspect of sound production is another common pattern used by a lot of the creators (i.e., in the piece *Sandbox* by Carlo Philipp Thomsen and the piece *stilleben* by Morgaine Faller, where grains of sand and soil are placed respectively on the membrane of a loudspeaker and bounce through its vibration).

Namely, some other motives of loudspeaker use are friction with other objects, as a decorative addition to a backdrop, and videotaping them in places where they are normally hidden, while others are still forming themselves as the project unfolds in real time.



fig. 4. Meike Senker, Romanze, within the Muvid-19 project. Video still.

3.2 The Basic Curatorial Decisions

Concerning the core curatorial decisions of the project, perhaps the most obvious one was to make it as timely as possible. By doing so, the project managed not only to produce a relevant response to the situation but also to turn it into something positive. This was accomplished by creating an open call for video miniatures (that were to be perceived as creative entities that are somehow the opposite to the Covid viruses. As stated in the project description: “Covid-19 ist klein, aber keine Kleinigkeit – Muvid-19 sind Miniaturen, Kleinigkeiten ohne Viren”¹²).

The element of relevance can also be seen in the title of the project, which refers to the word movie, and it also automatically draws necessary attention and curiosity, since it is also a paraphrase of the word Covid. A playful way by which the project also connected to the situation was by drawing inspiration for the first rule of the game (the duration) directly from the name of the virus. Besides its reference to the pandemic, this time-constrained rule fostered the creative process of the videos, and it increased the participation probability and also the probability of viewing them online.

The second rule was a very good curatorial decision as well, for two main reasons. Firstly, it gave a strong identity to the project. A “unique identifier” was also needed so that the whole project attained a concrete character that unified all the diverse videos into a big mosaic. Secondly, it offered the potential to view a quite familiar object in new ways and to experiment with the way we perceive it.

The decision to primarily host the first stages of the project in a university proved to be reasonable since people there predominantly connect and exchange ideas. These characteristics were abruptly lost through the pandemic, creating a huge gap, and in a way, the project managed to recompensate a little bit artistically.

4. Conclusion: Principles for Future Projects

Although the projects are different in nature (commission vs. open call), their common curatorial attributes suggest that there might be something right on a fundamental level, which could perhaps also potentially be described as principles for other future projects.

a) Find a strong basic idea that suits the medium and relates to the current situation. At their core, both projects share the same mentality. They experienced an unforeseen situation, one that took a great toll on the world of the arts, and decided to find a way to compensate for it. They didn't follow the norm (videotaping a concert and presenting it online), but instead they took the time, grasped what was needed, and came up with an strong original idea that had the potential to turn the situation into something positive, also taking into serious consideration the nature of the new medium. The good and timely ideas of both these projects, perfectly contained in their titles (*Premieres in Private Rooms* and *Muvid-19*), laid a solid foundation on which the rest of the project's creativity was built.

b) Keep it short.

The curators of both projects took seriously into account the viewers' online behavior and their ability to concentrate online and made a careful decision concerning the duration (something that also affected the contexts of both projects). With the goal of having many videos, the Muvid-19 project chose a rather short duration, while lovemusic decided that the five commissioned pieces should last about five minutes each. These decisions made the videos easy to watch, which met the current needs of most of the digitally oversaturated audience at that time.

c) Span your project through time; don't create just a one-shot single event.

lovemusic created five events with an approximate distance of two weeks in between, while Muvid-19 chose a virtually infinite amount, which continues as long as the open call makes sense. This decision achieved several goals at the same time. Firstly, they adapted to the characteristics of online platforms. The spanning of the projects through time, and thus their repetition, was a kind of antidote to the short memory of the online presence. This time spanning also enabled the development of a relationship with the viewers, which was also a strategy to create anticipation and enabling them to accumulate more audience or exposure along the way. Lastly, it allowed them to create a transition from the online to the physical world (lovemusic by planning a concert where the five videos will be combined with new concert commissions of the same composers and Muvid-19 by creating a movie-mosaic with all the pieces and premiering it in various cinemas).

d) Play with the medium and the context as the material itself.

It is not new to use the means by which a piece of art is created/disseminated as its material. Nevertheless, in the digital age where art is disseminated through online mediums, the palette is significantly expanded, since besides all the other elements, the video, the loudspeakers, the recording process, and the online platforms are also added. This complex layering in the digital era mostly functions unnoticed. For both projects, it was crucial that this layer, which is also part of the creation process, would also be incorporated as a material into the works and would make the viewers aware of it in order to spur reflection: a) their timely character (the projects were mainly a response to a situation where concerts could not take place, meaning that loudspeakers were the main source for aural communication), and b) their identity (the response was to be achieved by creating something new and not just videotaping a concert).

In Muvid-19, the loudspeaker as a visual object was already set in the game rules, which ensures that these means of dissemination will always act as a cornerstone for experimentation. In lovemusic's project, the process of incorporating the abovementioned layer occurred in a more natural way, mostly through the clear communication of the project's identity and the freedom provided. Perhaps the most common trick that everyone applied resided in the use of the recording process. All five composers

welcomed the various accidental sounds in the audio files and perceived them as compensation for not having a live concert with the performers' gestural actions and as part of creating "an audiovisual piece that has life of its own online."¹³

e) Grasp the zeitgeist and fill in possible gaps.

Undoubtedly, a major void that Covid-19 created was in terms of connection and communication. As mentioned, Muvid-19 somehow managed to create a very good structure in terms of filling these gaps. In *Premieres in Private Space*, the duty of filling the connection and communication gap was concentrated a) between players, and b) between the artistic product and the audience.

As mentioned earlier, it was crucial that the interaction between players and composers was not lost, and the numerous online sessions served to compensate for this. With the goals of the project having been clearly communicated, the composers managed in their individual ways to also compensate for the losses Covid caused. The subject of communication and social interaction is predominantly present in each piece. These subjects are strongly present in the sonic environment of the developed pieces, with a tendency to use sounds that create closeness and intimacy (like whispers).

Notes

1 "Premieres in Private Places," lovemusic, accessed January 6, 2023, <https://www.collectivelovemusic.com/ppp>.

2 Ibid.

3 Adam Starkie, in "Premieres in Private Places – Kelley Sheehan," lovemusic, accessed January 6, 2023, <https://www.collectivelovemusic.com/ppp>.

4 Ibid.

5 Lola Malique, in "Premieres in Private Places – Raphaël Languillat," lovemusic, video, accessed January 6, 2023, <https://www.collectivelovemusic.com/ppp>.

6 David Bird, in "Premieres in Private Places – David Bird," lovemusic, 2020, video, accessed January 6, 2023, <https://www.collectivelovemusic.com/ppp>.

7 David Bird "What glows is Fuchsia", score, quoted by Winnie Huang in "Premieres in Private Places – David Bird."

8 Bird, in "Premieres in Private Places – David Bird."

9 Raphaël Languillat, "Premieres in Private Places – Raphaël Languillat," lovemusic, video, accessed January 6, 2023, <https://www.collectivelovemusic.com/ppp>.

10 Niamh Dell, "Premieres in Private Places – Tine Surel Lange," lovemusic, video, accessed January 6, 2023, <https://www.collectivelovemusic.com/ppp>.

11 Muvid-19, accessed January 6, 2023, <https://vimeo.com/showcase/7188849>.

12 Ibid.

13 Starkie, in "Premieres in Private Places – Kelley Sheehan."

Ioannis Paul is a Greek-German composer born in 1987 in Greece. He studied composition with Prof. Dimitri Papageorgiou at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (bachelor's degree), and with Prof. Johannes Schöllhorn at the Music Academy of Freiburg (master's degree). In 2021, he completed the course CAS Curating Contemporary Music in the Music Academy of Basel, Switzerland. He was selected as an active participant in master classes such as Impuls Academy 2017, Mixtur 2018, and Outhear New Music Week 2019 with Mark Andre, Simon Steen-Andersen and Pierluigi Billone, among others. He has curated various contemporary music concerts, mainly with the ensemble for new music False Relationships and the Extended Endings.

“How Do We Listen?”

Interview with Elina Waage Mikalsen

Anja Wernicke

Anja Wernicke: Elina, as part of your two-year residency at the Borealis festival, you curated several projects for the newest edition in March 2023. One of them was a talk show collage about Sámi experimental music, Sámi sonic practices, and listening from a Sámi perspective. Why did you decide to do this project, and how did you approach it?

Elina Waage Mikalsen: This year’s festival marked the halfway point of my residency, and so I didn’t really want to just play as a musician myself. I rather wanted to lay out the different influences, thoughts, and research that accumulated during the year. Peter Meanwell [the artistic director of the Borealis festival] asked if I wanted to have a talk or do a concert. But earlier in my art projects, I liked to create more complex situations for my artworks. These situations often include food and different modes, like a performative part followed by a more relaxed part where you can talk about what happened and eat together, experiencing the tastes and smells. And so, I wanted to break up this talk situation, and I came up with this talk show collage concept, for lack of a better word. And it is both: it has the form of a talk show, but it is also a collage of collected knowledge and ways of experiencing and thinking. So that’s how it came together.

AW: I really liked this interactivity with the various guests and different voices.

EWM: Yeah, when I got this residency, I wanted to make a space that is not only for me but enabling the creation of a platform for other Sámi artists within the same niche as me—to kind of get in the front door and then open the back door for more people.

AW: Ah, that’s a nice metaphor.

EWM: Yeah, I got it from Adam Khalil, one of the artists behind New Red Order, an indigenous film art collective. They had this big exhibition at the Kunsthal Charlottenborg in Copenhagen, where I did a performance together with other Sámi artists. Adam said that it was their task as a collective when they got this opportunity

for a big exhibition within a white institution to not just walk in the front door, but also to open up the back door for other people.

AW: That’s really nice. Coming back to your talk show format, it was your idea to speak about experimentalism in Sámi music culture, right? Could you explain a bit what this means?

EWM: It was not only about experimentalism from a Sámi perspective, but also to open a conversation about listening, about the production of sound. And it was about how to experiment from a Sámi perspective, from a culture that is protectionist in a way and wants to keep its traditions because it has been threatened in many areas. It is also very important to keep the knowledge about the traditional way of Yoiking. So, there are two thoughts in mind at the same time: how to preserve and how to push forward. Sámi culture is alive and developing and has always brought in new techniques and knowledge. My entry point is about asking the questions, not necessarily having the answers, but to just start these conversations. How do we relate to field recordings, to listening to the land, to experimenting in ways that feel ethically right and non-exploitive?

AW: I remember this question of asking for permission to listen to nature. Is this very present in Sámi culture?

EWM: Yes, this way of relating to your surroundings and asking for permission is a huge part of Sámi culture. It is also about being thankful for what you take, to view it as an equal exchange. And you need to be a listening being to hear those answers. Kite (Dr. Suzanne Kite) has done a lot of research into these topics and put it into her issue of the *New Wave* magazine. She has conducted amazing interviews with lots of thinkers and artists with indigenous backgrounds on this topic, which is really inspiring.

AW: In the discourse around curating classical and contemporary music, much has been said about the stiff, sitting concert format and the isolated listening situation.



fig. 1 Elina Waage Mikalsen, *Elina Waage Mikalsen: The sounds from in between – a talk show collage*, 2023. Photograph by Johanne Karlsrud.



fig. 2 Suzanne Kite, *Elina Waage Mikalsen: The sounds from in between – a talk show collage*, 2023. Photograph by Johanne Karlsrud.

Do you see any interesting mix of the classical concert format and the Sámi way of listening? What would be your ideal listening space?

EWM: I guess, to create ways for the audience to somehow engage with what they hear. To make the situation of listening comfortable. Listening together is very much a collective experience. But I wonder if we take for granted hiding the source of the sound by closing your eyes, making it dark, hiding the orchestra in the pit, etc. It's done to create more images and to make it a more sacred experience, I guess. There is some quality to that, but I wonder about finding ways of listening that are more engaging from a Sámi perspective. For example, to join in with the Yoik is normal, if you know the Yoik or if you have heard it for a few rounds.

AW: Joining in would be the traditional way of attending music in Sámi culture?

EWM: Traditionally, yes. But today, of course, the Sámi music scene is also hugely influenced by the Western

global society that we live in. A lot of the Sámi music scene has adopted the same structures without really having those conversations about how we create spaces for experiencing sound.

AW: Speaking about the situation that you created for the listener in your project, were you entirely happy with it or would you change something next time?

EWM: I was really happy with it all. Also, with the resources and possibilities that we had. The whole festival team was extremely supportive. I'm not used to having a huge festival behind me or having my back. I'm used to doing things myself and on a very small budget. And this time, we actually had the opportunity to invite people, and I didn't have to cook the food myself. They really had my back, and we could think about the content. Part of the residency is also about working with the people in the organization around the topic of creating knowledge about working with indigenous artists, so that it can stay within the organization also after this project is over. We had several reading sessions and were talking about this boundary of not knowing about Sámi culture. That is where I always must start because the knowledge about Sámi culture is so low. It's about informing people that they can do their own homework. All the knowledge you need to know of the basics of Sámi culture is there on the Internet. I offer myself as a person. I know that my role will partly be to educate. But I'm interested in how to create a role that I can do it for as short as possible and be as much as possible an artist working with the festival and with people that have gotten knowledge. We also made a reading list for the audience on the basics, because I really wanted this talk show collage to be a space where we Sámis, me and the others that I had invited, could talk on our terms and have conversations that are actually interesting to us without always starting from the bottom. So, I'm not sure if the audience did read this, but it was there at least. And I also felt that we were able to take the conversation further.

AW: After this experience, are you motivated to do more of this kind of curatorial work? Or are you happy to get back to the artistic work?

EWM: Both. I think I really like to be a facilitator. It's about creating a space for more people than just me and to bring along all those Sámi artists working in between. And then I'm also really looking forward to doing the artistic work, which is closest to my heart.



fig. 3 Katarina Barruk, Viktor Bomstad, Elina Waage Mikalsen, *Elina Waage Mikalsen: The sounds from in between – a talk show collage*, 2023. Photograph by Johanne Karlsrud.



fig. 4 *Elina Waage Mikalsen: The sounds from in between – a talk show collage*, 2023. Photograph by Johanne Karlsrud.

AW: In an interview with the SHAPE platform some years ago, you were speaking about breaking up the hierarchy of sounds. I liked this idea. Do you have any thoughts on how we could address this issue in general, also from a curatorial point of view? Because especially in classical and contemporary music, there is still so much hierarchy and judgment.

EWM: Well, I feel experimental music—or more generally also experimental arts—in its core is about breaking down hierarchies. It’s about challenging the established. Maybe we have several different entry points into meeting in a festival such as Borealis or other kinds of contemporary music or experimental music festivals. Some will come from the more classical background, but I think I come from the more do-it-yourself background. And from that perspective, I think there is a lot of care and love and openness for different ways of being together and creating spaces that are good to be in.

AW: But there is still a lot of harsh judgment in the contemporary music scene and oftentimes this toxic competitiveness, especially between the professionals themselves who start complaining immediately after the concert is over.

EWM: I guess it’s important for people to understand they might not hold all the tools to understand what they are actually listening to. It’s about recognizing your own background with your certain privileges and that you might not carry the necessary tools to read, understand, and take in what you are listening to even though you think so. Maybe it fits to bring in the book by Dylan Robinson here, *Hungry Listening*. It talks about many aspects of listening and positionality, and he has formed this concept, or term, hungry listening, that describes a mode that is a certain way of being and also a certain way of listening. This hungry listening is supposed to give you something, for example, a booking for your next festival. It’s about a certain entry point, that is, a hungry way of listening and not a way of listening that opens you up for what you hear.

AW: Yeah, it’s almost a competitive way of listening, as it would be important to find out who is the better listener.

EWM: Whereas talking about this mode of listening means understanding your position and what different sounds might mean to different people based on who they are. A police siren will sound differently to different people, for example. Listening to Sámi music is also about understanding it as a very embodied way of practice that is highly connected to our homelands, to our history. The Yoik specifically: there is knowledge within the sound. And some of it might be accessible to a Western audience, but for some of it, you might necessarily not have the tools to understand what or how or why this is part. And maybe not everything is supposed to be accessible to everyone to keep some things sacred and secret. Maybe not all the sounds are also supposed to be for everyone.

AW: So, this would—ironically speaking—mean that you first have to pass a test?

EWM: In a way... But no. It is about being humble, to be listening, to be a listening being in the meeting with the people or culture or a sound tradition that you might not understand or know that much about. But then also I’m thinking—not only from the Western perspective, but from my own perspective, too—what does experi-

menting mean from a Sámi perspective? For example, will I hear it when a Sámi is experimenting? But you wouldn't. Because I have the tools to understand that this is groundbreaking, that this is really stretching it. And how can we do that? There is a lot of Western music with the Yoik on top. That has been done a lot with all kinds of indigenous or so-called “exotic” music, “world music,” of course. But we have to dig deeper, get deeper into the philosophies, the ways of thinking, the ways of seeing the world from within, how you structure the music, how you structure the whole listening situation.

AW: How can curators then frame these kinds of events in a way that is accessible for the audience even though it's more effort than just listening to what is familiar?

EWM: For example, at the Borealis festival before the Gamelan concert, they were handing out a piece of paper for each audience member with an interview with the composer. People who are not extremely into Gamelan music wouldn't necessarily hear that this is really different Gamelan music. When it comes to my own project, I hope that by calling it a collage was also a way for the audience to understand that there will be elements that you will have to put together yourself to create a meaning out of it.

AW: And what also made it accessible was this welcoming, soft atmosphere so that people could feel at ease and feel good.

EWM: I think care and generosity are important to invite people in. Though it should not be about luring them. But maybe it's easier to talk about stuff that most people don't understand or don't have the knowledge to understand if you create a generous atmosphere.

AW: Thank you very much for your time and sharing all these interesting thoughts.

Additional books on Sámi culture:

Outi Pieski and Eeva-Kristiina Harlin, *The Ládjogahpir: The Foremothers' Hat of Pride* (Karasjok: Davvi Girji, 2020)

Elin Anna Labba, *Herrene sendte oss hit: Om tvangsflytting en av samene* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 2021)

Harald Gaski and Gunvor Guttorm, eds., *Duodji Reader: Twelve Essays on Duodji by Sámi Writers* (Karasjok: Davvi Girji, 2022)

Gerd Mikalsen, *Farsmålet* (Tromsø: Gollegiella, 2017)

Patricia Fjellgren and Malin Nord, eds., *Inifrån Sápmi: Vittnesmål från stulet land* (Stockholm: Verbal Förlag, 2021)

Mary Ailonieida Sombán Mari, *Beaivváš Mánát / Leve blant reptiler* (Tromsø: Mondo Books, 2020), a PDF version of the book can be found at <https://koro.no/kunstverk/beaivvas-manat-leve-blant-reptiler/>.

Elina Waage Mikalsen is an interdisciplinary artist from Romssa/Tromsø, Sápmi, who works with sound, text, textile, performance, and installation. In her sound practice, she often mixes field recordings, her voice, electronics, and home-built instruments to create sonic spaces that exist somewhere between reality and fantasy. Her background is both Sámi and Norwegian, which is a recurring theme in her artistic practice. The holes that the Norwegian assimilation process has created in her own family history have become a starting point for fantasizing about and discussing what these holes represent, what matter they constitute, and how they affect us today. As an artist, she is concerned with making visible and including the interweaving of people from whom she originates, and often includes family and friends in her works.

From Sound Art in the Public Space to Sound Studies Research in Sacred Places: Interview with Guely Morató and Víctor Mazón Gardoqui from Sonandes (Bolivia)

Anja Wernicke

“To forge a society that listens is to forge a more just and equitable society.”

Anja Wernicke: Guely and Victor, thank you so much for your time and for sharing your work and thoughts around it. Under the roof of the Sonandes platform, you are doing many different activities like a biennial, research projects, laboratories, workshops. Could you tell us a little bit about how it all came into being, how it all started?

Guely Morató: We started in 2014 as the International Biennial of Sound Art. At the beginning, the idea was to share different sound experiences where practitioners worked with sound as a material to build their discourse; at that moment in Bolivia, everything was very traditional and classical. The underground scene was strong with people mainly focused on making noise or experimental music. On the other hand, there were people from the academy who were more into interpretation and contemporary composition. So, we decided to share the experience about sound art and different sound disciplines like objects, sculptures, installations, and other types of expressions. The first edition was only three full days long. It was small. For the second edition, we expressed it over a month. Our program grew a lot, with more seminars, lectures, workshops, and the opening took place in a popular market. The opening merged actions and expressions with the everyday sonorities from the open-air market. If you got it, it's okay. If you lose it, it's okay, too, because it's a public space. It's important to let it be free.

Víctor Mazón Gardoqui: I could add one thing. I see it more from a distance because I started to collaborate with Guely only in 2018. When you say that *Sonandes* is doing many activities, I think it's important to keep in mind that it's all happening in La Paz, which is not a big

city. I understand that Guely's passion was to focus on this idea of working with the materiality of sound and bringing people together, a collective learning process as an academy. So maybe that's why it's very much connected to the workshops, to the seminars and to the public spaces. Because, generally, art in Bolivia is a privilege for wealthy people. The difference in Guely's work is now—from my perspective—that she brings this idea of sound art to the public context, questioning what the public content is, making it free, open, and accessible to the people. And then, on the other hand, the invited artists don't bring a finished work to be exhibited, but rather ideas and processes to work together between the international artist, a local artist, craftsmen, or a practitioner within a community. And for the audience, there is not a paid entrance. You find it suddenly in the street without a big advertisement, no flashing lights, and no seeking applause at the end.

GM: For the piece in the marketplace, we spent eight months working with and among the ladies, listening to their thoughts and sharing knowledge to establish a dialogue with eight artists. The aim was to spread the dialogue through 60 speakers over the market and broadcast a radio artwork.

AW: And how did the ladies from the market react to it?

GM: Amazing! The ladies offered all of us a big special meal to celebrate. It was like a party that day. And we invited our audience to go to the market and establish a dialogue with them, listening to each other and buying local products. An action that, due to supermarkets nowadays, has been lost. At the same time, other people never noticed the installation.

AW: That means the speakers were hidden?



fig. 1 *Territorios* project with various artists during the 2016 *Sonandes* biennial at the Rodriguez open-air market in La Paz.

GM: They were installed into the architecture and the selling stands. The speakers were two inches in diameter, very small. So, the sound behaved like a perfume. Not so strong. Not invading the place. It was liminal, very sweet and kind. Another example is the project by Augustín Genoud from Argentina; he was working with biosensors, electronics, performers, and sound in a popular viewpoint and in another market. Ozzo Ukumari and Felipe Gutierrez went through the city with small sound devices offering the experience to pedestrians in a one-to-one action. Those kinds of actions are some of the most important manifestos inside our curatorial work.

AW: And how are the reactions from the more classical scene in La Paz? Do they come as well?

GM: Yes, they also were invited and participated. I was skeptical about it, because when you alter the standard methodologies to bring sound experiences to an audience and do something new, it's not always welcome. But it worked, and we got a lot of acceptance from different layers in our society from the academics to the citizens.

VMG: In the process that Guely creates, there are always different people attending and coming together, from old people to young people, full families from the grandmother to the child. And those people encounter it, and they ask: "What's this thing?" They just call it "*la cosa*" —the thing.

GM: Yes, *this thing!* It's amazing because outside the white and black cube are different rules. We don't conceive it as artworks per se, but more as a collective process that creates an experience and that has a lot of value for us, the artists, and the locals.

VMG: This also gives a different commitment, sharing time and space together while transitioning the urban space. You come across it, and almost instantly it opens a dialogue. And listening is about dialogue and empathy. Listening is about arriving at a community or a space and adapting to its rhythm and rules on a more horizontal level. In Bolivian society, everyday life happens on the streets, so it was important for us to offer cultural manifestations in these spots that are cohabitated by many different interests.

GM: It's a very interesting exercise for the artists, too, because they need to express themselves with another vocabulary. Connecting with people, approaching "*la cosa*" or the nature of the piece becomes an important role.

AW: So, did you also encounter some problems along the way? How do you prepare the artists?

GM: We present them the ideas, discuss them, and they need to be active to react.

VMG: Normally, the biennial starts one year and a half before. At this time, we start to talk with the artists and



fig. 2 José Ballivián, *CHENKO*, new work commissioned by the 2016 *Sonandes* biennial.

explain the rules of this game: come up with an idea, start the dialogue with the locals, then with the community. Then, we see if everything starts to match. And failure is part of making it. Last year, we had Valentina Vuksic, and she was totally into it. She came to live in a community of *Mujeres Creando*, which is a special....

GM: ...feminist house, a very important place in La Paz and widely recognized in Bolivia, due to their public actions and editions since the '90s. This long trajectory has happened in the highly patriarchal ecosystem that is Bolivian society.

VMG: They have an important community radio, they give social help, give many courses on multiple topics and have a local food restaurant and a hostel. So, we just started this dialogue and were like, let's see where the magic goes. Valentina was really into it; she was even wearing a jacket of *Mujeres Creando* at the end. The problem is more with the fragility of the body, because of the high altitude. You need some days to adapt. The food can also be a problem, if you eat something unusual, you can be off for three days.

GM: It's very important to take care of the artists and give the artists time to arrive in the city. It's a difficult city because of the high altitude, over 3600 meters. And the culture is very different. It's a bit chaotic, too, so they need to be permeable to new habits to get around town. In the process of adaptation, it must also embody collaborative work, moving away from an idea of solitary

work to a more open structure that contemplates the ideas and work methodologies of more people.

AW: Tell us more about the different festival editions that you realized.

GM: So, each edition has a theme, a subject. The first curatorship was dedicated to memory and listening, addressing body and social memory in a pluri-national state like Bolivia. The second edition was dedicated to public space and listening, questioning the public space, and not just invading other spaces with actions. In the third edition, we turned to the different forms of perception, so we focused on perception and listening to incorporate different types of bodies into the act of listening, like the blind and the deaf. And the last edition we have been working on with Victor is dedicated to the diversity of technology, trying to imagine different ways of understanding technology. How do you deconstruct the criterion of mono-technology? In my work, the reflection around listening and sound studies is central. All the editions have made efforts to assimilate this concept. For me, listening is a very important collective space. To forge a society that listens is to forge a more just and equitable society. We live in an ocular-centric society; listening is an act of resistance. It is to lodge in the invisible and from there deconstruct the idea of the image. The image is a synesthetic process, and it is not exclusive to the eye. That is why I find much value in cultivating an aural society.



fig. 3 Guely Morató experimenting with salt bricks in the Salar de Uyuni.

VMG: Yes, in these other ways of listening, we were into cosmotechnics and multi-naturalism. How different bodies listen, from the geologic body, the architectural body, the machine listening. How to create a discourse where those bodies cohabit and juxtapose? The premise was to expand to the inaudible and towards a non-cochlear and multispecies listening. The most critical part was the cosmotechnics. How are all these technologies with their persuasive design, coming from a specific part of the world with specific kinds of engineers and developers, invading other ways of thinking. The question was, what listening technologies happen in other latitudes and how to imagine them from the South? These questions were treated in the talks and the dialogues to form an expanded edition with printed and sound archives.

AW: Great, thank you very much. And then you are working on a new project right now. Could you explain what it is about?

GM: Yes, in our new project, we are working on the Wak'a [which means "sacred place" in Quechua]. And there are two sides to the project like in a diptych. On the one side, there is the idea of the black hole which refers to the silver mines in Potosí that have been active for five centuries now, since the Spanish crown came to Bolivia. Their methods of extracting are still ancient. It's a very poor place, with very hard work conditions and a short life expectancy. And then on the other side of the narrative is the white flat land, the Salar de Uyuni, from

which lithium is extracted and which is located in the same municipality. And that's a very strange situation to have this amount of lithium in the same place where all the colonization with silver started. For me, it's something deep and strong. Why is this contingency and recursivity in the same area?

AW: Yes, that's crazy.

GM: So, the second concept of this research is sacredness, because the mountains here in Bolivia are considered living beings, the elders. They are alive for our culture, during the rituals, people even offer food to them. We establish a long-term relationship with the mountains. They are called Wak'as. Wak'a is a sacred body or a sacred territory. Through our practice-led research, we found that these Wak'as deal with a great energy and are also places with substantial amounts of commodities. And for the inhabitants of those places, it is really an identity conflict, because they live by the need to extract minerals from the mountain. In the Andean worldview, you need to offer something back, as an act of reciprocity. But what happens when instead of extracting resources for your own family, you work for a transnational enterprise and need to abuse the resources? That means everything gets out of balance. The people in Potosí have an internal fight because of their worldview on the one side and capitalism on the other side. The Enlightenment placed the human figure in the center, and that's very different from the Andean worldview, where ideas establish a horizontal relation-



fig. 4 Víctor Mazón setting up the work *Bramador*, 2020, objects made of melted bullets and coins from the Chaco War.

ship with other beings. And that's something interesting for us because it's a reality. Our people there live in that way. It is important not to romanticize the situation and think that there is innocence in the eyes of the locals; they understand the capitalist world and move according to its parameters, but they also understand the unbalanced situation proposed by a large-scale extraction. On this point, we find the research very interesting because it is a reality that the extraction poses disadvantageous situations for the communities that must suffer the contamination of water and their territories.

VMG: Through our research, we realized that in this Potosí region, the first coins in America were minted and the dollar -\$- sign was coined. In 1573, Potosí had the same population as London and more inhabitants than Madrid, Rome, or Paris. With more than 160,000 inhabitants, it was one of the largest and richest cities in the world. It was sophisticated and developed, with the first cinema and locomotive in America. Nowadays, the Cerro Rico (rich hill), from which its different minerals are still being extracted, is different; the existing resources are minimal, and the pollution and human traces are huge. Now, this same region cohabits a new narrative, as the flat salt from Uyuni has around 65% of the world's lithium reserve, and a new loan of extraction of 70 years was signed with a German company. This governmental decision will run and have an impact for more than three generations and become a loop of previous nondemocratic actions that have happened in the region.

AW: Do you work together with other people on this research, too?

VMG: We started this long-term research with a hybrid team: anthropologists, historians, scientists, and locals from Potosí. Then, later, thanks to a collaboration with Solidar Suiza and the Witness Project, we expanded it and presented this ongoing research in a network between different universities in North and South America like Portland, Harvard, Columbia, Labverde, and McGill. We all worked together towards sound-based research on the impact of the Anthropocene in inhabited and uninhabited places. During the pandemic, we decided to move there. We abandoned the city of La Paz, because a major city was not the best place to stay during the pandemic. So, we moved to the countryside, and we were living with the silver miners, we were working with them, establishing a dialogue, getting into the mine, being part of their daily activities and recording the different sonorities and conversations. They were very intrigued and questioning why we were there. And the first days were a bit strange. But after two weeks of sharing, we became friends, and the project now has been running for three years.

AW: And from the sonic point of view—What was interesting for you in this region during your research?

VMG: It was important for us to reflect in a location where the orality and oral tradition is so important. At the same time, there are only two seasons on the pla-

teau: the rain season and the wind season. And the instruments replicate the rain to call the rain, or replicate the wind to stop the rains. On a plateau desert at 4,000 meters without vegetation and small hills, everything is sonorous. The music is present from the automatic experience of sound systems in the street to the live bands and festivities. The rituals, composition, and storytelling do not follow a linear discourse; they will follow a circular narrative. Also, a circular disposition of the interpreters and audience and a continuous repetition create an acoustic totem that stays on time. We were interested in implementing these circular narratives, and we decided to work with first-order ambisonics. Through it, we can record sound in a sphere and have deeper recording and reproduction experiences.

GM: Bolivia is a country with a strong oral tradition; the word plays a central role in the social and political organization of society. The word is surrounded by rituals, while writing is not developed before and lately after colonization. People need to speak more than to write to communicate. It is a tradition, but also simply a necessity. That's why we are interested in the universe of the spoken word.

VMG: As Guey said, before the Spanish came, it was a culture where there were no writings. Information was passed through listening to the elders. Everything was, again, in a circle. We adopted those concepts when we compose and when we arrange sounds to create a narrative. The Salar de Uyuni—the salt flat—measures more than 11,000 km², and that salt contains a percentage of lithium. We have named it neo-extractivism, and it's the third concept behind the curatorial research. Five hundred years ago, it was happening in the black hole of the mine, and now it happens in this white salt flat. Now, everything is there in front of us, in front of the naked eye.

GM: In a country with no education, with no technology, with no structures, it's like a loop. We can perceive it. The same thing that happened 500 years ago will happen again. We are facing neo-colonialism and neo-extractivism.

VMG: There is the promise that this is the Saudi Arabia of the new world, that the country will become rich. But at the same time, there is the 70-year loan of extraction that the government gave to a German company, as I had already mentioned. And there are mostly engineers working in the lithium mine, while in the silver mine there are over 10,000 workers. These engineers fix the

wash machines that, through density, decant the lithium and potassium chloride. The orality and the acoustics are totally different compared to the black of the mine where you have detonations, explosions, dynamite... there you have machinery, engines, and motors moving water in a desert. At the same time, the research facilities where the production of the batteries will happen will be located outside Bolivia.

AW: That's very interesting. Coming back to the sonic projects that you realized in the region, could you name some examples?

GM: In terms of sound praxis and actions, we connected with different inter-scalar communities and started different projects and collaborations. We were working for a few months with recordings from different mines and transducing these sounds into the salt flat. We were also working with the materials we found on site and at the same time in a further process creating site-specific sculptures; for example, we connected the salt miners with the historical silversmiths' academy, and we produced silver bricks using as a mold a salt brick unity (salt adobe of 40x25x20cm) that is used for all architectural buildings in the area. The objects behaved as microphones that capture, through long recordings, the winds that cross the salt flat without other friction. At this point, one of the things that most interested us was connecting with different layers within society. We understood that the more people are involved in our proposal, the more public reach we get. We understood that it does not become public by being in the public space, it becomes public when there are several layers of society involved.

VMG: For these actions, we traveled with a group of composers and artists, making workshops in different locations. We were traveling with two cars into the salt flat. Through these actions without the public, we were interested in strategies of awareness of extraction, human traces, and man-made landscapes. So, we did concerts for the space, the Wakas, and for us. Now, we are using the recordings as material for composing with different artists and musicians.

AW: Are you planning to do something with the audience in the salt flat?

GM: Not in the salt flat probably. It's complicated to go there and a very arid location, dangerous to move around due to the morphology of the floor and intense ultraviolet radiation. That's why we chose to work



fig. 5 Guely Morató, Víctor Mazón, *Bota*, 2021. Salt, water, miner's sack, and four transducers.

around the Salar with different communities and share this work afterward. We worked, for example, in a place that is called Pulacayo that used to be the biggest mine in the world. But now it's abandoned. Due to the road infrastructure, there is the local school of all villages around, and there is also an historical museum. We shared a lot of time with the students of that school, making pieces and recordings with them. We also developed VR experiences to connect the real narratives with local worldviews. Another relevant project was with the Young Potosí Philharmonic Orchestra. We worked with the imagined sounds of the mine and made a workshop with silent footage we filmed in the mines, and the young musicians composed with *musique concrète*, foley techniques, and their instruments. This process was very nutritious, as most of their parents are miners or work in relation to the mines, but none of them had visited the mine due to the dangers of going there, and it was the first time they actually saw the inside.

VMG: We were presenting the videos and were playing with the acoustic imaginary: *How do you think it sounds there?* And then we produced the sounds with special self-made microphones, amplifiers, and reused materials, from wooden and cardboard resonant bodies to quinoa and stones.

AW: Do these ideas develop in the process, or do you come with a fixed concept?

GM: It's part of the process. Because it depends on the people that you meet. And what happens in that

encounter. So, first we ask for permission to enter the areas and communities, presenting ourselves and listening to their circumstances, and then understanding if they are open to share, communicate, and collaborate. One thing is very important—as I said, we live in an ocular-centric society. If we put a camera in front of people, they start acting for the camera, or being cautious of seeing or being recognized for what they say. But when you have a recording device, people just forget it. And that helps us a lot in connecting in a better way with them. We want to involve more people in the process, trying to share all this knowledge and all these ideas with a different audience, from children to elders, to engage in a dialogue about these topics and this research. We want to form a community rather than be working with a community.

VMG: For us, there are different intentions. On the one hand, it's about sharing an experience. Let's say there is the act of listening, this act of empathy, this moment to share, this time to preserve. This is towards the creation of an archive; it's important because we are creating and preserving memories for the future as an open archive. We work with free, *libre*, and open licenses. We share what we create together with them and with others. Then, it's also about different strategies to bring awareness to these worlds that are invisible. There are many people from Bolivia who have no image of these things. And we are finding ways to present, sensitize, digest, and learn together.

AW: So, actually, it's very political or activist work. Why do you think it's important to have the artistic approach in it at all?

GM: Why is it important? Because it's a way to communicate with another sensitivity. There is an urgency to connect with this issue; it is a very important moment in which we must take part in the possible solutions and part of this is to communicate in order to understand the magnitude of the problem and from there develop new strategies to improve the situation.

VMG: There are diverse strategies—we could create an academic paper, and some people would read it. We could create audiovisual content for the media, and others will receive it (but the media is populated with such bad news that it is saturated). And through the arts, we find strategies of awareness and strategies for discussion.

GM: And Switzerland is a great place to share this research, and open a dialogue, because here people start consuming *clean-green energy*. But on many occasions, we have a wrong idea about what green or clean means. It's clean here, but not in our country. We need to understand the whole process and then redefine what is green and clean. Green energy comes from renewable energy resources that can be renewed naturally and have *the least* environmental impact, but the term *least* is very controversial, as lithium, nickel, cobalt, manganese, and graphite are crucial to battery performance and are mostly extracted in third countries with few regulations and by transnational companies interested on the maximum rentability and reduction of costs. Clean energy is created without emitting greenhouse gasses, though it isn't necessarily naturally renewable.

AW: Yeah, that's so true.

GM: If you don't have up-to-date information and you wish to help *to save the world*, you might fail using strategies led by the energy lobby. It's important to share what has happened and happens in the Global South and to look at what happens in the North at the same time. And then try to find the best way to do things. We really are in a hotspot moment as humanity, as a planet. So, we need to develop multiple strategies because one strategy is not enough. We are also conscious that we are part of the problem, and hopefully part of the solutions. That's why we are trying to offer ways of thinking beyond the obvious things.

Guely Morató Loredo is a curator, sound artist, and researcher. She has a master's degree in education and technology (ES) and a bachelor's degree in social communication sciences, specializing in cultural studies (BO). In 2014, she founded and began directing ***Sonandes: Platform for Experimentation and Research***, which organizes the only biennial specialized in sound art in Latin America. Sonandes has also developed *Puertos: Creation Residency Program* (2018-2021), as well as publications, laboratories, and exhibitions specialized in sound art and listening studies. Her work has been shown in different festivals and museums in different countries of America and Europe. She also has won awards in America and Europe.

<https://sonandes.org/>

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Víctor Mazón Gardoui Exposing the unheard and unseen, addressing the inaccessible and experiencing vulnerability and awareness in the viewer. Perception and altered states are key concepts in the performances through the use of sound or light. His art practice explores amplification, electromagnetic phenomena and images of invisible fields by using locative audio and custom electronics. His work materializes in three main fields: actions or site-specific performances through experimental processes, exhibitions as consequences of previous actions and collaborative works through seminars to form a communal dialog. His work has been performed or exhibited in museums, biennials, galleries, billboards, urban screens and TV/radio stations in Africa, Russia, Nepal, North America, Canada, Mexico, Bolivia, Colombia, Argentina, Uruguay, Antarctica and numerous locations across Europe.

<https://victormazon.com>

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Cover Image:
V́ctor Mazón setting up the work *Bramador*, 2020,
objects made of melted bullets and coins from the Chaco War.