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No problem!

Approaches towards an artistic New Music

Transcript of a lecture given at the conference
New Perspectives for New Music

Harvard University, Department of Music
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Links are referring to files on SoundCloud

Before I start to elaborate on some ideas of my lecture *I hereby resign from New Music*, which I gave in July 2012 at the International Summer Course for New Music in Darmstadt, I want to give a short summary of this text in order to outline the main thoughts I delivered there.

The title refers to a work by Joseph Beuys: a multiple postcard he made in 1985. It reads: *I hereby resign from art*. The art, Beuys resigned from, was the *established* art, which had turned into an object, a product and had become a genre. This turning away reminded me of a statement, that is used more and more frequently by quite a number of young composers: »Essentially what I do is not New Music« or »New Music is what other people do«. However, a definition of precisely *what* they are distancing themselves from is not immediately clear. But one tendency can be recognized: an aversion towards compositions whose surfaces give an overly strong impression of arts and crafts, a rejection towards a music that has fallen prey to a self-referential sonic fetishism.

This sort of pottering around in the *haute cuisine* of carefully prepared sonic delicacies makes those young composers resent being subsumed under the label of New Music. Instead of buying into the competitive logic of continuous material refinement or referring to the stringing-together of catalogues patterns as »composition«, the focus of artistic interest has shifted: from the *how* of construction to the *why* of aesthetic substance – to the question of a composition's significance outside of an esoteric system of reference. The number of those composers who are content to have occasional success with »well made« works seems to be in decline. A vital interest in the effects and perception of musical works outside of the scene's sheltered spaces, which have lost all connection with the cultural discourse, is more and more noticeable.

After that, I posed the question what it means to work as a composer and diagnosed that it ultimately implies choosing a work without any effects to speak of. A reception

outside of the time-honored areas is virtually non-existent, and, moreover, the »cultivated« ignoring of New Music has long since become accepted. Being a composer thus also means having to explain to everyone that one is not a »twelve-tone musician« who produces »something like that Stockhausen«. So I tried to establish a cursory »taxonomy«, in which I attempted to pinpoint at least a few facets of this little-known species. Among others, that was:

THE CONSERVATOR

– who acts as a preserver of a historical apparatus of musical instruments by establishing a microcosm of sonic differentiation; thus he ensures the survival of the artefacts of instrument building. Therefore the composer has to some extent been urged to perpetuate the mounting of material variants. Finally the effect of that was an inversion, as the composers themselves seem to have been conserved by their reproductive media. The technical limitations of instruments, along with the stylistic preferences of ensembles and commissioners dictate the setting in which compositional work takes place. Moreover, this is supported by a more or less voluntary acceptance of this forced symbiosis that turns composers into »cleaner fishes« – useful parasites of an institutionally regulated food chain.

THE BRAND

– a function, that brings the composer into an almost irresolvable dilemma: On the one hand, recognizability is a prerequisite for successfully launching one's product as a »must-have« with a secure place on the programs of festivals and repertoire lists of ensembles. On the other hand, this can rapidly create the danger of being accused of a lack of ideas: the brand is then compromised into a »trick«. However, especially from young composers permanent agility is expected: every work is, first and foremost, a recommendation for the next – the goal is to serve the determinants of the market. And before they know it, composers are trapped in a net of demands and conventions, and forced to serve an industry with all its intrinsic regularities.

THE CONSUMER

– a term with which I tried to characterize a composer, who does not want to limit himself to the aforementioned roles of the conservator and the brand. The position of the attentive, critical consumer, who observes the mechanisms of medial conditions, judging their significance for the state of the material in New Music, is one of the central requirements for the conception of a sustainable way of composing. The desideratum is to overcome the discrepancy between compositional work and aesthetic reality. For the composer, this means no longer being able to live in lovely Late Romantic coziness »alone in his song«. A music that claims social significance cannot dispense with detailed knowledge of the »outside«.

At the end of my lecture I expressed my hope, that the latent willingness of young composers to »resign« from New Music is more than a mere fashion. One of the most urgent questions for the genre in the immediate future would be how far the supposedly exotic activity of composition can justify its function in earthly life. The goal is an approach towards composition connected to the present: a timely New Music.

When I gave that lecture, there were about 25 people in the audience. And I remember that the Q&A afterwards was not quite productive. To be honest: I didn't expect that this text would initiate a vital discussion. But after the International Music Institute in Darmstadt made the text available online and shared a download link on Facebook, I was almost a bit scared about the interest that arose. The lecture has been translated into several languages: Common ones like English or French, but also rather »exotic« ones like Montenegrin or Swedish.

The latter version was made for a publication of the text in the Swedish magazine for contemporary music *Nutida Musik* (issue 1, January 2013). In addition to the publication, the magazine's editor-in-chief, Andreas Engström, came up with the idea to ask 20 composers/sound artists for statements.

Áki Ásgeirsson

Joanna Bailie

Hafdís Bjarnadóttir

Erik Bünger

Leo Correia de Verdier

Marcus Fjellström

Juliana Hodkinson

Lina Järnegard

Adrian Knight

Annette Krebs

Johannes Kreidler

Ignas Krunglevicius

Jonatan Liliedahl

Ida Lundén

Elena Mendoza-López

Anne Pajunen

Marianthi Papalexandri-Alexandri

François Sarhan

Ása Stjerna

Øyvind Torvund

His call led to a broad spectrum of statements and comments. Moreover, several statements also appeared on Facebook. In the following I'd like to document some of these reactions.

First some, to my mind, rather negligible ones:

Two of the composers asked by *Nutida Musik* were already unhappy with the linguistic style of my text. Reykjavík based composer and guitarist HAFDÍS BJARNADÓTTIR spotted a »funny« coincidence: »Funnily enough, some of the arguments leveled against New Music in Mr. Rebhahn's analysis would seem to apply to precisely this type of rather turgid academic writing style.« Sound artist and musician ANNETTE KREBS from Berlin agreed with her and diagnosed an: »[...] extremely academic style, obsessed with content and form. [...] Shouldn't even scientific texts be readable without the need for consuming several pots of espresso in order to digest them?«

[I'm still a bit worried about Annette's blood pressure.] Anyway: Berlin based composer and screenwriter SAGARDÍA was a bit at variance with Hafðís and Annette. Apparently he missed the right amount of substructure and advised me on Facebook: »Michael, better read Rancière before starting to criticize!« Unfortunately he didn't tell me what exactly I should read and in which way Rancière's theories would have been able to enhance my text.

British composer JULIANA HODKINSON conjured clan's liability. The buzzword *Darmstadt* seemed to be enough for her; instantly she indexed me as a negativist and called me a devotee to a very special sort of athletics: »Rebhahn's lecture at Darmstadt – where, apparently, the Adornian sport of character assassination as primary weapon in musical power struggles lives on [...].« I have no clue where Ms. Hodkinson detects »character assassination«. Perhaps that's her notion of the phenomenon *criticism*?

Quite interesting – and now I am coming to the more instructive reactions – is indeed, that Juliana Hodkinson obviously knows very well who has the right to criticize and who not. Referring to Joseph Beuys's postcard *I hereby resign from art* she points out that »there is a big difference between Joseph Beuys making a maverick artwork [...] and various unnamed composers of the younger and youngest generation murmuring personal disclaimers during concert intervals at the performances of their colleagues' music.«

Although this attitude of a general not-taking-serious disturbs me a bit, I have to admit, that one objection is actually justified: Hodkinson mentions the »unnamed composers«, thus formulating a critique, which was also expressed by others, e.g. by Johannes Kreidler in his article in *Nutida Musik*. Indeed I refrained from naming names, because I wanted to frame an abstract hypothesis without reference to individual positions. To a certain degree I failed in that attempt, what became quite obvious by observing the broad variety of individuals acclaiming the text. Apparently »resigning from New Music« is a really common phenomenon and it seems to be quite easy to label oneself as a »resigner«.

The following reaction appeared in the so-called *Bad Blog of Musick* – an online forum hosted by the German music magazine *Neue Musikzeitung*, which mainly attracts a rather – let's say – conservative or traditionalistic clientele. There, composer ALEXANDER STRAUCH from Munich wrote: »In Rebhahn's text I mainly recognize a description of state and not so much an outlook. Finally he saves the ideas of New Music and implicates, even claims to draw on those ideas. He calls for a disruption, but doesn't really disrupt. »Resigning from New Music« would imply being Penderecki, Górecki, Henze or Pärt. That would clearly mean an exclusion from Darmstadt, Donaueschingen, etc.«

There are two things I find quite remarkable (respectively questionable) about Strauch's comment:

1) Obviously it is still an exigency to create simple as well as obsolete dichotomies: On the one hand the grim knights of Darmstadt's Wiesengrund, always ready for the battle against reification and fetishization. On the other hand the passionate thoroughbred composers, who simply want to write »beautiful« pieces, and who are treated with such disdain by the relentless custodians of New Music.

2) The act of »resigning« is necessarily associated with regression. Apparently it is not imaginable to establish a non-static aesthetic open to the future. Instead the disruption should paradoxically emerge from going backwards. Why should »resigning from New Music« imply to be (like) Henze or Pärt? – Why can't it simply mean to be oneself?

The following is to exemplify how widespread and acceptable the equation of opposition and regression is in Germany.

Daniel Smutny
Symphonie (2011)
MDR Symphony Orchestra
Torodd Wigum, conductor
[excerpt]

»The very opening of the work is remarkable: a clarinet – combined with a vibraphone and supported by harmonics of the same pitch level from the harp – plays ornamental figures squeezed into an emotional icebox by the tam-tam. Then, beginning at bar 4, the high strings judiciously warm things up with a unison major ninth doubled at the octave. What a moment – so brilliant, so simple, yet never used before! [...] Smutny reshuffles the history of music with unspoilt and stubborn precision. For this very reason, his allusions are like branding irons searing the listener's memory, reminiscences jammed together higgledy-piggledy like interlocking hinges. Nor are they averse, in his more recent music, to suddenly upsetting the borrowed inflections by adding inflections all their own.« – HANS-PETER JAHN

Just to make things clear: Daniel Smutny was born in 1976. As a composer he has been awarded with several prizes, a.o. he twice received the Stuttgarter Kompositionspreis; his works have been performed at the Donaueschinger Musiktage, musica viva Munich, Ultraschall Berlin etc. – Hans-Peter Jahn has been editor-in-chief for New Music at the Südwestrundfunk in Stuttgart from 1989 to 2013; in this function he curated the festival ECLAT. Music and text were published in the renowned *Edition Zeitgenössische Musik* (Edition Contemporary Music), a CD series by the German Music Council which documents the work of selected composers born or living in Germany.

Again: According to Hans-Peter Jahn »Smutny reshuffles the history of music.« That's quite a demand! And how does he accomplish that? By using a sonic language which negates all musical developments and achievements of the past 60 years? By regressing to a semantical and syntactical predetermined vocabulary, which is per se resistant to the formation of non-affected contexts? Jahn mentions »a moment never used before«.

I have no idea where he notices such a moment. And however: Is New Music still about the »unheard«, about this fatiguing search for new sounds, new combinations, new whatsoever? Am I really reshuffling the history of music by »discovering« some sound, structure or combination? Surely not.

Anyway, to ease the criteria a bit, we probably should leave Hans-Peter Jahn's notion of an aesthetic world revolution behind us. Nevertheless, there is this unbroken confidence in a sort of *recherche*, that perpetually combs through the repertoire of sanctioned material in order to prize out an alleged »first«. And this is what leads to the unfortunately rather common notion that the composer's goal is mainly to create a »never-heard« or »never-used«.

A little example how this alleged task is adopted by young composers: In August and September 2012 I went to *matrix*, an academy of the Experimentalstudio Freiburg that took place in Amsterdam and Warsaw. In almost all presentations, given by an international selection of young composers, the topic was – sooner or later – about »solving a problem« with a certain composition. Those »problems« were without exception intra-musical: Generally it was about combining a structure/a texture/a harmony/a rhythm or a technique with another structure/texture etc. in order to achieve something »never heard« or »never used«.

Apart from my personal belief, whereby art doesn't *solve* problems but rather *creates* them, I wondered where this preference stems from. What moves a composer to understand his own *métier* as a sort of elaborate puzzle game? I'd like to float a rather adventurous hypothesis regarding this topic. Perhaps the preference in »solving problems« has to do with the following: Everyone who is concerned with music is confronted from the outset with a great deal of principles claiming the paradigm of *per aspera ad astra*.

You have to learn the recorder before you can study the clarinet. – You have to bang on some weird Orff instruments before you are allowed to bang on a piano. – You have to practice Czerny before playing Chopin. – You have to do ear training and harmony exercises before you are able to study composition. – You have to orchestrate a piano piece by Debussy before applying your own ideas to the orchestra... etc. In short: You have to *solve problems*, before you are allowed to *create art*.

To prevent a misunderstanding: I certainly do not call for a sort of plunging into the material without any notion. John Cage once described *discipline* as the crucial moment of aesthetic practice: »Discipline is, before everything else, a discipline of the ego. The ego without discipline is closed, it tends to close in on its emotions. Discipline is what ruins all that closure. With it one can open up to the outside, as well as to the inside.« I think, that kind of discipline allows an access to the material which is insofar »guided« as it is not a mere plunging-in, but creates a balance between subjectivity and objectivity. However, this discipline cannot be reduced to a sheer obedience to extrinsic rules or norms.

One more example related to John Cage – a very prominent one: It's the famous Schoenberg-harmony-wall anecdote: »After I had been studying with him for two years, Schoenberg said, *In order to write music, you must have a feeling for harmony*. I explained to him that I had no feeling for harmony. He then said that I would always encounter an obstacle, that it would be as though I came to a wall through which I could not pass. I said, *In that case I will devote my life to beating my head against that wall*.«

To put it a bit less solemn (and less painful) Cage's beating-the-head-against-the-wall serves as a metaphor for the courage to disregard a congruity, to ignore the alleged indispensable preconditions. What would have happened if Cage had tried to compensate for the deficit Schoenberg mentioned? Probably music history has to register another twelve-tone minor master who failed in emulating his mentor.

That episode took place in 1937. But has the situation changed fundamentally?

»The goal of the composition program is to prepare students as much as possible for a future career; however, students will only become composers *after* graduation, after their own work has spoken for itself.«

This sentence is taken out of an image brochure describing the composition program at the Hochschule für Musik und Tanz in Cologne. [Well, that's quite a way to shuffle out of responsibility.] However, what is happening *during* the studies? Usually the education of a composer is based on a notion of composition as a primarily *technical* practice. The content of teaching focuses on the imparting of knowledge and techniques, which are necessary to produce scores: notation, instrumentation, study of musical forms etc. Moreover, the student has to deal with tradition: analysis – from Machaut to Lachenmann.

The result is an enormous workload that leaves not much space for excursions beyond the sphere of music; it's an hermetic training, that tends to exclude a profound aesthetic reflection of really contemporary musical positions, conceptions and discourses, not to mention those of other artistic fields. The involvement with the own material is complicated enough. Finally, the crucial question is mainly referring to workmanship: *How does one compose?* That kind of self-reference harbors the danger of shifting from *artist* to *artisan*; composing degenerates into being nothing more than the skill of putting learnt knowledge to work – according to approved and established production standards.

Artistic practice as an implementation of techniques, methods, forms and rules: A genuinely *artistic* thinking falls by the wayside. Instead, is it about »solving problems«. Moreover, the composers accept without contradiction that their material consists of traditional parameters – classical instruments, pitch, rhythm, playing techniques etc. – and that they have to cope with those dispositives. In addition they have to deal with extrinsic regulations: the expectations and requirements of an institutionalized music establishment.

Where this set of demands and conventions may lead to, is described in the following by composer Martin Schüttler: »More and more I observed myself just varying or arranging things I had learned or already worked out. It remained at a certain state of material, a certain method of operation... I didn't mean to at all, but I did not feel able to act freely. When I am listening to contemporary music or attending concerts and festivals, I get the impression that many others feel the same way. There is a certain framework, which directly impacts the composers' aesthetics, which limits and restricts the creative process early on and inhibits several ideas. The result is a *standardized* music, which runs totally counter to the self definition of New Music.«

To illustrate the phenomenon Schüttler calls »standardized music« with regard to its striking versatility: Here are two short pieces by composers you never heard of, but still know very well.

Saed Saundikura

Music for counter tenor, bass recorder, trumpet, violin, violoncello, and accordion

Sven Isabel Schöllkötter

Music for voice, clarinet, violoncello, piano and percussion

What I did here is the following: In a certain way I borrowed Johannes Kreidler's idea of »music with music« and applied it to a »music with compositions«. Both pieces consist of various layers of continuous, non-edited passages taken out of various works. The first one, that sounded to me strikingly like Klaus Huber, was a quite international *mélange*, whereas the second piece was an entirely German line-up.

Notwithstanding the rather arbitrary method of those cut-ups, I believe that there is something like a typical, internalized »sound« of New Music, which results from a high level of consistency of certain harmonic, rhythmic and technical parameters. Basically it is the result of varying a limited gamut of materials that guarantee an intactness of the external appearance.

In the following I would like explore possibilities for undermining that kind of »sound«. How could a New Music, which explicitly disregards the limitations of the state of material and is in no way interested in an intactness of the external appearance, sound like? How about a New Music, which is not about *differentiation*, but about *difference*?

Two composers who are exploring this question [Johannes Kreidler and Hannes Seidl] are invited to this conference; two others I would like to present now: the already mentioned Martin Schüttler as well as Maximilian Marcoll.

»The composer, as I see him, has not the task to innovate music. Nowadays his task is rather to adapt to the acoustic surroundings and to respond with a reaction that is relevant to society. He has to work on a sort of acoustic readjustment, instead of voluntarily fleeing into inner emigration. The composer's role is to comment on the things that surround us in the here and now.« – MARTIN SCHÜTTLER

The sonic comment on the here and now Martin Schüttler wants to give, gets very descriptive in his series *schöner leben* that he started in 2004. In these compositions he denies explicitly any »state of the art« of New Music and negates a mere demonstration of craftsmanship. Instead, he uses rough, non-refined sounds and works mostly with highly prestructured materials of various origins.

»I consider«, Schüttler explains, »the *thinking* about material, the thinking about music, the dissociation of musical elements as a very important mindset of 20th century music. I don't want to give up on this, as it represents a complex approach towards music and musical creation. But why should I apply this always to the same basics – pitches, rhythms, durations etc.? How can this mindset be applicable to the trivial, to everyday occurrences and their permanent aesthetification?«

In this aspect he claims an aesthetic proximity to the work of Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn. »Making art«, Hirschhorn says, »means to do a work which is full of energy, which is powerful and has guts.« So, it is not about the distinction between art and non-art. In Hirschhorn's notion, art is a tool to deal with reality. Typical of his work is the accumulation of prefabricated material; his sculptures and installations often look like handicraft works completely gone out of control. Hirschhorn consequently negates any distinction between »suitable« and »inappropriate« objects – there is no differentiation between »high« and »low«.

Schüttler corresponds to this aesthetic with musical means. The first step in composing *schöner leben 7*, the newest piece of the series, was the scanning of a folder named »Sketches«, containing various sound files without any systematical order.

The folder »Sketches« contains a.o.

4-year-old guitar master.mp3 – 2.6 MB

audacity.wav – 5.1 MB

badbirds.aif – 464 KB

beats.aif – 14.1 MB

fundspeak.aif – 10.5 MB

mailbox.aif – 17.4 MB

microchords – 12.9 MB

porn_3x.aif – 2.4 MB

rausch.aif – 7.5 MB

saxophon_anfaenger.mp3 – 8.1 MB

Finally Schüttler chose two of these audio files: *audacity.wav* and *saxophon_anfaenger.mp3*. The first one is a sonification of the source code of the audio editing software, the

second one is an audio track of a YouTube video, in which some teenagers demonstrate their first encounters with the saxophone. Those two materials became constitutive for the piece. However, they didn't remain unchanged, but were processed in several ways: by reductions, cuts, by the systematization of parameters etc. Schüttler is not interested in just taking ready-mades – he wants to *dissolve* or almost to *dissect* them. »The stuff I use«, he says, »is aesthetically preformed. If I leave it like it is, the inner semantics will prevail. I have to avoid this.«

The result is a music consisting of cultural sediments, isolated topoi and subtexts. One of these phenomena is e.g. the *form* Schüttler chose for *schöner leben 7*: It's the good old song scheme with intro, verses, chorus, bridge and outro. However, this structure is filled with materials, which are basically alien. The song scheme becomes disturbed and is brought into a state which frays out the original. Instead of affirming the naive aesthetics, Schüttler undermines its mechanisms and functions.

The subtitle of *schöner leben 7* – »Äußerlich auf dem Damm, aber verkorkst im Innern« – reads translated: »Right as rain externally but messed up on the inside«. This sentence stems from the short story *John Billy* by David Foster Wallace. For Schüttler's composition this is more than just a title: The implied dualism between intactness and defect becomes a structural thesis.

Consequently David Foster Wallace is the »vocalist« in Schüttler's piece. Out of a 90-minute interview that Foster Wallace gave in 2003, he extracted some passages and mounted them to rhyming »verses«.

There are things you have to do,

Do what you want.

There's this other part of you,

Pretend I'm James Bond.

There's an element in the book,

His neighbors would complain.

There is no larger good,

That escapes from pain.

There are things you have to do,

I'm just wishing this is good.

There's this other part of you,

Drink my chocolate milk and read a comic book.

The usage of *found footage*, of contingent material from the everyday world is what Martin Schüttler considers an appropriate way to participate as an artist in this very world. In his compositions he works with worldly phenomena instead of withdrawing into an aesthetical escapism. »My music«, Schüttler states, »is not reporting on aesthetical misconceptions of the everyday life, but it consists of their particles.«

Martin Schüttler

schöner leben 7

for saxophone and electronics (2011)

Mark Lorenz Kysela, saxophone

[excerpt]

»In 1963 Karlheinz Stockhausen wrote: »Today, musical imagination demands sounds nobody has heard before.« – By now it should be: The music of today demands new imaginations of sounds everybody knows.« – MAXIMILIAN MARCOLL

As you can see, Maximilian Marcoll's aesthetic principle is about linking music to everyday acoustic experiences. Primarily, the basis for Marcoll's compositions consists in recordings of sounds and noises from his social environment: the acoustic scenery of urban surroundings, the variety of everyday noise. Marcoll focuses on collecting material, without thinking about its potential suitability in a compositional context. The materials he accumulates represent a contingent overabundance; the process of composition later on consists of limiting this extensive gamut in order to create an aesthetic coherence. This limitation is realized by means of framing – based on a semantic reference system which causes an aesthetic »charging« of seemingly »profane« acoustic phenomena.

Maximilian Marcoll calls these reference systems *compounds*, in the sense of mixture or assembly. This concept is to be thought in several regards: On the one hand, it is the connection of original recording and transcription, meant as the elaboration of instrumentally reproducible notations of the recordings. Anyhow it is not about an achievement of an ideally undistinguishable imitation of the taped material with musical instruments, but rather about the production of *derivatives*. Those derivatives trace back to the original material, nevertheless they use the process of the transference into another medium in order to achieve a more or less significant distance to the original. Hereby the everyday noise becomes »aestheticized« and disassociated from its original relations. The essential meaning in Marcoll's work is the *treatment*, the *fitting* of the materials: It is not about the mere exhibition of primary materials, but about their processing in a compositional context.

On the other hand, the compounds' »mixture« consists of the connection of rather different materials within a network-like structure. The basis of this network are all taped events found in Marcoll's collection as well as their derivatives and transcriptions. Which of these materials become part of a concrete composition, depends on the instrumental setup of the respective piece. The instrument with all its acoustic and technical potentials and limitations thus becomes a sort of »reference device« with which the totality of the material stock is scanned.

In his composition *Compound No. 1 CAR SEX VOICE HONKER* Marcoll chose the *accordion* to be the instrumental base; therefore he selected sounds and noises which can be reproduced with an accordion: breath noises, voices, horns, cars passing by.

Precisely: A car parade celebrating some football success, background noises in a café, breath sounds while having sex, hissing doors of a subway train or a whining child in a backyard. In the piece a permanent blurring of these sounds' origin takes place: Is it a car or the accordion honking? Is it a human voice apparatus or the mechanics of the instrument? A human lung or the accordion's bellows etc.?

Maximilian Marcoll

Compound No. 1a: CAR SEX VOICE HONKER

for accordion and electronics (2008)

Eva Zöllner, accordion

[excerpt]

»The usage of everyday noises is not special. That goes without saying. I use them in the same way I use other music or instruments. It is not about taking in such materials into the realm of the musical, because in my view, that realm doesn't exist anymore. Nothing is per se musical or nonmusical, it always depends on the handling of a given material.

Moreover, it is not so much about drawing out interesting musical structures, but rather about an exploration of my living and working environment: What sounds do I produce – what sounds are my neighbors producing – what does this have to do with me – what means music in this situation?« – MAXIMILIAN MARCOLL

Maximilian Marcolls *Compounds* do not represent an *imitation* of everyday noises, but rather a *recontextualization*, framed by a musical logic applied by the composer. The everyday sounds do not become musical material by a mere inclusion into a compositional construction. As an unchanged phenomenon, the everyday sounds would remain just quotes – just »transplanted« signals. The transfer happens by means of changing the context, by dislocations, projections and the establishing of intrinsic connections. The framing of the everyday sounds induces an equivalence of the material; the everyday noise becomes an integral part of an aesthetic object – and not the counteracting »antagonist«. Thus, these sounds are not aesthetic objects per se: It's the composer who realizes this aesthetification in a compositional act that creates a music which wants to be no escapist »other«, but emphasizes its position in the here and now.

To my mind, Martin Schüttler and Maximilian Marcoll are two composers, who represent exemplarily the change (or maybe the upheaval), which begins to emerge in New Music. An increasing number of young composers are distancing themselves from a post-avantgarde that sees its duty fulfilled in the continuous variation of catalogued sounds and patterns. In the younger generation the number of those who are content to have occasional success with a »well made« piece, and thus secure a comfortable place in the committee of New Music trustees, seems to be in noticeable decline. Instead of that, there is a growing interest in adopting a critical stance towards the transmitted conventions.

Likewise, the relation to »playback media« is changing: e.g. the former »accolade« for young composers – the commission of an orchestra piece – is not that desirable anymore. Why should they deal with an unwieldy, often antagonistic apparatus if finally the outcome is the performance of a rather badly rehearsed piece? The same applies in general for commissions, which confront the composer with massive predeterminations of the concrete result. Instead of coming to terms with those alleged inevitabilities, the ideal of a *musique d'auteur* is observable.

The *writing for*, the delegation of responsibility before the crucial process that leads to the performance, is basically contrary to the needs of many composers; the traditional sequence of *production–delivery–realization* turns out to be counterproductive. So, why should a composer permanently work towards a result that leaves him dissatisfied? Why should he constantly grapple with compromises and concessions? To put it bluntly: The institutionalized mechanisms, restrictions and rituals have become an insufficient instrument – and thus almost an impediment.

With this in mind, I would like to refer to a proposal by British composer Joanna Bailie, which she formulated in reaction on my text in *Nutida Musik*: »Resign from new music?«, she asks and replies: »Never, I mean to save it!« In the following she made some practical suggestions for, as she says, »rescuing new music from its own cultural irrelevance«. – I want to pick up the first one:

»Let's cut our ties with the classical music scene! It is the elderly, deeply conservative and wealthy husband (oh the opera houses and symphony orchestras!) we have been married to all these years who (not so) secretly hates us. We still love the dusty old man though, because we love Beethoven and conservatory-trained musicians. This is not good enough: time to set ourselves free girlfriends!« – JOANNA BAILIE

[Perhaps it could also be an elderly *wife*, thus I take the liberty to include the *boyfriends* too.] Moreover, I want to move a step further by asking: How much classic is in the so-called New Music? To what extent it has become a classic today?

What defines musical classic? Based on the »original« phenomenon – the Viennese Classic – it's mainly the mastering and sublimation of diverse styles and forms of composition: from baroque polyphony to the Volkslied. Classic unifies characteristics of the gallant style and the sensitive style (*Empfindsamer Stil*) and merges German, French and Italian styles in a variety of genres. Insofar, Classic is a style of combinations and adaptations including the refreshment and refinement of traditional forms, which, every now and then undoubtedly led to groundbreaking compositions.

Let me elaborate another hypothesis: Especially in anglophone countries there is this paradoxical term of *Contemporary Classical Music*. In German it is not that common, but from time to time you also come across the *Zeitgenössische Klassik*. A really ghastly term at first glance. But is it that wrong? Or isn't it rather a term that defines, in a sort of almost cynical accuracy, a not inconsiderable portion of New Music? A style of com-

binations and adaptations, of allusions and quotations. A gallant mixture of serialism, complexism, spectralism, micropolyphony and of course *musique concrète instrumentale*. Now and then a little tonal sprinkle may also be quite nice, and the sonoristic icing is done by some electronics. Isn't that pretty much what a not so small amount of New Music is like?

So, wouldn't it be helpful to establish a separation of the genres: *Contemporary Classical Music* on the one hand and *New Music* on the other hand? The first as an eldorado for those composers who make do with the traditional repertoire of materials, for those who do not see any difficulties in the three-step-archetype *production–delivery–realization*, for those who are not really interested in contributing to an aesthetic discourse. In contrast the latter would be the field of activity for artistically ambitious composers, who are fed up with skillfully executed variations of material and are totally interested in contributing to an aesthetic discourse.

Distinguishing between Contemporary Classical Music and New Music would, I believe, effect an improvement of the working atmosphere of composers, interpreters, organizers, critics and scholars. Competences and spheres of responsibility would be rearranged. What I would enjoy most is the weakening of the long-established institutions' claim to importance: Curating a festival for New Music would then imply to pose the question about the requirement of the New: if it should really be New Music or rather Contemporary Classical Music? According to this – Joanna Bailie's second demand:

»Take some care over curation! Why does New Music think it's OK to be lazy about which works are arranged on a concert or a festival together?« – JOANNA BAILIE

A distinction of the genres would also be a benefit for my profession – for those who *write* about music. I don't know how many times I got upset about colleagues, who are claiming to be able to criticize innovative aesthetical approaches while using totally inappropriate and sometimes irrational terms and criteria. An example:

My colleague Eleonore Büning, editor-in-chief for music at the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, one of the most renowned dailies in Germany, wrote a review of last year's Donaueschinger Musiktage. After she breathed fire and brimstone about some premieres, among others Stefan Prins's *Generation Kill* and Trond Reinholdtsen's *Musik*, she stated: »Unfortunately botched pieces like those were legion in Donaueschingen. All the more, one was grateful that the marvelous Ensemble Ascolta set the bar of craftsmanship at the right place by painting such a subtly hatched sonic tableau like Øyvind Torvund's *Forest Construction*.«

Obviously Ms. Büning somehow misjudges Torvund's music, insofar as he is surely not interested in creating »subtly hatched sonic tableaux«. But nevertheless: It is – once more – about craftsmanship, about an intactness of the external appearance. That's where true expertise is located. Music as a feast for the ear – nothing more.

But, challenged by a contemporary music whose innovative potential can no longer just consist of the perpetuation of an alleged »material progress«, there is no value in a

descriptive approach that exhausts itself in mere illustrative prose. Consider Harry Lehmann's theoretical model of a »new aesthetics of content«, according to which a progressive material hyperdifferentiation is suspended in favor of an emphasis on conceptual clarity. In comparison, the metaphorical predication of the music, the mere recounting of the sensory experience, is utterly trivial. Lehmann calls for a form of reflection about art which is fundamental to the art itself – an »immanent art criticism« whose function is to question the artwork as to its worldly content: »Immanent art criticism is concerned with uncovering the possible relationships between the work and the world, and not with a direct judgment of the work itself.«

The consequence is a kind of qualitative judgment wherein the *innovative* art work is one from which a further discourse could be extrapolated, one which withstands critical scrutiny beyond the language of colorful attributes: A music criticism that takes its topic seriously is one which communicates the potential of this art in a way that encourages debate.

A language that stays abreast of the artwork's content, calls for the establishment of precise terminological instruments, with which the respective constitutive meanings and references of the work can be verbalized. A connoisseurship of product-oriented lyricism will prove itself inadequate. At best, it could remain applicable by furnishing a counterexample: As long as this flowery phraseology persists in reviews, essays or programs, it could evolve into a system of »alarm codes« whose mere presence signals an art object which – at least in regard to its worldly relevance – can safely be neglected.

A similar role could be played by certain notorious festivals, organizers, foundations, prizes, ensembles, interpreters, critics and scholars. In short: By the entirety of indicators of an art form, that has itself – let me try that neologism – *obsoletified*.

So, anyone, whose interest lies in affirming the codes of a fallen behind arrière-garde, – anyone who wants to compose a music of quotations, allusions and conventions, – anyone who wants to be praised for »subtly hatched sonic tableaux«, – anyone who would feel comfortable with contributing a piece for two violins, viola and cello for the gala concert on the occasion of the Arditti String Quartet's centennial...

Well, anyone who finds his fulfillment in this, will most likely have a prosperous future in the realm of Contemporary Classical Music. All the others are set to the task of unmistakably emphasizing the differences and incongruities; and thus – instead of *resigning* from New Music – attempting to *revive* or to *reinvent* it.

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