

Dirty Hands¹ by Marko Ciciliani

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The title of this project – *Music with the Real* – puts Music and the Real side by side and thereby implies that they are two separate entities: music is not the real, and the real is not music. More specifically the project description says, that it's

“main ambition has been to explore dialogues between traditional musical material (understood as instrumental music based in traditional notions of pitch and rhythm), and outer-musical material derived from our everyday surrounding (such as samples of everyday events from both sonic and visual domains, text and speech), thereby attempting to create unexpected dialogues between the two.”

Also the term repeatedly used term 'dialogue' underlines, that we are dealing with two parties.

The traditional musical material mentioned in this description refers to the tradition of the avant-garde which inherited the idea of Absolute Music. Although I'm neither a philosopher nor a historian, in my understanding it was in the wake of the Enlightenment, that Art was promoted from a commodity to a sensual form of philosophy. In its high form Art was believed to consolidate a deep human conflict that was felt to exist between the rational and emotional side of human existence. Through the creation of beauty, Art's mission became to “consolidate of the reasonable and the sensual”² and thereby to lead to a realization of truth. In order to achieve this, art had to transcend both the sensual and the reasonable that were both inseparably tied to daily life, and manifest in an independent realm, apart from reality. Reality became the 'other', an alien element which had to be kept out.

All of this was to serve a greater plan. According to the Humanistic idealism aesthetic education was part of the formation of a superior human being that would be able to lead to a new society. A teleological plan was thus embedded in this concept.

I'm bringing this up because I think it's interesting to trace back the reasons why art took on particular meanings and – as a consequence – aesthetic developments. These might not have the same validity today, but often the aesthetic “habits” prevail more stubbornly than the necessities

1 This essay draws from some of my earlier publications, primarily „Vom Kanon der Verbote und der postmedialen Musik“ <http://terz.cc/magazin.php?z=44&id=139>, 2012, and “Music in the Expanded Field – On Recent Approaches to Interdisciplinary Composition” in: Rebhahn, M. and Schäfer, T. (Ed.): *Darmstädter Beiträge zur Neuen Musik*, Vol. 24, Mainz, Schott Music GmbH, 2017, pp 23-35;

2 The full original sentence is: “Das Schöne ist also die Ineinsbildung des Vernünftigen und des Sinnlichen und diese Ineinsbildung als das wahrhaft Wirkliche ausgesprochen.”, Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich: *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, Band 10, Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1835

that caused them. And this is precisely why research project such as this one are important: the habit of separating music and the real seems to have prevailed for too long.

What exactly did this separation entail in aesthetic terms?

Art, to fulfil its full potential, namely the bridging of the reasonable and the sensual, had to stay away from the profanities of everyday life. This propagated to the 20th century – in simplified terms – as a renunciation of affective aesthetics. Music was not supposed to speak to the senses in an affective and impulsive manner, as for example through catchy tunes, danceable rhythms etc.. Such pleasures were considered part of 'dark emotions', part of the 'other', whereas according to Hegel: “from the realm of the art all dark forces have to be banned as in Art there is no place for darkness, everything is bright and transparent”³.

Hence, music was supposed to express a deeper meaning by different means. As a consequence musical form and structure became primary concerns. In the 20th century first Jazz and later pop music considered to be opposed to that and deemed unacceptable as they address our so-called superficial affections and dark emotions.

Instead the Avant-Garde was for various reasons characterized by the drive towards innovation, because only the unfamiliar could serve as a critical mirror to our state of existence. Musical material with its timbral manifestation thereby had to mediate the form and structure of the work. Material was never considered to be self sufficient. The mutual dependence of sound and structure is nowhere as evident as in Helmut Lachenmann's dual terms “Strukturklang” and “Klangstruktur”. They are two sides of the same coin.

But as this research project stated, the ongoing search for innovation of material lead to a fatigue, a dead end as it became impossible or pointless to keep discovering previously unheard sounds.

The need to allow material of different unexpected origins to enter a work, to open a window to allow a new perspective has been done at various stages in music history. Even during the heydays of the Avant-garde, various attempts have been made in this direction, for example by incorporating quotes from particular works of the repertoire as with Zimmermann or Berio, or theatrical actions as with Kagel or Schnebel. Interestingly, as philosopher Harry Lehmann pointed out, these modernist practices incorporated these extrinsic materials in such a way, that they became part of the main

³ The German original quote is: “Aus dem Bereiche der Kunst aber sind die dunklen Mächte grade zu verbannen, denn in ihr ist nichts dunkel, sondern Alles klar und durchsichtig und mit jenen Uebersichtlichkeiten ist nichts als der Krankheit des Geistes das Wort geredet [...], Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich: *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, Band 1, Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1835

material and its intrinsic order. For example, when Bernd-Alois Zimmermann quotes Beethoven, Debussy or Wagner in *Photopsis*, he carefully shaped the surrounding form and material in such a way, that the quote from the 9th Symphony and subsequently the other quotes perfectly fall in place. In this particular example he does this by establishing various layers of sonic blocks that are distinguished by instrumentation, registration and texture. Each block comes back in regular time intervals, while these phrases have a different length in each layer. Eventually, when the various quotes come in, each one represents one of the blocks that have previously been established. The boundaries between the abstract material and the incorporated quote are therefore blurred, the otherness of the old quotes exist merely as surface phenomena and are justified structurally. Expressed differently: the 'other' is thus commodified it's only the surface that seems "old".

What Lehmann on the other hand coined "relational music" does not try to assimilate the other. The other remains different and it is pointed to as a reference. As I would say, the referred to elements are always put in quotation marks. Similar to quotes in an academic text, they are clearly designated as somebody else's origin. The negotiation of the relationship between the referred-to elements is what often forms the backbone of these works. One might say, however, that this strongly upholds the idea of the 'other', as it is only referred to indexically, without bringing it into the work itself as an aesthetic value that has to be addressed. The composer is like an visitor in a Zoo, looking at strange animals in a glass container, without taking the risk to be touched, let alone attacked by them.

In summary, I argue that both, the modernist approach as with Zimmermann, and the indexical approach as in "relational music" stay true to the value system and discourse of New Music. Zimmermann assimilates the material so that the otherness only remains a surface phenomenon whereas in relational music the 'other' is kept at a distance. In both cases there is nothing that truly invades the order of the system, the discourse remains intact.

I would like to add a third perspective to the two I mentioned, which I call Music in the Expanded Field. Two years ago I presented a talk at the International Summer Courses in Darmstadt with this title where I addressed transdisciplinary practices which can nowadays be found with an increasing number of composers, including myself. Last year a revised version of the talk was released as a paper.⁴

A starting point of the paper is the observation that many composers expand to other media while they still conceive their transdisciplinary practices part of musical composition. No matter if they are designing theatrical actions, as in the case of Jenny Walshe or Cathy van Eck, or whether they

⁴ See footnote 1 for reference

are editing videos, like Yannis Kyriakides or Michael Beil: all of this is part of music creation. This led me to the assumption that in this line of work, sound alone apparently does not suffice anymore to express musical ideas.

What I find characteristic of many of these practices is that – contrary to “relational music” where the other is held at a distance –, here the other discipline penetrates the work, however, it penetrates it without being commodified and translated as in the example of Zimmermann.

Jenny Walsh for example is not referring to performance as an extrinsic phenomenon, but she is also not turning it into commodified musical material. Her work is performance, but also music. Here, I would argue, the composers get their hands dirty and they leave the safe zone of a homogenous and well defined discourse, which in my opinion is not the case with modernist or relational music.

Here, something interesting happens for which I like to refer to a concept by musicologist Joanna Demers which she calls Accents in Discourse. Once a composer starts to work with a different medium as more than an indexical reference, they are confronted with the history of this medium, its value system, its discourse. When a composer for example works with music but also performance or video, what is their reference system, or the discursive home base? The discursive boundaries become blurred, a patch-work, of discontinuous fragments. Demers calls this the accent that these artists take on. Their language still sounds familiar but there is also that accent that points to a particular place, which might be an unfamiliar one. The language has become contaminated with traces of 'otherness'. This 'other' however, is not out there, it is inside.

If that coloration of accent is mild, the work might still be perfectly understandable but what if the accent becomes so strong that it starts becoming a different language, that nobody else speaks and understands?

It is not an uncommon option that music speaks to a deep human side that is beyond the constraints and economies of discourses. Music, then, is believed to have the potential to function as a unifying *lingua franca* that can unite all cultures (as for example Stockhausen believed to accomplish with his work “Hymnen”) or even help mankind to rediscover lost roots (as Wagner envisaged a.o. with the *Gesamtkunstwerk*). I personally do not believe in this. Rather I think art and music is synthetic in the sense that it is inseparable from culture, historical and demographic contexts. Therefore I think that we depend on discourses to be able to make sense of the art we produce. From that point of view it may be argued, though, that the aforementioned accents in discourse with their individualistic manifestations are aberrations that lead to cultural solipsism or a Babilonian

confusion of Tongues. I will return to this in a moment.

First, please let me recapitulate what I addressed so far: I talked about (1) the modernist approach, that turns foreign material to fit the other used material, (2) the relational music which leaves the “Other” unaltered, but points to it from a distance, and the (3) music in the expanded field, that sees multidisciplinary practice as part of music but thereby abandons the home base and develops discursive accents. The boundaries between such categories are of course fluent. I think that all of the five works that have been created as part of this research project by Carola Bauckholt, Clemens Gadenstätter, Henrik Hellstenius, Johannes Kreidler and Matthew Shlomowitz show aspect of all these three approaches but in different proportions.

As I'm expected to add a critical note, I would say that all five works maybe show relatively low dosages of the 'expanded field', in the sense that they all remain more or less in the homogenous discourse of New Music.

I would like to suggest that it might be time to leave behind the discourse of New Music altogether and allow it to be contaminated by other discourses and practices. Maybe we have to embrace the confusion of tongues that might emerge when every artist acts within their own patchwork of cultural identifications and discourses.

I personally find see the development, that Demers called accents in discourse a fascinating one. I believe that the diversity that we live with nowadays gives us the multilinguistic capacity and flexibility to deal with such diversities. I even believe that a multitude of accents is maybe the appropriate way to confront the complexity of our time where homogeneities are constantly fractured and multilayered. Maybe the time has come for what George Brecht already said in 1964, that “[...] the bounds of art are much wider than they have conventionally seemed, or [...] art and certain long-established bounds are no longer very useful.”

And in that sense I would like to close by saying: let's leave behind the proper ground of New Music. Let's get our hands dirty!

Thank you very much.