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Contemporary Music and the Curatorial Turn: Surveying Curatorial Practices from Curators-as-Authors to Institutional Critique

BRANDON FARNSWORTH

The idea that contemporary music can be “curated” has over the past decade become increasingly accepted among festival directors, leaders of music centers and ensembles, and among artists. Borrowed from the visual arts by way of theater, dance, and performance, the term’s definition in contemporary music is still being negotiated. For many, curating’s ambiguity is its allure, creating an opening for questioning established institutional structures and modes of presentation, creating more transdisciplinary modes of musical production, and crucially for connecting it to forms of social and political struggles and to forms of intervention in real-world events. The significance of this development can hardly be understated; Western art music has in the past two centuries largely been defined by its emphasis on high-fidelity individualized self-expression, and precisely its autonomy from any such social or political struggle. As Georgina Born writes of this history, “we might say that a defining feature of the ontology of western art musics from the 19th century to the present has been a disavowal of music’s social mediations” (Born 2016, 49).

While not entirely new, what could be called a “curatorial turn” towards criticizing structures, addressing societal issues, and creating new formats raises a host of historical, theoretical, and practical issues around contemporary musical practice that must be re-examined. In order to set the stage for more fundamental analyses of these questions,

this article surveys a diverse array of interrelated practices related to this transformation. By investigating statements and by analyzing organizational and artistic practices, it identifies four major strands of thinking about curatorial practice in contemporary music being practiced today and connects them to various forms of social engagement as well as to curatorial theory from the visual and live arts. The goal is to highlight the specific dynamics of curating's permeation of contemporary music, and thus to lay the groundwork for differentiating musical practices from other live arts in the broad interdisciplinary field of socially engaged performative practices.

Curator as Author

The music curator as a form of individual author of a festival or concert program is the most widely held understanding of curatorial practice in music (Farnsworth 2020, 19). Selection as a form of individual expression and curatorial authorship originates with the historical emergence of the professional profile of the curator in the visual arts, particularly in relation to arts biennales.

Starting in the late 1960s, independent curators like Harald Szeemann and Seth Siegelaub began working together with artists independent of galleries or museums. The artists' production was often conceptual, site-specific, or performative, and thus could not be placed into a conventional "frame" without this too becoming part of the work. Thus together with artists, these early curators designed and experimented with new forms of display that acknowledged the artistic encounter as co-constitutive of the art itself (Szeemann 1981, 44–47).¹ Curators' experiments with modes of display of contemporary art would develop in the 1970s and 1980s into group exhibitions where the juxtaposition of selected artists became a codified means of illustrating a curatorial thesis, often as a subjective commentary on art historical, social, or political issues. As the number of biennales grew

¹ See here for instance Siegelaub's *Xerox Book* exhibition (1968), and Szeemann's *When Attitudes become Form* (1969).

rapidly around the globe in the 1980s and 1990s, curators were the ones responsible for developing concepts for these mega group exhibitions, which continue to serve as platforms for discussion and re-examination of a site or city's relation to local and international histories, often taking a critical, counter-hegemonic perspective and using the same group exhibition format developed by early independent curators. With such concepts, often laden with intertextual or otherwise highly complex forms of positioning, came also the need to explain their significance via talks, symposia, and exhibition catalogues. Paradoxically, these attempts at transparency would further entrench and mythologize these art world elites, as their explications themselves became performances that positioned them at the center of discourse production. (O'Neil 2012, 10 and following.)

The mythos of the curator as a singular, hypervisible auteur mediating encounters with diverse artistic or cultural contexts was taken up by performing arts in the early 2010s. In his 2014 article "The Curatorial Turn," Tom Sellar proposed that the figure of the "performance curator" could be seen as a catalyst for the "rejuvenation and development" of the live arts of theater, dance, and performance, a "great white hope for progressive theater makers" (Sellar 2014, 21). He argues for the urgency of curators in the performing arts as a response to artistic productions combining multiple forms (for example, no longer only taking place within theaters), and blending many different discourses and references. Because such work is "often inseparable from its context" it requires "a curator to originate or complete its framework," recalling the concepts of global biennale curators (Sellar 2014, 23).² The curator-as-author model is made more attractive because of its correspondence with the singular role that artistic directors have historically played at the center of administrative and artistic structures of European theaters since the early 1900s (Schmidt 2018, 5).

Curatorial practice in contemporary music adopts this understanding from theater, focusing on individual artistic directors of major festi-

2 See here also Malzacher 2010, 12; Ferdman 2014, 6–7.

vals and their concepts. Recent increased interest in curators and curatorial practice in contemporary music means that many programmers and artistic directors increasingly eclipsing in importance the artists that they program, disrupting the traditional centrality of the composer. The concept of the independent curator, curatorial collectives, or musicians/composers “curating” events do exist, but rarely are implied by the uses of the term in this context.

Examining recent editions of the Maerzmusik festival at the Berliner Festspiele illustrates the curator-as-author model. The festival has been led by Berno Odo Polzer since 2015 under the subtitle “Festival for Time Issues,” where he has focused on exploring large societal topics like decolonization, migration, and capitalism through the lens of music and the live arts. In his earlier festival editions, this was often achieved through what Polzer called “composed evenings,” meaning that they possessed a detailed concert dramaturgy uniting heterogeneous works to illustrate a curatorial thesis (Odo Polzer and Engels 2017, 4). This created a strong presence of a curatorial authorship and coherency cutting across whole evenings of various kinds of artistic work, realized through the careful coordination of transitions between works, manipulation of lighting, choice of site, and choice of works/artists.

Later years have focused more on evening-filling projects developed for the festival that relate to larger, “extramusical” topics, and are often departures from the traditional concert setting. The 2019 edition of Maerzmusik featured for instance an exhibition entitled “Tele-Visions: A Critical Media History of New Music on TV (1950s–1990s),” which presented over 250 films during the festival from a number of television archives. The “criticality” of the exhibition’s title comes from the artistic director’s “composition” of pre-existing material (here television archives) in ways that re-interpret the archive or create new meanings, as was the case with the “composed evenings.” Expanding this to the whole festival, the thematic content becomes centered on the artistic director’s vision of the festival as a kind of “meta-artist.” What is presented becomes *illustrative* of this curatorial vision, with works being programmed because of their contribution to the director’s titular exploration of “time issues.” This is the mechanism by which a

curatorial vision is able to subsume the authorship of the individual artists presented within the festival, and the first way in which contemporary music is beginning to rehearse similar power structures found in curatorial practices in other artistic fields.

Diversifying Contemporary Music as Curatorial Practice

While the Maerzmusik example illustrates how contemporary music festivals can serve as public spheres for addressing broad societal questions such as decoloniality, music festivals tend to focus more on supporting existing communities, and the perpetuation of a “symbolic economy” of cultural capital (such as the status and legitimacy conferred on composers by large commissions) (Farnsworth 2020, 41–42).³ Because of this focus on supporting a community, progressive social movements around social justice, intersectional feminism, and decolonization are primarily being addressed through reflection on the constitution and definition of the supported community (i.e. who is on-stage), and less through programming that in turn addresses these issues. In curatorial parlance, these practices more closely resemble a form of new institutionalism than of institutional critique.

These topics began to receive increased attention at festivals following several public statistical analyses showing the lack of women programmed at contemporary music festivals. Central here was Ashley Fure’s commission for the Darmstadt Summer Course’s *Historage* project in 2016, where she presented statistics on the shocking number of female composers who had been performed and commissioned by the course since 1946 (92 per cent of all works performed until 2014 were by men, see Fure 2016). The collective outrage over the systemic imbalances in the field seemingly reached a tipping point, spurring widespread action and debate, with many initiatives around diversity

3 One needs here only to consider the marketing material for music festivals across many genres to see the central importance placed on the names of individual “headliners” (as opposed to themes or questions) in advertising.

able to be traced back to this period. The group that directly emerged from Fure's actions, Gender Relations in New Music (GRiNM), has since produced statistics on other festivals, as well as further interventions.⁴ A number of similar initiatives around Europe have also confirmed the huge statistical underrepresentation of women and non-binary people in contemporary music, including KVAŠT in collaboration with FST in Sweden (2019), the Danish Composers' Society's study of repertoire statistics (2018), Curating Diversity's study on gender and ethnic representation in Italian contemporary music (Bertolani and Santacesaria 2020), and Scharff's statistics on inequalities in the classical music sector in German and the UK (Scharff 2018, 44–64). These studies all show the frighteningly disproportionate programming of particularly white (cis) men over any other group.⁵ While preliminary studies by Fure, GRiNM, and others focused mainly on proportions of men/women due to constrained resources, they have since added a third gender category, but also developed into broader intersectional critiques of the presumed defaults of contemporary music, and the structures that have led to this situation.

These statistics efforts have led to festival leaders acknowledging that their organizational structures are complicit in reproducing these exclusions, and as a result to fundamentally re-examine and change their commissioning and programming practices in a process that is decidedly *curatorial* in its critical re-imagining of the gatekeeping mechanisms over which they themselves preside. The largest of these initiatives so far was *Defragmentation: Curating Contemporary Music*, a joint project between the Darmstadt Summer Course, the Maerzmusik Festival in Berlin, and the Donaueschinger Musiktage, in cooperation with the Ultima Oslo contemporary music festival, which was organized partly in response to the uproar around Fure's 2016 statistics on the

4 The author is currently a member of GRiNM, and has co-edited several of its texts, but was not directly involved in its first incarnation in Darmstadt as Gender Research in Darmstadt (GRiD).

5 Cis here refers to people whose gender identity and expression corresponds with their assigned birth sex.

Darmstadt Summer Course. The project focused on the topics of gender & diversity, decolonization, technology, and curating, and encouraged discussion among the festivals' directors about how to address them in contemporary music, where they had largely been ignored. As Lars Petter Hagen describes, the project's overall focus was on re-examining the mechanisms constituting contemporary music's artists and audiences:

Defragmentation looked at [...] structures in various institutions of contemporary music. [...] Which mechanisms are we subject to? And which conscious and unconscious (or subconscious) rules are we led by? Who gets to choose the music we hear? How are decisions made, and by whom? (Hagen 2020, 3.)

The project's emphasis was on exchange between those festivals' leaders about how to question these mechanisms in order to create new criteria for inclusion into contemporary music, in order for their festivals to be both more gender equal, and program more diverse musical practices. As with the curator-as-author, this newfound self-reflexivity is associated with the singular individual, and thus again historicized as a new form of "artistic director, dramatist, festival programmer, etc." (Hagen 2020, 4.)

In 2019, a new large-scale festival network with a similar premise called *Sounds Now* launched with nine partner festivals and art/music centers.⁶ The project's stated goals are further evidence that problematizing the constitution of the contemporary music community is central to music curatorial practice:

In this project, we are concerned with the way in which curation [...] reproduces the same patterns of power and exclusion that are

⁶ Though focusing mainly on electronic and popular music festivals, the Keychange Initiative (since 2017) should also be mentioned here, as it is the network with the largest number of participating festivals, who have all commit to gender equal programming by 2022.

dominant at all levels of our societies [...]. Sounds Now consequently aims to actively stimulate diversity within our professional field and thus open up the capacity and possibility for different experiences, conditions and perspectives to be defining forces in shaping the sonic art that reaches audiences today. Activities in Sounds Now are directed at bringing new voices, perspectives and backgrounds into the extremely closed, patriarchal and top-down hierarchies of contemporary music festivals. (Creative Europe n.d.)

Similar to *Defragmentation's* earlier focus on decision-making structures, *Sounds Now's* diagnosis of contemporary music's closed, patriarchal structures suggest that the operational definition of music in these institutions has become narrow to the point of becoming untenable. The solution to this perceived aesthetic impoverishment is thus to diversify the mechanisms for artists being programmed *qua* curatorial project.⁷ The exchange network then offers opportunities for curators to network and exchange best practices for doing this, while also facilitating co-productions of these diverse artists.⁸

Looking past the status of curatorial discourse production in these networks, individual festivals and music centers who participate in them are actively implementing changes. The most prominent has been their programming response to the quantitative statistics referenced earlier which monitor the increase in programming women: according to GRiNM statistics, Maerzmusik's 2018 festival was gender equal (GRiNM n.d.), and the 2018 Darmstadt Summer Course highlighted its high number of productions by women (both were members of *Defragmentation*). Some festivals have gone further and programmed

7 *Sounds Now's* website's tagline describes the network as aiming "to achieve greater inclusion in contemporary music and sound art by exploring new pathways in curating," making the rhetorical connection between inclusivity and curatorial practice (<https://www.sounds-now.eu>).

8 Portmann argues in the contemporary theater context that co-production networks are increasing in importance as festivals are increasingly the sites of production of new work (Portmann 2020, 40). This dynamic is doubtless here as well, and likely undermines some claims of diversification by forming an international style for touring productions, however more research is needed.

all-female/non-binary programs, such as the 2019 edition of Archipel in Geneva, or the Heroines of Sound festival in Berlin (continually since 2014). While these are positive developments, many organizations still have much to do, as shown by research on venues in Italy (Bertolani and Santacesaria 2020, 34–35), and the reactionary programming of classical music festivals and venues.⁹ Despite this, a focus on the gender diversity of musical programming in the live music sector is in general clearly recognizable, and largely the result of festival leaders gaining a new consciousness of their responsibility in perpetuating discriminatory practices.

Though until now the most prominent, gender discrimination in programming is not the only structure that is being put under scrutiny. Proponents of more intersectional approaches to music curatorial practices argue though that while simple percentage increases of any identity group are important, they are largely palliative, and that “it must be the diversity of musical expressions, tools, techniques, languages, traditions that will effect a turn towards the global musical reality of this current historical moment” (Bhagwati 2019, 40). Between these two positions lies a yet-unresolved tension between the need to address blatant inequalities, and the deeper sense that major contemporary music festivals have a societal mandate that goes beyond just supporting one musical genre. This sense of responsibility towards representing a more global, more multifaceted understanding of music from different musical cultures bears similarities worth investigating to the visual arts’ global “expansion” in the early 1990s, corresponding also with the increased importance of curators, as mentioned earlier.

A smaller number of festivals are addressing this tension, such as Maerzmusik mentioned earlier. The Donaueschingen Music Festival’s “Donaueschingen Global” project scheduled for its 2021 centenary is another. Starting in 2019, “four experts in global art music have been

9 For instance, CEO of the Danish Royal Theatre Kaspar Holten has recently stated that the challenge with diversifying his institution is both its reliance on an old musical canon “written by white males,” and the large number of staff and performers whose livelihoods are invested in this status quo (Holten 2020, 171).

travelling to different rural and urban regions in South America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East to explore and discuss contemporary musics outside of well-known networks and institutions,” the results of which will be presented at the festival (Donaueschinger Musiktage). Notably, the Munich Biennale for New Music Theatre has since 2016 emphasized commissioning music theater by collectives instead of composers and focused on idiosyncratic and often site-specific formats by practitioners with many diverse backgrounds (Farnsworth 2020, 139 and following).

Curator as Manager

Some institutions are continuing this critical project questioning contemporary music’s power structures further and are changing their internal organizational and administration as an extension of this curatorial practice. The Borealis festival for experimental music in Bergen, Norway is an example of this approach. Since 2015, the new artistic director Peter Meanwell has been expanding his definition of “experimental” beyond its understanding in contemporary music to include more electronic music and sound art, while also tailoring the festival programming to the listening expectations of local audiences (Meanwell and Rude 2020, 57). This led to the festival team also questioning its own organizational structures as a logical continuation of its diversification process.

One result was the festival restructuring into a co-director model, where the artistic director (*kunstnerisk leder*), Peter Meanwell, and managing director (*daglig leder*), Tine Rude, have equal weight within the organization (Meanwell and Rude 2020, 59). The co-directors claim this new structure facilitates “intertwining the organizational and the curatorial” (Meanwell and Rude 2020, 62), a claim exemplified by the festival’s *Doing Not Saying* project initiated in 2019 by resident artist Jenny Moore. It is described by the festival as “an artist led project that has brought different perspectives to our organizational structures” and has led the co-directors to state that “we must make our structures diverse—change the way we WORK not just how we TALK,” suggesting the danger they perceive in diversification remaining as a

performance of music curatorial discourse at symposia (Borealis 2020, 4). The project itself led to both artistic outcomes like workshops and presentations, as well as specific operational outcomes like signs for gender-non-conforming toilets in all venues, working with security companies to coordinate their understandings of inclusive spaces, and trainings in non-violent confrontation for festival volunteers (Meanwell and Rude 2020, 63).¹⁰

The Ultima Oslo Contemporary Music Festival's artistic director Thorbjørn Tønder Hansen is similarly diversifying the festival's programming, while also investing effort into diversifying its internal working processes, audiences, temporary festival staff, permanent staff, and board (Tønder Hansen 2020, 21). The artistic director sees this internal diversification process as the way to formulate new structures for the festival that can break away from existing normative values. Combined with using the festival's yearly commissions to challenge the defined limits of contemporary music, this internal process is the director's attempt to create the possibility for a line of flight from existing aesthetic norms (Tønder Hansen 2020, 20).

These examples suggest contemporary music's curatorial turn is strongly related to a diversification of programmed artists and institutional structures. As has been shown, numerous major initiatives focused on programming and structural reforms are doing so using the language of diversification and the professional strategies of curators. If contemporary music festivals traditionally focus on supporting their communities, then their curatorial turn has been marked by a critical revisiting of the specific mechanisms and legacy structures that create it.¹¹

10 This example illustrates why such power-sharing arrangements are a positive development. Had these reforms taken place without moving to a co-director model, the artistic director would probably not have been able to navigate these operational and artistic considerations as effectively alone. It is however worth considering here Thomas Schmidt's research on the power structures of German theaters, where he argues that only as of three people in an executive committee like this can concentrations of power be most effectively avoided (Schmidt 2019, 413).

11 On music festivals' working in a paradigm of the symbolic economy of cultural capital, see again Farnsworth 2020, 41–42.

The Artist as Curator

The previous three sections focused on artistic directors who have been shaping programming as a form of self-expression, diversifying it as a critique of contemporary music's elitist structures, or otherwise attempting to create alternatives to these structures themselves. This is because contemporary music's interest in curatorial practice has come mainly from administrators who connect the term to the "mythological" global biennial curator synthesizing diverse cultural contexts, and thereby assert a new form of authorship in the field. It must, however, be remembered that this model of curatorial practice developed out of the response to performative and conceptual turns in artistic practices in the mid-twentieth century, with curators focusing more on *concepts* instead of *logistics* for programming artistic work.¹²

This same shift among artistic practices also occurred in contemporary music, as Brüstle (2013) argues in her history of artistic experimentations with concert formats between 1950 and 2000. For her, the same epistemological shift happening in conceptual art with movements like Fluxus would in music shift the focus from musical works to music's performative situation, and lead to a continued experimentation with the concert format for the remainder of the century. Important as well to Brüstle's approach is that this centring of the performative situation allows for a more pluriversal definition of contemporary musical practices that allows space for many idiosyncratic connections to other theatrical, performative, and conceptual practices. This permits her to sidestep unfruitful attempts at genre categorization and focus instead on individual practices and performances themselves, as well as their often rhizomatic influences and connections—the potential beginning of a solution for contemporary music festivals currently questioning what kinds of artistic practices their programming should focus on.

Hiekel (2017), though to the contrary perhaps overstating certain genre categorizations, continues this examination of contemporary

¹² This comparison comes from Ferdman (2014, 10), who also uses it in the context of linking visual arts curating with curatorial practices in the live arts.

music's experimentation with its modes of presentation and display into the 21st century. He argues that many musical practitioners today are working with formats in project-specific ways that emerge out of internal artistic logics. Staging becomes part of the artistic concept, meaning that there is often no clear distinction between music theatrical and concert situations (e.g. in the work of Simon Steen-Anderson), and thus often between musicians and performers (e.g. in the work of Trond Reinholdtsen) (Hiekel 2017, 23). These productions are also increasingly eschewing interdisciplinary collaborations (defined by discrete roles working together) in favour of more transdisciplinary, team-based and collective forms of production that create alternatives to the model of composer-as-author (Hiekel 2017, 33).

Together, Brüstle and Hiekel show that a history of experimentation with the performative event exists also within contemporary music practices, continuing until today. The many forms of commissioned productions for the Munich Biennale for New Music Theatre since 2016 are one illustration of this. Under the new artistic directorship of Daniel Ott and Manos Tsangaris, both with backgrounds creating new music theater themselves, the biennale has been commissioning productions that are from various musical traditions, often by transdisciplinary teams, often site-specific, and that result in unique approaches to musical presentation. The heterogeneity of modes of presentation and display gives a glimpse of what these new, transdisciplinary forms of music production can look like. They have included in 2016 a performance installation (*The Navidson Records*), a sound installation (*Hundun*), and unannounced interventions in public space (*Staring at the Bin*), in 2018, performances for individual audience members in a bathtub (*Bathtub Memory Project*), an estate auction (*Nachlassversteigerung*), a magical realist reconstruction of a state assassination (*Ein Porträt des Künstlers als Toter*), a micro concert hall in front of the Bayerische Staatsoper (*Tonhalle*), and in 2020 a series of rapped music video news reports on YouTube (*Journal Rappé*), to name just some of the productions.

In addition to production-specific forms of collaboration and presentation, musicians are also directly addressing social and political issues with their work, as well as experimenting with new organi-

zational structures. These include projects like Hannes Seidl's *Good Morning Deutschland* (2016) giving a voice to a wave of refugees arriving in Germany through the creation of a radio station, or experimental contemporary music publisher Y-E-S publishing C.A.S.C.A.T.A.'s *A Bucolic Treasure Hunt* (2020), a score for a treasure hunt around the RWM bomb factory in Sardinia. Artist-run networks and groups, often organized around supporting gender minorities in contemporary music, furthermore are practicing non-normative and experimental organizational structures to support such new practices. These include SKLASH+ and Damkapellet in Denmark, Konstmusiksystrar in Sweden, and GRiNM and FEM*_MUSIK*_ in Germany. In addition to providing support structures that established institutions fail to provide, these artist-run organizations typically mirror their values in their forms of organization, such as collective and non-hierarchical leadership, while also experimenting with alternative structures for creating contemporary music performance, such as Konstmusiksystrar's experimentation with chance operations in musical programming (see Antonsson and Jakobsson 2020).

As the numerous artistic practices and organizations referenced above illustrate, Hiekel argues that while current practices may be rooted in the historical dynamics studied by Brüstle, the fluency and self-evidency with which contemporary music practices are currently blending references and blurring genres constitutes a new approach to musical production, demanding, in turn, new musicological and organizational frameworks to adequately support and acknowledge them (Hiekel 2017, 42). Importantly, this need for new frameworks parallels the emergence of performance curators in the fields of dance, theater, and performance (cf. Sellar 2014). In both instances, artists are "blurring forms with unprecedented fluidity" resulting in "a tidal wave of site-based, urbanist, participatory, and relational performances," necessitating the creation of new institutional structures to fund, commission, contextualize, and present these works to audiences (Hiekel 2017, 22–23). This suggests that across the arts, when the performative situation becomes co-extensive of artistic production, or what Jackson would call the "addressive relation between art and receiver" becomes

a component of artistic practice (Jackson 2005, 173), the “disciplinary defaults,” or established working methods for organizing and talking about artistic practices become no longer adequate. Instead, artists and organizers must experiment and negotiate new ways of working with the many stakeholders in the performative event in order to realize these new forms of artistic practice, as is taking place here.

Where this development in contemporary music differs from other live arts is in the current disparity that exists between the artistic and curatorial practices in the field. Artistic practices exhibiting a new self-evidency of blended and diverse references that would necessitate the music curatorial turn’s redesigning institutional structures are still largely absent from discussions of curatorial practices in music, such as take place at *Defragmentation* or *Sounds Now*. They thus remain under-reflected and underexplored, and institutions consequently struggle to address their needs.

A potential explanation is that as opposed to theater or dance, contemporary music does not have a strong tradition of dramaturgs, someone who would act as “the first spectator,” apart from the composer themselves (van Kerkhoven 1994). While programmers and festival directors are obviously important for contemporary music history, the role of these mediating figures has remained comparatively undertheorized/ignored. Compare this with the discourse on theater curating, which, for example, in collections by Tom Sellar or Florian Malzacher is able to move fluidly between institutional issues and discussions of individual artistic productions by directors, dramaturgs, and choreographers (see, e.g., Sellar and Ferdman 2014). It makes sense then that a newly conscious class of music curators is focusing first on their abilities for subjective expression through programming, creating more diverse programming, and experimenting with their existing institutional structures, because these are all domains over which they have some form of executive power.

Because of this, the conversations around music curating still focus mostly on directors and institutions instead of productions or artistic practices, once again as seen in the *Defragmentation* or *Sounds Now* projects mentioned earlier. Meanwhile, the growing number of educa-

tion programs teaching music curating such as those being organized by *Sounds Now*, as well as musicological projects like those of Hiekel and Brüstle, focus mainly on artistic practices and their theatricality. These currently disparate approaches to music curatorial practice will be able to merge when they can be better conceptualized within a larger turn in the understanding of musical production more generally. Rogoff asked already a decade ago in reference to the visual arts' educational turn whether "turning" should be understood as an active, critical movement, opening up a new horizon, or as more cynically the branding of certain stylistic tropes under a fashionable, new banner to be incorporated into funding applications (Rogoff 2010, 33). Following this approach, if a curatorial turn in contemporary music is to take place, it must thus transcend the status of buzzword for artistic directors and become a project of re-examining music's relationship to its many social mediations, realized in different ways by different stakeholders.

This means that in addition to the important work already underway by directors of festivals and music institutions experimenting with the structures and the implicit values they reproduce, existing curatorial practices by artists must play a central role, with their unique forms of artistic, non-discursive knowledge production co-informing changes in the rest of the system. Furthermore, the rest of the musical ecosystem must similarly experiment as well, from music educators to symphony orchestras to arts councils, many of whom have not even begun the process of critical self-reflection of the curators mentioned here.

Such a wider, more holistic approach to exploring forms of curatorial practice in contemporary music will be decisive in determining the extent of this turn on the field. However, if curatorial practice in the other arts can again serve as a guide, the outsized influence of a small few on the conversation around experimentation with modes of presentation will hopefully soon give way to more nuanced, collectively determined, and artist-led reflection on contemporary music and its mediation, as well as an understanding of contemporary musical aesthetics that better reflects the rich diversity of current musical production.

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