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Darmstädter Beiträge zur Neuen Musik

**Defragmentation
Curating Contemporary Music**

Herausgegeben
von Sylvia Freydank
und Michael Rebhahn

Sonderband

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Inhalt / Contents

Vorwort

Foreword

Dorothee Richter: Propositions on Curating

Martin Tröndle: Concert Evolution: A Theoretical Approach

Tim Perkis: Speaking with the Mindless

Sandeep Bhagwati: How to Be a Node, a Temporary Abode.
Some Ideas on Curating Contemporary Musicking

Rolando Vázquez: The Decolonial Option and the Practice of
Listening

Florian Malzacher: Creating Temporal Realities.
Performativity as a Curatorial Tool

Anke Charton: Default, Debug, Decolonize: Thoughts on
Intersectionality and New Music

Nick Collins & Björn Gottstein: The curAltor

Camille Baker: Where is the Human in a World of Technology and the Arts?

Jérôme Glicenstein: Aesthetic Experience and its Dispositifs

AutorInnen / Authors

Programm Defragmentation (17.-20. Juli 2018)

Vorwort

Unter Defragmentierung versteht man in der Informationstechnik einen Vorgang, bei dem zusammengehörige Daten neu geordnet und gewissermaßen gebündelt werden, die vorher an verschiedenen Stellen eines Speichermediums vorhanden waren. Der Begriff, englisch „Defragmentation“, diente als Titelmetapher für ein Rechercheprojekt, das 2017 erstmalig mehrere Festivals Neuer Musik gemeinsam unternahm. Für das Projekt „Defragmentation - Curating Contemporary Music“ hatten sich vier Leiter von Festivals Neuer Musik (Thomas Schäfer/Darmstädter Ferienkurse, Björn Gottstein/Donaueschinger Musiktage, Berno Odo Polzer/MaerzMusik — Festival für Zeitfragen sowie Lars Petter Hagen/vormals Ultima Festival Oslo) dazu entschlossen, gemeinsam an Themen zu arbeiten, die alle an verschiedenen Orten und auf verschiedene Weise beschäftigten: Im Austausch mit Expertinnen und Experten ging es über die Dauer von zwei Jahren in mehreren Think Tanks sowie einer öffentlichen Konferenz im Sommer 2018 in Darmstadt darum, Institutionen und kuratorische Praktiken stärker für Problematiken um Gender &

Diversity, Dekolonisierung und technologischen Wandel zu sensibilisieren.

Dass eine solche Unternehmung eine hohe Aufmerksamkeit erzielen würde, veranlasste die Kulturstiftung des Bundes, das Projekt von Beginn an zu begleiten und finanziell zu unterstützen.

Der vorliegende Band versammelt einige der Impulsreferate, die im Rahmen der viertägigen „Convention on Curating Contemporary Music“ (17. – 20. Juli 2018) im Darmstädter Schader-Forum gehalten wurden. Sie werden ergänzt durch einen Beitrag von Camille C. Baker, der im Rahmen des Writing Workshops „Technology in Music“ entstand. Die durchweg auf Englisch gehaltenen Beiträge wurden zum großen Teil in ihrem mündlichen Charakter belassen und mit einem deutschen Abstract versehen.

Neben diesen Lectures umfasste das Programm etliche weitere Vorträge und Präsentationen, Gesprächsrunden, künstlerische Interventionen, Workshops, Think Tanks, Listening Sessions, Filmvorführungen und selbst organisierte Open Space-Veranstaltungen. Zusätzlich zu der hier vorliegenden Publikation erscheint im Rahmen des Projekts Defragmentation eine Ausgabe des Online-Magazins OnCurating.org sowie ein iBook des „Writing & Making“ Booksprints, herausgegeben von Camille Baker.

Der herzliche Dank der Herausgeber gilt all jenen, die die Tagung inhaltlich geplant und verantwortet haben: Heloisa Amaral und Lars Petter Hagen haben federführend zum Thema Kuratieren recherchiert; von Berno Odo Polzers langjährigem Forschungsnetzwerk profitierte die Tagung im Hinblick auf Dekolonisierung; Camille C. Baker und Tim Perkis brachten im Team mit Björn Gottstein ihre

künstlerisch-wissenschaftliche Expertise im technologischen Bereich ein; George E. Lewis und Georgina Born planten gemeinsam mit Thomas Schäfer Formate zu Gender & Diversity. Nicht zuletzt sei Katja Heldt für die Koordination gedankt sowie John Patrick Thomas und W. Richard Rieves für das englische Korrektorat und dem Schott-Verlag für Satz und Druck dieses Sonderbandes der *Darmstädter Beiträge zur Neuen Musik*.

Sylvia Freydank und Michael Rebhahn
Darmstadt, im März 2019

Foreword

In the field of information technology, defragmentation refers to the process of reorganizing and bundling related data previously spread throughout various areas of a storage medium. Defragmentation was the guiding metaphor for a research project started in 2017 in which several New Music festivals collaborated for the first time. For “Defragmentation - Curating Contemporary Music”, the directors of these festivals (Thomas Schäfer, Darmstadt Summer Course; Björn Gottstein, Donaueschingen Festival; Berno Odo Polzer, MaerzMusik - Festival for Time Issues; and Lars Petter Hagen, formerly with Ultima Festival Oslo) agreed to coordinate discussions on selected topics. Over the course of two years, recognized experts met in a number of think tanks in various locations as well as a public conference in Darmstadt during the summer of 2018 with the goal of increasing institutional and curatorial sensitivity to issues related to gender and diversity, decolonization, and technological change.

Eager to encourage public interest in such an undertaking, the German Federal Cultural Foundation supported the project from the beginning and provided significant financial assistance.

The present volume collects several of the talks and lectures presented during the four-day “Convention on Curating Contemporary Music” held in the Darmstadt Schader Forum from 17 to 20 July 2018, plus an article by Camille C. Baker based on her experiences in the writing workshop, “Technology in Music”.

In addition to the lectures collected here, the program included a broad range of other presentations, discussions, artistic interventions, workshops, films, think tanks, listening sessions, and self-organized Open Space events. Further publications of the Defragmentation research project include an issue of the online magazine OnCurating.org as well as an iBook of the “Writing & Making” Booksprint, edited by Camille Baker.

The editors would like to thank everyone in charge of planning the conference. Heloisa Amaral and Lars Petter Hagen led the research into the theme of curating. The discussions on decolonization profited greatly from Berno Odo Polzer’s years of experience and network of expert contacts. Together with Björn Gottstein, Camille C. Baker and Tim Perkis contributed their artistic and scientific expertise in the field of technology. George E. Lewis and Georgina Born, along with Thomas Schäfer, planned formats for the investigation of gender and diversity. Last but not least, we wish to thank Katja Heldt for her coordination activities, John Patrick Thomas and W. Richard Rieves for editing and proofreading the English texts, and Schott Music for the typesetting and printing of this special issue of the *Darmstädter Beiträge zur Neuen Musik*.

Sylvia Freydank and Michael Rebhahn
Darmstadt, March 2019

1. In unseren Studiengängen an der Zürcher Hochschule der Künste verstehen wir Kuratieren weniger als philosophisches Konzept denn vielmehr als Praxis, die eng verbunden ist mit der Politik des Zeigens, des Ortes, der Übermittlung und Übersetzung sowie allgemein der Politik der Sichtbarkeit. / 2. Kuratieren findet an der Schnittstelle zwischen Raum, Theorie und Visuellem statt. / 3. Kuratieren bringt insofern Subjekte hervor, als in jedem Moment des Kuratierens die Essenz eines Konglomerats medialer Darstellungen heraufbeschworen und manifest werden soll. 4. Kuratieren ist in Anlehnung an Michel Foucault eine diskursive Formation. Diese erzeugt Ein- und Ausschlüsse, entscheidet über richtig und falsch ("gute Kunst" oder "schlechte Kunst") und produziert neben Diskursgemeinschaften und -institutionen auch materielle Rahmenbedingungen (eine Produktion, ein Budget usw.). / 5. Kuratieren erfolgt mit und ohne Kunstwerke. Kunstwerke stellen in sich oft schon komplexe Konstellationen dar. Kuratiert werden können auch Podiumsdiskussionen, Archive, soziale Situationen, Websites und vieles mehr. Kuratieren heißt Bedeutung produzieren, indem kulturelle Artefakte ausgewählt und zeitlich und räumlich in neue Relationen zueinander gestellt werden. / 6. Kuratieren heisst verhandeln. / 7. Kuratieren kann nicht auf Arts Administration reduziert werden, wie es verschiedene Aus- und Weiterbildungen nahelegen. / 8. Wie alles im Feld der Kunst ist auch das Kuratieren immer und unvermeidlich mit dem Kunstmarkt verbunden. / 9. Wie jede kulturelle Äußerung kann auch das Kuratieren zu sozialen Veränderungen beitragen, aber nur dann, wenn es als Bedeutung stiftende Tätigkeit an andere gesellschaftliche Dringlichkeiten und Forderungen anknüpft.

Propositions on Curating¹

Dorothee Richter

As a short introductory remark, I would like to point out that curating has a lot to do with the self-organized events and festivals put up, for example, by Fluxus artists travelling in Europe in the 1960s. And this is also connected to Darmstadt, since John Cage lectured here and

he of course is a very close link to Fluxus. The initial impulse was to transform musical notations or scores to any other imaginable act, in order to create a radical intersection of music, poetry and visual arts. The instruction in a score might be, for example: "Draw a straight line." Or, as in La Monte Young's *Composition 1960 #5*, to turn a butterfly loose in the performance space. The action lasts as long as the butterfly needs to leave the space through a window. Or Dick Higgins's *Danger Music #11*: "Change your mind repeatedly in a lyrical manner about Roman Catholicism." In these actions inspired by new music, a radical crossover of all genres took place. All institutional parameters were questioned; the artists freed themselves from institutional restrictions and organised events by themselves. So one could see this as a first example of curatorial activity, until this role of knowledge producer was taken up by Harald Szeemann and a new type of curator — mimicking on an iconographic level the position of a god, a king and a genius — emerged with *documenta 5* in 1972.²

In the following, I will present nine different propositions on curating to roughly outline the field:

I. In our programmes,³ we understand curating, or the curatorial, not as a philosophical concept, but as a practice that is deeply involved in the politics of display, politics of site, politics of transfer and translation, and regimes of visibility. It is based on a concept of critical research that takes as its starting point the investigation of what is often an overly simplistic understanding of the curator as a new agent in the fields of art and culture. The programme understands the curatorial as a multi-authored approach to the production of meaning, which is intrinsically linked to

transformations of contemporary societies, the reorganization of labour, cultural policies, politics of inclusion/exclusion, and issues posed by points of intersection.

The problem is that the notion of “the curatorial” is a nobilitation of this complex production, and therefore it is in danger of becoming nebulous. Also, the idea of insisting on just another way of authorship has its problems; curating can become a driving force at exactly the moment it abandons the pattern of single authorship and becomes a project of shared interests. This is an approach we have followed in various projects (see www.curating.org) in which the process of working together became crucial.⁴

II. Curating exists at the interface between the spatial, the theoretical, and the visual. Curating produces meaning in the manner analysed in Roland Barthes’s *Mythologies* (1957) for complex sign systems. This meaning is produced in a specific historical moment in relation to the arts, to a political situation, to a cultural context, or to a social situation.

III. Curating produces subjects in the sense that each instance of curating consists of a media conglomerate representing an interpellation. Curating situates viewers as subjects, but it also makes proposals on how subjectivity might be re-organised, re-thought: how subjects and a community are interrelated and so forth. The subjects can be overpowered by intense and emotional environments, or be positioned in an overview situation; above all, they can be entertained. It is not easy to attain true participation; this is only possible when both the content and the form are taken into careful consideration, whether by an artist or by curators.

IV. Curating is a discursive formation as sketched by Michel Foucault; it produces inclusions and exclusions, it rules over right or wrong (“good” art or “bad” art), it produces constellations such as discourse societies and institutions, as well as material conditions (production, budgets, etc.). In this sense, curating is knowledge production and truth production (if this is conceived of as historically produced, with very specific effects). From the structural perspective, curating, as a product of Western cultural art production, comprises racist, sexist, and sociological — i.e. class-oriented — exclusion mechanisms. To curate means to be aware of this and also to be aware that culture is continuously being produced. “What people call transculture is culture as it happens. Culture alive is its own counter-example. Transculturation is not something special and different. It is a moment in a taxonomy of the normality of what is called culture. To assign oneself the special task of cultural translation or plotting cultural translation has therefore to be put within a political context.”⁵ Along this line of argument, we (the study programmes and cooperation partners) understand transculturality not so much as a dialogue between “Asia” and “Europe”, or “Africa” and “Europe”, since the implied understanding of “culture” tends to either stay abstract or have an identitarian effect (which of course hides structural violence). But cultures (in the plural) are understood as constantly migrating, in flux, and leading to hybridizations on a societal and on a personal level, not limited to geographical fixity or civic identity, but also including disciplinary provenance, gender or social backgrounds, and the power structures involved.

V. Curating can take place with artworks (which themselves often already represent complex situations), but also

without: the act of curating a panel discussion, an archive, a social situation, a website, etc. is an act of meaning production through the selection and combination of cultural artefacts and utterances in space and time. In relation to art, curating is a subordinate system (within the framework provided by the art system, an institution, a city, a nation, a tourism strategy, etc.). This is emphasized by Magda Tyzlik-Carver: “So what is a curatorial system? Firstly, we need to identify various elements that are part of this system. Curating is one of them, but also online platforms, networked tools, software, and a public as users/producers/immaterial labourers. However, the notion of a curatorial system also recognises the interactivity among all the elements, the relations generated and forms of production mobilised within the system.”⁶

VI. Curating means to negotiate. To have access to a space of representation always also means to work in a contested space. Envy ensues; various groups and players strive to exert influence. Every curator has to work in a sphere of intersecting and contradictory demands and limitations. To be aware of this, and to test the limits, is what Felix Ensslin means when he examines curating within the context of the hysteria discourse and the university discourse.⁷ Therefore curating itself has to deal with the tensions between the affirmation of the commissioning institution and an institutional critique, as well as between different forms of knowledge and its practices. It may act as a space that opens up the opportunity to leave the university for a time — and to come back to it with new questions and desires.

VII. Curating is not to be reduced to a form of administration, as is implied by various study and further training programmes. These courses provide their

participants with a number of organizational and management tools: for example, knowledge of loan contracts, condition reports, insurance, transport, cooperation with business enterprises, etc. While it is true that this can all be part of curatorial work, art handling as such is just one organisational part of curating.

VIII. Like everything in the art field, curating is always and unavoidably linked with the art market. There is no such thing as “outside the discourse” or “outside the market”. For curators and artists alike, what is crucial is the decision as to how one positions oneself within and in relation to the discourse/market.

IX. As with any cultural utterance, curating is only able to interfere as an active player in an instance of social change if this meaning producing activity will cooperate with other social urgencies and demands. Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau have described this as forming a chain of equivalence. Curating can offer a space of representation, a space of discussion, a meeting space, a space for reflection, a space to learn from one another. Art, curating, and political action are not the same, but culture is a space in which to create consent or dissent relative to political systems. Therefore, our programmes have been developed in the context of cultural analysis, theories of power, and theories of communities based on feminist, queer, postcolonial, ecological, post-Marxist, and other political and emancipatory positions. Many of these positions emerge out of political struggles or social movements. We see curatorial knowledge production as a space for the negotiation of social, political, cultural, and economic conflicts. We therefore understand curating as agency from which new constellations emerge.