

Music Criticism in the Age of Digital Media

with two contributions by Benjamin MiNiMuM/Angèle Cossée, and Peter Uehling

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Among the many notions between God and humanity lately declared “dead,” neither music critics nor music criticism have been spared. There are numerous articles, YouTube-videos, round-table discussions, and books featuring “the death of the music critic,” claiming that “music criticism is dead,” or pursuing a manhunt for the persons having “Killed Classical Music.” The threat of extermination looms even where hope is nurtured, as others ask: “How can music journalism survive digitalization?”¹

It may be wise from the beginning to put the death-of-topos in perspective as a stratagem to affirm the life of the persons using it. After all, living means to bear witness to things, people, institutions, ideas, and convictions pass away. As we perceive something is ending, something different may come into existence, as Hegel argues where he explains his reasons for the “end of art.”² The topos seems to express the dark side of moderni-

1 See as examples Norman Lebrecht, *Who Killed Classical Music? Maestros, Managers, and Corporate Politics* (Secaucus: Birch Lane Press, 1997); see also Michael Kaiser, “The Death of Criticism or Everyone Is a Critic,” *HuffPost*, The Blog, November 14, 2011, updated January 14, 2012, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-death-of-criticism-or_b_1092125; *The Death of the Critic? A Roundtable on the Future of Music Criticism in the Digital Age*, moderated by Ann Powers, transcripts of the roundtable at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Southern California, September 24, 2008, <https://learcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/DeathoftheCritic2.pdf>; Bhanuj Kappal, “OFF THE RECORD: Does music criticism have a future?” *Mumbai Mirror*, updated October 6, 2019, <https://mumbai-mirror.indiatimes.com/others/leisure/off-the-record-does-music-criticism-have-a-future/articleshow/71461447.cms>; Janosch Troehler, „Wie Musikjournalismus die Digitalisierung überleben kann,“ *Medium*, uploaded August 22, 2018, <https://janoschtroehler.medium.com/wie-musikjournalismus-die-digitalisierung-%C3%BCberleben-kann-4b79607f6603>.

2 See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* [1717–1738], ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970); Eng. trans. *Aesthetics. Lectures of Fine Art*, 2 voll., trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

sation, and to mark the losses in a Schumpeterian process of “creative destruction,” a concept that originates in economics but is implicitly based on a philosophy of life that features the mother of all proclaimed deaths, that of God.³

Yet, where a sense of loss prevails, something is likely to be disappearing. Music criticism as both a practice and institution, and the critic as a role model and profession, have come under strain. Figuring for more than a century as part of generalist newspapers’ offerings predominantly in the European west, as well as a key feature in specialist magazines, music criticism has become a casualty of the seemingly secular decline in audience and revenues.⁴ Permanent full-time jobs have been cut, many of the remaining critics carry on in precarious labour relations. With the advent of social media, arts organisations have begun to elude intermediation by established media and to communicate with their public directly. In this understanding of disintermediation, contributions by music critics are on the downgrade as “secondhand opinions.”⁵

Is music criticism getting allotted a place in the museum of obliterated practices and deserted discourses? Can it prevail by inserting its proven contents and manners of operating into new media techniques and formats, as Christopher Dingle and Dominic McHugh seem to assume?⁶ Is there a path of adaptation or innovation discernible in the proceedings of the digitally formatted discourse on music?

3 Conspicuously close to Nietzsche’s formulations, Schumpeter—in his *The Theory of Economic Development: An Inquiry into Profits, Capital, Credit, Interest, and the Business Cycle*, trans. Redvers Opie (London: Transaction Books, 1983), 84—depicts the entrepreneur as a creative destructor, someone combining the characteristics both of a creator and a *Führer*. Previously, Nietzsche had formulated in view of his “transvaluation of all values,” e.g. in *Ecce Homo*: „und wer ein Schöpfer sein will im Guten und Bösen, der muß ein Vernichter erst sein und Werte zerbrechen“ (“and whoever wants to be a creator in good and evil: verily, he must first be an annihilator and shatter values”); Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* [1888], in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe VI:3*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montanari (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1969), 363–64; Eng. trans. *Ecce Homo: How to Become What You Are*, trans. Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 88–89.

4 See Christopher Dingle and Dominic McHugh, “Stop the Press? The Changing Media of Music Criticism,” in *The Cambridge History of Music Criticism*, ed. Christopher Dingle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 695.

5 As Drew Crocker puts it: “Music criticism is dead ... Why consider secondhand opinions when you can hear directly from creators about their own writing processes?” (“Music Criticism Is Changing Its Tune—and That’s a Good Thing,” *This*, October 25, 2018, <https://this.org/2018/10/25/music-criticism-is-changing-its-tune-and-thats-a-good-thing/>).

6 Dingle and McHugh, “Changing Media of Music Criticism,” 695–99.

These are the questions this text will try to help elucidate. Rather than applying a fixed framework, I will seek to find out what the main forces behind present transformational processes affecting music criticism are. The general perspective is that of media change, whereby “media” are understood as dispositives entailing technological apparatuses, communication structures, discourse practices, role models, and their institutionalisation. The products generated in media systems shall be understood, following Siegfried J. Schmidt, as “social instruments for the structural linking of cognition and communication, thus for the linking of actants, organisations, institutions, and enterprises in the symbolic space.”⁷ Media change, for its part, will be considered within a larger prospect of a history of ideas. While these definitions may appear rather broad, they steer clear of the kind of technological determinism often found in debates about “the future of music criticism.” Through them I will attempt to counter any short-termism in the appraisal of technological innovation and the resulting changes in the mediascape fed by a widespread perception of “the rapid development of new digital media.”⁸

Metaphors of Depth

In pursuing such a program, this text focuses on a “German” conception of music criticism. The reference to Kantian, Hegelian and, as we will see, post-Hegelian perspectives is being chosen because it can help explain present strains on music criticism not primarily dependent on media change. Irony will help keeping national stereotypes at bay, similarly to the irony adopted by composer, conductor, and writer Ferdinand Hiller in 1884 when comparing contemporary music culture in Italy with practices then understood as typically German. Not only did he mention the obsession with “founding one musical newspaper after another” and writing “critical-aesthetical” articles, but he also referred to “German depth” in musical discourse.⁹

7 Siegfried J. Schmidt, „Der Medienkompaktbegriff,“ in *Was ist ein Medium?* ed. Stefan Münker and Alexander Roesler (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008), 152. English translations are mine, unless indicated otherwise.

8 Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 5.

9 „die Italiener es sich angelegen sein lassen, germanisch-harmonischen Spuren zu folgen. Nicht allein, daß sie durch Orchesterconcerte die deutsche Instrumentalmusik zu ver-

As Holly Watkins has shown, metaphors of depth pervade German reasoning from Wackenroder's early romanticism to Arnold Schönberg's musical thinking.¹⁰ Arguing with Albrecht Koschorke's theory of the emergence of a new topology of subjectivity towards the end of the eighteenth century, "depth" may be considered as one of the terms expressing a shift of their frame of reference "from transcendental subjectivity towards the empirical-psychological individuum."¹¹ "Depth" was assigned a function in the dichotomy between "profound" and "superficial." It also marked a position on a vertical axis ranging from the chthonic to the transcendental, as opposed to "breadth."

Since the end of the eighteenth century, music criticism has not only tried to assess "depth" in musical works,¹² it has also aimed to be profound itself. If music is understood as the semiosis of a "hidden dimension where nature, man, and spirit intersect," as per Watkins' summary of Wackenroder's theory of musical art,¹³ music critics have been trying to capture through language what would otherwise fade away without entering the sphere of discourse. Until the invention of Charles Cros's *paléophone* and Thomas Alva Edison's *phonograph* in 1877, "deep" music criticism was therefore an invocation of the ephemerality of everything said, sung, and played. It was an objectivisation via written language, a transmediation instituting music-centered public discourse.

If "breadth" in discourse about music does not seem to be a problem today—news about "who is doing what" in musical life are being announced, told, reported, posted, and retweeted through all channels and in all manner of media—the pursuit of "depth" is perceived as a losing proposition. This, in the last analysis, is the reason behind many critics' grief and dismay, and Peter Uehling's contribution to this subject (see Appendix 1) may be read as a critic's document of the sensation of being marooned or outcast

breiten suchen, Oratorien aufzuführen beginnen, sogar mit Wagner und Goldmark auf der Bühne experimentieren—sie schreiben kritisch-ästhetische Zeitungsartikel mit deutscher Tiefe, setzen Preise aus auf Kammer und Kirchenmusiken—gründen eine musicalische Zeitung nach der andern.“ Ferdinand Hiller, *Erinnerungsblätter* (Köln: DuMont-Schauberg, 1884), 69.

10 See Holly Watkins, *Metaphors of Depth in German Musical Thought: From E.T.A. Hoffmann to Arnold Schoenberg* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

11 „von der transzendentalen Subjektivität auf das empirisch-psychologische Individuum.“ Albrecht Koschorke, *Die Geschichte des Horizonts. Grenze und Grenzüberschreitung in literarischen Landschaftsbildern* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990), 242.

12 See Watkins, *Metaphors of Depth*, 37–44.

13 Watkins, 33.

by changing discursive and media practices. Uehling's *Wutrede* (rage address) reminds us of the fact that "change" in cultural matters is always embodied, and that changing media practices entail a reevaluation of human capital as well as changes in the quality of communicative relationships.

Invocation and discursivation find themselves intertwined in Theodor W. Adorno's influential conception of music criticism. On the one side, the musical artwork itself is seen by Adorno as being in need of critical discursivation. On the other side, both musical experience and reflection on music are needed for the project of emancipation—and more emphatically: constitution—of the modern subject. Adorno understands musical artworks as processes that unfold their essence "in the time," as he puts it. This unfolding of art (to use the botanical metaphor) is realised through "the medium of commentary and critique."¹⁴ Therefore, music criticism is not just "a means of communication." Adorno understands it as an activity and a form of discourse in its own right that complements the artwork.¹⁵ In this process of transmediation—or more emphatically: transubstantiation—the critic exercises what according to Adorno is the essence of musicality: "to think with one's ears the unfolding of what becomes sound in its necessity."¹⁶ Music itself may both express and influence the "deep" instances of human existence. Music criticism then subjects sound to linguistic reason. Within its sphere of duties, defined by the post-Hegelian teleology of the subject, it has to enhance the level of awareness of a public less familiar with musical artworks.¹⁷

14 „Kunstwerke selbst sind ein Prozeß und sie entfalten ihr Wesen in der Zeit. Es ist prozessual. Medien dieser Kunstentfaltung sind Kommentar und Kritik.“ Theodor W. Adorno, „Reflexionen über Musikkritik (1968),“ in Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 19, *Musikalische Schriften VI*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), 574–75.

15 Adorno, „Reflexionen,“ 573–74. Adorno opposes his concept of music-oriented discourse to the concept of "music appreciation" (or as we would say today: mediation and outreach) found "in the Anglo-Saxon language sphere" and being guilty of "adapting [musical] works to its adversaries": „Aber die Funktion der *music appreciation* in Amerika, die in Europa ihre eifrigen Nachfolger findet, ist so peinlich wie die Obertöne des deutschen Wortes. Schuld ist das institutionell und gesellschaftlich diktierte Streben, Kunst Kunstfremden zu erschließen, ohne deren Bewußtsein zu verändern. Dadurch werden die Werke ihren Widersachern angepasst.“ Adorno, „Die gewürdigte Musik (1963),“ in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 15, *Komposition für den Film—Der getreue Korrepetitor*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), 163.

16 „sondern die Entfaltung des Erklingenden in ihrer Notwendigkeit mit den Ohren denken.“ Adorno, „Die gewürdigte Musik,“ 184.

17 See Klaus Georg Koch, *Innovation in Kulturorganisationen: Die Entfaltung unternehmerischen Handelns und die Kunst des Überlebens* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2014), 164–65.

Adorno set the standards for public discourse on music in the German-speaking countries of the West for several decades following the end of World War II. When currently speaking of a retreat, resignation, or replacement of music criticism, we mean music criticism realising Adornoian-type ideals. The debate that caused Adornoian-style theorising to lose its high ground was, by contrast, pursued in the musicological community. It may well be argued that culturally-turned reasoning about music on the one side, and a structural understanding of the artwork as “a self-enclosed and internally consistent formal unity” do not have to be irreconcilable.¹⁸ However, even plausible arguments cannot turn back time in a history of ideas. The idea of a “breakdown of music as a discrete concept” has historicised and ultimately delegitimised any attempt to position music on a vertical axis ranging, as defined above, from the chthonic to the transcendental.¹⁹

Dahlhaus and the Decline of the Großkritiker

Without forgetting the belletristic vocation of one strain of music criticism and the role composers played as critical experts, a closer look at the relation between music criticism and musicology may elucidate cultural change processes affecting the role of music criticism. Musicologists also working as music critics have influenced the debate on music in many national cultures. One thinks of Boris de Schloezer, Armand Machabey, Henry Prunières, and Léon Vallas in France, for example,²⁰ and Ernest Newman, Edward J. Dent and Donald Francis Tovey in Britain.²¹ In the German-speaking countries, Carl Dahlhaus may be considered the last great musicologist also working as a music critic. As a culture editor at the *Stuttgarter Zeitung* between September 1960 and November 1962, he pub-

18 Martin Scherzinger, “The Return of the Aesthetic: Musical Formalism and Its Place in Political Critique,” in *Beyond Structural Listening? Postmodern Modes of Hearing*, ed. Andrew Dell’Antonio (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 253.

19 Rose Rosengard Subotnik, *Deconstructive Variations: Music and Reason in Western Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), xx.

20 See Michel Duchesneau, “Music Criticism and Aesthetics During the Interwar Period: Fewer Crimes and More Punishments,” in *Music Criticism in France, 1918–1939: Authority, Advocacy, Legacy*, ed. Barbara L. Kelly and Christopher Moore (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2018), 17–42.

21 Karen Arrandale, “The Scholar as Critic: Edward J. Dent,” in *British Musical Criticism and Intellectual Thought, 1850–1950*, ed. Jeremy Dibble and Julian Horton (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2018), 154–73.

lished a total of 108 concert, opera, and recordings reviews. Miriam Roner has shown to what extent Dahlhaus's work as a critic was based on the concept of the musical artwork. Given that the musical scores can be seen as underdetermined, and the musical performance, by contrast, as overdetermined, Roner states that "the work as an intentional entity has to be identified through the coaction of several different actors."²² Here again, as with Adorno, the musical artwork needs discourse to become fully discernible. It is in this sense that Dahlhaus aims at the "constitution of the artwork" (Roner) through his reviews.

Dahlhaus wrote his reviews from a position of supreme power. His texts let readers understand that the critic was in possession of a higher level of insight than both the musicians and the ordinary public, superior perhaps even to historical composers who in their time couldn't have any cognizance of *Wirkungsgeschichte*, the history of reception and interpretation of their compositions as they became transformed into "works." With a precise linguistic strategy, Dahlhaus shifts his reviews from the realm of "opinion" to what since Plato (*politeia* VII, 534a-c) has been considered the superior category: "knowledge." The grammatical subject of his texts is neither "I," nor "you"; there is no opening towards dialogue. Instead, Dahlhaus uses "one" as a subject, the German *man*, a generic subject assuming and presuming universal rationality and validity.²³

While shedding light on Dahlhaus's self-perception, the critic's chosen role was far from being idiosyncratic. Twenty-five years later, Zygmunt Bauman would historicize it:

The typically modern strategy of intellectual work is one best characterized by the metaphor of the "legislator" role. It consists of making authoritative statements which arbitrate in controversies of opinions. ... The authority to

22 „das Werk ist ein ‚intentionales‘ Gebilde, das erst im Akt des Tätigwerdens, des Zusammenwirkens unterschiedlicher Personen, identifiziert werden kann.“ Miriam Roner, „Carl Dahlhaus als Musikkritiker: Über die Leistungsfähigkeit des Werkbegriffs in der Konzertberichterstattung,“ *Die Musikforschung* 70, no. 1 (2017): 42.

23 To illustrate the case, I quote Dahlhaus' review of a Beethoven-recital by Rudolf Serkin from November 2, 1961, out of Roner's text: „daß man Beethoven-Sonaten wie Rudolf Serkin spielen müsse, schien, während man ihm zuhörte, so selbstverständlich zu sein, daß man nicht einmal aufatmete, weil es anders war als gewöhnlich, sondern glaubte, so habe man Beethoven schon immer verstanden. Die Vorstellung von der »Appassionata« oder der »Hammerklavier-Sonate« wird künftig, auch wenn man nicht an Serkin denkt, von seiner Interpretation geprägt sein, gerade weil sie keine Interpretation war, sondern die Sache selbst.“ (Roner, "Carl Dahlhaus als Musikkritiker," 44).

arbitrate is in this case legitimized by superior (objective) knowledge to which intellectuals have a better access than the non-intellectual part of society.²⁴

Bauman identifies “to civilize” as the leading motive of modernity, an “effort to transform the human being through education and instruction.”²⁵ Nowhere else, following Bauman, has the educating and legislating role of intellectuals been so dominant as in the domain of art and art criticism, and nowhere else “[has] the authority of the intellectuals [been] so complete and indubitable.”²⁶ Although music is based on sensory experience, there is little evidence for many assertions forming music-related discourse. One way of resolving (or sugarcoating) the problem is to transform music criticism into a belletristic undertaking. Another solution consists in amplifying the role of the critic as a legislator. In this sense, leading *Großkritiker* (grand critics) have also been called *Kritiker-Päpste* (critic-popes) in the German-speaking countries. In synchrony with the paradigm shift from “modern” theorising, based on universalist assumptions, to “postmodern” ones, the use of the term *Kritiker-Papst* peaks in 1975 and falls into disuse after the year 2000.²⁷

The (D)Evolving Role of the Intellectual

In opposition to the *prima pratica* of the “legislator,” Bauman posits the postmodern role of the “interpreter”: “With pluralism irreversible, a world-scale consensus on world-views and values unlikely, and all extant *Weltanschauungen* firmly grounded in their respective cultural traditions, ... communication across traditions becomes the major problem of our time.”²⁸ Within Adornoian theory, Herder’s and Rousseau’s ideals of a common language for an inclusive mankind are still echoing, thus music and subsequently critical discourse is seen as addressing the whole of mankind, now understood as the self-emancipating subject of history. Conversely, the postmodern world outlined by Bauman is constituted by languages and

²⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Post-Modernity and Intellectuals* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 4.

²⁵ Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters*, 92.

²⁶ Bauman, 140.

²⁷ See the distribution graph of the term „Kritiker-Papst” in the DWDS, Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache, <https://www.dwds.de/?q=Kritiker-Papst&from=wb>.

²⁸ Bauman, 143.

groups. “What remains for the intellectuals to do,” in Bauman’s words, “is to interpret such meanings for the benefit of those who are not of the community which stands behind the meanings; to mediate the communication between ‘finite provinces’ or ‘communities of meaning.’”²⁹

To understand the changing conditions of music criticism it is not sufficient to view universalist claims only as an intellectual problem. After all, Adorno’s Critical Theory was committed to building a new and better society.³⁰ Concerning poetry and song as living art forms, singer Thomas Hampson has drawn attention to what he, as a performer, perceives as an erosion of its humanist foundations. Assuming that the genre of song features the complexity of “being human,” Hampson deplors that “we do no longer understand the arts as a day-book or a textbook of existence,” and that “we” do not recognise “our vision of the world, our *Bildungsprozess* [formation/education/personal growth], our own self” in lyric art anymore.³¹

Clearly, the role model of the “legislator” had a structural affinity with the auctorial, one-to-many approach of what during the twentieth century was understood as mass media.³² At the same time, “legislating”—i.e., making judgments on the basis of universal humanist assumptions—was at the heart of both the *ethos* and *pathos* of music criticism. The reasons negotiated in critical discourse on music were assumed to concern every person reading a general information newspaper, irrespective of their personal interests, just as political reporting, analysis, and comment are believed to concern every citizen. In many cases, “legislative” music criticism fulfilled functions similar to what Bauman, in line with the postmodern paradigm, called “mediation” and “interpretation.” Yet, this endeavour of

29 Bauman, 197.

30 See Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung* [1947] (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1991), 142, 150, and 158; Eng. trans. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 95, 102, and 108–9.

31 Michael Stallknecht, „Ich kann niemanden überreden, die Winterreise super zu finden,“ interview with Thomas Hampson, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, March 25, 2011. Hampson’s account of the substance of lyric art is reminiscent of Hegel’s emblematic definition of poetry as a form in which “in his subjective inner life the man becomes a work of art himself.” See Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, vol. 3, 427; Eng. trans. *Aesthetics*, II, 1120.

32 See Habermas’s critique of a process of “refeudalization” as he perceived it in the public sphere shaped by mass media. Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* [1962] (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990), 335; Eng. trans. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 231–32.

promoting the understanding and appreciation of music continued to dwell and flourish on the assumption of artworks being an exemplary instance of the “self-encounter of man.”³³ Deprived of this assumption, or deprived of “man” (“Mensch”) as a category deemed to be of relevance, music criticism turned into a service for special interest groups or Bauman’s “communities of meaning.” Auctorial music criticism lost prestige and legitimacy in twentieth-century-type mass media and became subjected to the quantitative logics of audience share.

The Demise of Traditional Media

As effective as it might appear at this point to indulge in a narrative in which “the before” and “the after,” “the modern” and “the postmodern,” “old media” and “new media” appear as discernible entities, we will rather opt for distinctions made on a spectrum of differences, and attempt to account for the iterative, sometimes nonlinear and even contradictory changes in behaviour that in aggregate constitute what we interpret as cultural change.

Concerning the complex of media practices registering a loss of actors, we have to include the decreasing use of the medium in which music criticism has thrived in the first place. In 1936, Adorno described how “countless readers” resorted to their newspapers every morning wishing “to regulate their opinion” on what they had listened to the night before. According to Adorno, this behaviour was a normality, albeit an endangered one.³⁴ If we look at Germany today, the reach of printed newspapers and magazines has fallen from 60% in 2005 to 22% in 2020.³⁵ This tendency is confirmed by the European Commission’s statistics for the countries forming the European Union in the period from 2010 to 2019: the use of the older mass media such as television, radio, and most markedly the written press has been declining while internet-based media are on the rise.³⁶

33 „Die Selbstbegegnung des Menschen in den Werken der Kunst.“ Hans-Georg Gadamer with reference to Hegel in *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: Mohr und Siebeck, 1986), 64; Eng. trans. *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 51.

34 See Theodor W. Adorno, „Zur Krisis der Musikkritik,“ in Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 20-2, *Vermischte Schriften II*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), 746–55.

35 As a rule, the data base is the German-speaking population over the age of 10.

36 See “Massenkommunikation,” ARD/ZDF website, 2021, <https://www.ard-zdf-mas->

This widening use of internet-based digital media affects much of present music journalism, and the text on the evolution of French world-music journalism by Benjamin MiNiMuM and Angèle Cossée (see Appendix 2) may be read as a document for the iterative and often nonlinear adaptation and appropriation process in which “old” and “digital” media usages are interwoven, while innovative publishing strategies are increasingly pursued on the internet. Music journalism in digital media is mostly dedicated to the representation of musicians, musical activities, and products, in line with an understanding of the internet as an inclusive medium, characterised by “low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement,” a belief that “contributions matter,” and by a sense of “social connection.”³⁷

MiNiMuM and Cossée’s work is one telling example of the representation of music cultures formerly outside the focus of music criticism in established media. Another example is Music in Africa (musicinafrica.net). The platform, founded in 2013 and “reaching millions of people every year,”³⁸ structures the representation and self-representation of musicians, producers, and cultural managers across the African continent. It features products and events, informs about technological developments and business opportunities, and offers reflections upon political and social conditions of musical practice. It also dedicates a whole section to the presence of women in African Music, discusses questions of music education, and proposes solutions for problems like those arising from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Evidently this is a major shift in the evolution of the mediatic presence of music-related discourse on this continent. Music in Africa performs a bundle of tasks previously unserved by mass media. In creating networks and channels of communication, it connects professionals and the interested public throughout the world. The platform establishes and facilitates

senkommunikation.de; European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, *Media use in the European Union: Report* (European Union, 2020), page 6, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2775/80086>. To put the German numbers into relation: within the European context Germany is one of the countries featuring a relatively high rate of people using the printed press on a daily base (position 7 out of 30). See European commission, *Media Use*, 14.

37 Henry Jenkins, “Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century,” MacArthur Foundation website, October 19, 2006, page 3, <https://www.macfound.org/press/grantee-publications/white-paper-confronting-the-challenges-of-participatory-culture-media-education-for-the-21st-century-by-henry-jenkins>.

38 “Music in Africa Portal,” Music in Africa official website, <https://www.musicinafrica.net/about/music-africa-portal>.

information structures that transcend existing social structures anchored in local, regional, ethnic, or national communities.³⁹

Internet and the Public Sphere

When it comes to music criticism *stricto sensu*, it may be asked whether the developments highlighted in the examples above merely represent a migration of practices and content from an older medium to a newer one, or whether there is a structural change under way that may alter the very definitions of music criticism. One might argue that the construction of the platforms is the expression of a target-group orientation and not much else. As an increasing number of people use the internet instead of print media, critics place their content there. Nevertheless, “target-group orientation” could also be interpreted as the result of a cultural shift from a “scholarly” stance to a “managerial” one,⁴⁰ and correspondingly a shift away from critics’ traditional role of custodians of artworks and associated values. In any case, the critical spaces presented in this issue of *Sound Stage Screen* have characteristic voids where more expert-based, “legislative” forms of discourse on music might be imagined. Reviews are mostly empathetic descriptions of what musicians produce, or statements about their self-perceptions, intentions, and public acclaim. In addition, the platforms feature factual information and explanatory texts about musical practices and local traditions. The reviews fall, however, short of the requirements traditionally associated with music criticism consisting of aesthetic judgments based on criteria. The explanatory texts for their part do not appear to be up to par with the standards of humanities research.

While print-based music criticism took part in what was conceived as “the public sphere,” multi-platform music journalism relates to something different that might be tentatively conceptualised as “specialised public

39 The concept stems from Scott Lash’s and John Urry’s early postmodern “Economies of Signs and Space.” There, processes of a “replacement of social structures by information structures” appear as the structural prerequisite for the “networking” of “economies of signs and space.” Scott Lash and John Urry, *Economies of Signs and Space* (London: Sage, 1994), 111.

40 In the neighbouring field of cultural production, this process has been explained by Victoria D. Alexander, “Pictures at an Exhibition: Conflicting Pressures in Museums and the Display of Art,” *American Journal of Sociology* 101, no. 4 (1996): 831. In Alexander’s presentation, “scholarly” and “managerial” represent different role models for arts managers, the former being oriented towards discourse on art, the latter towards a broader public.

spheres.” Why does that matter for music criticism? Bauman, while putting forward the idea of intellectuals as “interpreters,” does not seem to be concerned about the mediated nature of these new forms of engagement. His “communication across traditions” seems to presuppose a comprehensive communicative space in which processes of mediation between groups take place.⁴¹ Lash and Urry later conceptualised the question in a multidimensional space. In this space the level of reflexivity is augmented by the proliferation of communication networks on the side of the structures, and by individualisation processes following the “retrocession of social structures” on the side of the actants.⁴²

Both expectations were formulated at the very beginning of the rise of internet-based digital media. Today, there is an ongoing discussion whether we are witnessing the emergence of a worldwide participative and inclusive communicative space, or rather the fabrication of disruptive public spheres, and as to how far an expansion of meaningful reflexivity is taking place. Since conceptions of the public sphere depend on normative assumptions, every valuation here is literally a function of values. In this respect, Hans-Jörg Trenz has drawn attention to the tradition of thought leading from Kant’s programme of universal enlightenment to Habermas’s notion of a public sphere (*Öffentlichkeit*) that “unfolds in the individual and societal practices of reason” and therefore is “the method of enlightenment.”⁴³

Habermas himself recently undertook an assessment of the change in media culture in light of his earlier theory, particularly *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* dating back to 1962. Habermas’s understanding of the public sphere as a field where the “peculiarly unforced force of the better argument” plays out,⁴⁴ and as an “inclusive space dedicated to a possible discursive clarification of competing claims on truth” may seem to have anticipated early ideas of an emancipatory internet.⁴⁵ Given the high

41 Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters*, 143.

42 Lash and Urry, *Economies of Signs and Space*, 111.

43 „Öffentlichkeit entfaltet sich vielmehr in den individuellen und gesellschaftlichen Praktiken des Gebrauchs von Vernunft. Sie ist die Methode der Aufklärung.“ Hans-Jörg Trenz, „Öfflichkeitstheorie als Erkenntnistheorie moderner Gesellschaft,“ in *Ein neuer Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit?* ed. Martin Seeliger and Sebastian Sevnigani (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2021), 390.

44 Der „eigentümlich zwanglose Zwang des besseren Argumentes.“ Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, 4th rev. ed., vol. 1 (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1987), 47; Eng. trans. *The Theory of Communicative Action. Volume 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 24.

45 „als inklusiver Raum für eine mögliche diskursive Klärung konkurrierender

stakes, Habermas, however, comes to “utterly ambivalent” findings today.⁴⁶ First of all, the blurring of the distinction between the “private” and the “public” produced by social media eliminates the inclusive character of a public sphere that used to be distinct from the private realm and thus favoured mediation between the single citizens and the system of politics.⁴⁷ The resulting fragmented, rather plebiscitary than deliberative „demi-public spheres“ (*Halböffentlichkeiten*) often compete against others, producing “uninhibited discourses, shielded against dissonant opinions and critical comment.”⁴⁸

It is true that Habermas is specifically interested in the political function of *Öffentlichkeit*, where citizens mediate between private interests and the common good, and reason emerges from cooperative deliberation. What makes Habermas’s theory of the public sphere relevant for music criticism is the fact that the aesthetic judgement, the judgement of taste in Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*, is of an equally public nature. If, following Kant, judgement “is the faculty of thinking the particular as contained under the universal,” the judgement of taste “with its attendant consciousness of detachment from all [individual] interest, must involve a claim to validity for all men. ... There must be coupled with it a claim to subjective universality.”⁴⁹ Kant, in the middle of his abstractions, describes the act of the aesthetic judgement as a practice: “if upon so doing, we call the object beautiful, we believe ourselves to be speaking with a universal voice, and lay claim to the concurrence of every one.”⁵⁰ Carl Dahlhaus remarked that the judgement of artworks involves more than only Kantian judgements of

Ansprüche auf Wahrheitsgeltung.“ Jürgen Habermas, „Überlegungen und Hypothesen zu einem erneuten Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit,“ in Seeliger and Sevignani, *Ein neuer Strukturwandel*, 497.

46 „höchst ambivalente.“ Habermas, „Überlegungen und Hypothesen,“ 487.

47 See Habermas, „Überlegungen und Hypothesen,“ 479.

48 „der enthemmten, gegen dissonante Meinungen und Kritik abgeschirmten Diskurse.“ Habermas, „Überlegungen und Hypothesen,“ 489.

49 „Folglich muß dem Geschmacksurtheile mit dem Bewußtsein der Absonderung in demselben von allem Interesse ein Anspruch auf Gültigkeit für jedermann ohne auf Objecte gestellte Allgemeinheit anhängen, d. i. es muß damit ein Anspruch auf subjective Allgemeinheit verbunden sein.“ Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* [1790], part I, book 1, §6, 18, in Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, vol. 5 (Berlin: Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1913), 212; Eng. trans. *Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911), 51.

50 Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, part I, book 1, §8, 18, in Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, 216; Eng. trans. *Critique of Judgement*, 56.

taste.⁵¹ But if we account for the moral judgements Dahlhaus includes in the judgement of artworks, the reference to a sphere of universal claims turns out to be further strengthened. One could therefore deduce that the disruptive effects of internet-based media on the efficiency of “the public sphere” as well as an insufficient “discursive quality” of contributions will affect the grounds and the development-paths of music criticism.⁵²

Narratives of Cultural Change

At this point (if not before) it becomes apparent that argumentations based on historical grounds of music criticism have a tendency to become self-reinforcing if not circular. Music criticism has developed in institutional contexts and within dispositives based on assumptions about truth-conditions as well as the human condition. It has been integrated in narratives, inscribed in media systems, and incorporated in role-models that do only partially find their expression in the culture of internet-based digital media. As the historical resources erode, music criticism is on the wane. On the other hand, the impression that “Things Fall Apart” (Chinua Achebe) has been pervading the self-perception of modernity in the *longue durée*. It is not exclusively the expression of a transition from “modern” to “postmodern,” or from “old media” to “new media.” Friedrich Schlegel in his late essay “Signature of the Age” (1820) already deplored the “chaotic flood of opinions flying past.”⁵³ Hugo von Hofmannsthal in his *Letter of Lord Chandos* (1902) recounts deconstruction as an existential experience. Chandos discloses his state as “[having] lost completely the ability to think or speak of anything coherently. ... For me everything disintegrated into parts, those parts again into parts; no longer would anything let itself be encompassed by one idea. Single words floated round me.”⁵⁴ And Adorno

51 Carl Dahlhaus, *Analyse und Werturteil* (Mainz: Schott, 1970), 26; Eng. trans. *Analysis and Value Judgement*, trans. Siegmund Levarie (New York: Pendragon Press, 1983), 17–18.

52 „der diskursiven Qualität der Beiträge.” Habermas, „Überlegungen und Hypothesen,” 478.

53 „chaotischen Flut vorüberfliehender Meinungen.” Friedrich Schlegel, „Signatur des Zeitalters,” in Friedrich Schlegel. *Kritische Schriften und Fragmente*. Vol. 4, 1812–1823, ed. Ernst Behler and Hans Eichner (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1988), 259.

54 „Mein Fall ist in Kürze dieser: Es ist mir völlig die Fähigkeit abhanden gekommen, über irgend etwas zusammenhängend zu denken oder zu sprechen. [...] Es zerfiel mir alles in Teile, die Teile wieder in Teile, und nichts mehr ließ sich mit einem Begriff umspannen. Die einzelnen Worte schwammen um mich.” Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Ein Brief* [1902], in

begins his *Aesthetic Theory* (1970) with the statement that “it is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist.”⁵⁵

In order to contemplate alternative concepts not entangled in the legitimacy compulsions resulting from dichotomies between “the old” and “the new,” “tradition” and “progress,” “inertia” and “innovation,” we might choose to frame change as a continuum. Susan C. Herring, for example, has proposed to understand the evolution of media and genres as relationships shifting “along a continuum from reproduced [or familiar] to adapted to emergent.”⁵⁶ We could thus draw a line from the “familiar” text format of critical reviews to the “adapted” format of blogs. Blogs change their material manifestation as digital media simulate features of print. Otherwise, they continue to comply with the conditions of textuality. They continue trying to be coherent, cohesive, and consistent. They apply rhetoric strategies. “Adapted,” formerly “familiar” texts could then become “emergent” in the form of transmedia storytelling coalescing in multimodal digital artifacts.

Most of the debate on the “death” of music criticism is based on the dichotomic paradigm, such as William Deresiewicz’s recent lament about “the eclipse of expert opinion and the rise of populist alternatives: blogs, ratings, comment threads, audience reviews; Twitter, Facebook, YouTube.”⁵⁷ In contrast, theories based on the continuum paradigm may still be infused

Hofmannsthal, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 7, *Erzählungen, erfundene Gespräche und Briefe, Reisen* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1979), 9; Eng. trans. *The Letter of Lord Chandos*, in *The Whole Difference: Selected Writings of Hugo von Hofmannsthal*, ed. J. D. McClatchy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 73–74.

55 „Zur Selbstverständlichkeit wurde, daß nichts, was die Kunst betrifft, mehr selbstverständlich ist. Weder in ihr noch in ihrem Verhältnis zum Ganzen, nicht einmal ihr Existenzrecht.“ Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 9; Eng. trans. *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, new trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 1997), 1.

56 Susan C. Herring, “Discourse in Web 2.0: Familiar, Reconfigured, and Emergent,” in *Discourse 2.0: Language and New Media*, ed. Deborah Tannen and Anna Marie Trester (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 7. Herring’s scheme is based on the slightly simpler one elaborated by Kevin Crowston and Marie Williams, “Reproduced and Emergent Genres of Communication on the World-Wide Web,” *The Information Society* 16, no. 3 (2000): 201–15.

57 William Deresiewicz, *The Death of the Artist. How Creators are Struggling to Survive in the Age of Billionaires and Big Tech* (New York: Henry Holt, 2019), 258.

with disruption anxiety, but “death” does now appear as a transfiguration ranging from “remediation” (Bolter and Grusin) to “demediation” (Stewart). This paradigm accommodates most of the discussion about a “future” of music criticism.⁵⁸

Singularised Actants and the Grounds of Judgement

With all its inherent wisdom, however, a theorising continuously mutating identities and practices is good at differentiating but not very effective with regard to distinction. Another aspect of the phenomenon becomes discernible if we think change in the mediality of music criticism as a disruption. Firstly, as a disruption in terms of intellectual history. Here we might put into practice what Jean-François Lyotard stated in *The Postmodern Condition*: “abandon the idealist and humanist narratives,” increase the distance to the “obsolete ... principle that the acquisition of knowledge is indissociable from the training (*Bildung*) of minds, or even of individuals.”⁵⁹ This mostly concerns the sociological perspectives of media theory. Secondly, from a technological point of view, networked digital media may not be understood as “new media” adding new functionalities to existing media, but as an emergent phenomenon, as categorically distinct “hypermedia.” These hypermedia may simulate and thus preserve prior physical media. Beyond that they also give rise to “a number of new computational media that have no physical precedents,”⁶⁰ thereby generating modes of reflection that prior to their emergence did not exist.

Concerning the sociological dimension of media disruption, Elizabeth Dubois and William H. Dutton conceptualised the emergent entity as a “Fifth Estate”:

58 See Garrett Stewart, “Bookwork as Demediation,” *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 3 (2010): 410–457. For further discussion see also Jan Baetens and Domingo Sánchez-Mesa, “A Note on ‘Demediation’: From Book Art to Transmedia Storytelling,” *Leonardo* 52, no. 3 (2019): 275–78.

59 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 46 and 4.

60 Lev Manovich, *Software Takes Command* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 110. See also Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 38: “In hypermedia, the multimedia elements making a document are connected through hyperlinks. Thus the elements and the structure are independent of each other—rather than hard-wired together, as in traditional media.”

As such, the Fifth Estate is not simply a new media [*sic*], such as an adjunct to the news media, but a distributed array of networked individuals who use the Internet as a platform to source and distribute information to be used to challenge the media and play a potentially important political role, without the institutional foundations of the Fourth Estate.⁶¹

Who are these “individuals” acting on the platforms? It can be doubted whether they coincide with the citizens Habermas has in mind as communicators in the discursive public sphere. Nor do they correspond to the emancipatory subject Adorno evokes when reflecting upon music criticism. Digitally networked individuals fall short of enacting the dialectics between the particular and the general, the individual and the universal, or the subjective and the objective as implied in Adorno’s warning against a deterioration of criticism induced “by the shrinkage of a subjectivity that mistakes itself for objectivity.”⁶²

These “individuals” populate the platforms and make use of their single-agent broadcasting (webcasting) capabilities. What is more, they appear as products of the platforms themselves and of their underlying algorithms. Crispin Thurlow criticises that “the affordances and typical uses of social media foster a microcelebrity mindset of extreme self-referentiality.”⁶³ Andreas Reckwitz has integrated observations of this kind with pre-internet discussions about “Modernity and Self-Identity” developing a comprehensive theory of the “late-modern self” and its systemic collocation in a “post-industrial economy of singularities.”⁶⁴ In this economy, digital tech-

61 Elizabeth Dubois and William H. Dutton, “Empowering Citizens of the Internet Age: The Role of a Fifth Estate,” in *Society and the Internet*, ed. Mark Graham and William H. Dutton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 239.

62 „Der Verfall von Kritik als eines Agens der musikalischen öffentlichen Meinung offenbart sich nicht durch Subjektivismus, sondern durch Schrumpfung von Subjektivität, die sich als Objektivität verkennt.“ Adorno, *Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie* [1967], in Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 14, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 34; Eng. trans. *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 148.

63 Crispin Thurlow, “Facebook: Synthetic Media, Pseudo-sociality, and the Rhetorics of Web 2.0,” in *Discourse 2.0: Language and New Media*, ed. Deborah Tannen and Anna Marie Trester (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 245.

64 „Die postindustrielle Ökonomie der Singularitäten.“ Andreas Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: Zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 5th ed. (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2021), 111. The reference is to Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

nologies gain significance as a “general infrastructure for the fabrication of singularities.”⁶⁵ This singularisation is at once a product of the interaction between persons, between persons and machines, and—in the computational deep structure of the platforms—of interactions between machines. Social media “with their profiles are one of the central arenas where the elaboration of singularity takes place.”⁶⁶

For the one thing, this “singularity” is a performative category. “Singularity” is the (ephemeral) quality of communicative artefacts that prove successful on “attention markets.”⁶⁷ This, incidentally, might help explain how trending topics unseat canon. At the same time, “singularisation” is an ongoing process of predications, judgements, and negotiations of judgements. Formally, these judgements—Reckwitz calls them “valorisations”—put the particular or “the idiosyncratic” into a relationship with schemata of the general.⁶⁸ In linguistic practice, these judgements rather look like assignments of subtopics to superordinate terms. To generalise, Reckwitz states that in late-modern societies a structural transformation is taking place that causes “the social logic of the general to lose its supremacy to the social logic of the particular.”⁶⁹

As “subjective universality” ceases to serve as the reference point of judgements, Kant’s “judgement of taste” loses its base. Opinions on the aesthetic value of objects and performances evidently continue to be expressed in the “postindustrial economy of singularities.” On social platforms they are proliferating. But from a Kantian perspective they are just that: private opinions about the effect of aesthetic artefacts “upon my state so far as affected by such an object.”⁷⁰ In a Kantian world, private opinions of

65 „einer allgemeinen Infrastruktur zur Fabrikation von Singularitäten.“ Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten*, 229.

66 „mit ihren Profilen sind eine der zentralen Arenen dieser Arbeit an der Besonderheit.“ Reckwitz, 9.

67 „Auf den kulturellen Märkten stehen die ... Güter im Wettbewerb darum, sichtbar zu werden und die Aufmerksamkeit des Publikums auf sich zu ziehen.“ Reckwitz, 149. For the definition of „Performanz“ as a „Publikumsrelation“ see Reckwitz, 220.

68 Reckwitz, 48–50.

69 „In der Spätmoderne findet ein gesellschaftlicher Strukturwandel statt, der darin besteht, dass die soziale Logik des Allgemeinen ihre Vorherrschaft verliert an die soziale Logik des Besonderen.“ Reckwitz, 11.

70 „Daß nun mein Urtheil über einen Gegenstand, wodurch ich ihn für angenehm erkläre, ein Interesse an demselben ausdrücke, ist daraus schon klar, daß es durch Empfindung eine Begierde nach dergleichen Gegenstände rege macht, mithin das Wohlgefallen nicht das bloße Urtheil über ihn, sondern die Beziehung seiner Existenz auf meinen Zustand,

the above kind do not contribute to public discourse; in this sense they are insignificant. Can this result in anything else than the liquidation of music criticism defined as a contribution to a public discourse based on arguments that can be discussed in turn? Hartmut Rosa still distinguishes between the “public opinion” (based on deliberation), and the preliminary realm of “private opinions” made public through their aggregation in surveys and polls.⁷¹ In a world, however, where “likes” are structurally integrated in the interface of digital media, expressions of personal pleasure or displeasure do not only have an effect on public opinion, but they also constitute it in a non-argumentative, stochastic way.

Strange enough, the authorities of the late bourgeois world of “legislators,” the ones declared historically obsolete by Lyotard and Bauman, are now reappearing on our digital media stages in the shape of “creatives” and influencers. Their audiences accept them as “experts” on the base of attributions and identification, less so on the base of acquired professional or academic competence. Yet that may, on closer inspection, also be said about some of the former “grand critics.” And possibly there is more continuity than might be expected considering the change in the fundamentals of critical practice. During the preparation of this article, I found little evidence of a significant shift in critics’ practices. Traditional critics embracing digital media mostly seem to limit themselves to moving their analogue texts to the equally textual blog, all the while continuing to make the “personal” perspective of their judgements more marked. Instead of using the collective subject “one,” dear at one time to Dahlhaus as a music critic, they now write “I.” Established music critics proved disinclined to give an account of their attitudes, practices, and experiences with digital media. Managers of major European concert houses, asked whether they could recommend younger content creators advancing discourse on music in digital media, replied, “tell me, should you find one.”

It may be understandably difficult for reasons of professional identity to move from one role model to another, or to give up the role model of a competence-based author in order to become a performance-oriented content creator. Few will manage to embody both roles. On the other hand, there

sofern er durch ein solches Object afficirt wird, voraussetzt.“ Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 207; Eng. trans. *Critique of Judgement*, 45.

⁷¹ See Hartmut Rosa, „Demokratischer Begegnungsraum oder lebensweltliche Filterblase? Resonanztheoretische Überlegungen zum Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit im 21. Jahrhundert,“ in *Ein neuer Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit?* ed. Martin Seeliger and Sebastian Seignani (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2021), 255.

are examples in neighbouring disciplines suggesting that new forms of singularising or singularised judgements can work for specific, potentially vast audiences. BookTok, the fast-expanding submarket of TikTok dedicated to appraisals (rather than reviews) of books, could be an example of a new form of criticism. Invent OperaTok.⁷² Finally, the appearance of “grandfluencers,” senior netizens who gain audience as influencers presenting their mature singularities, proves that there is no age limit to the appropriation of role models developed through digital media.⁷³

The Knowledge of Hypermedia

Hypermedia have disrupted the mediatic conditions for traditional music criticism. Differently from our everyday interpretation of change as bringing something “new,” both adding to and opposing the “old,” the concept of hypermedia theorises networked digital media as emergent, thus not incremental and not prefigured in existing media. If in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries media were “defined by the techniques and representational capacities of particular tools and machines” (materials could be added), digital media on networked computers now become simulated through algorithms and programmes.⁷⁴ This not only leads to multimodality, the merger of semiotic resources and modal affordances through a unifying code allowing for new modes of signification. It also makes the creation of meaning possible through the code (or “software”) itself. “Turning everything into data, and using algorithms to analyse it changes,” in Manovich’s words, “what it means to know something.” This emergent “software epistemology” implies the generation of knowledge and of “additional meanings” through the analysis of old data derived from analogue sources and of specifically generated data, and the fusion of separate information sources.⁷⁵

Reckwitz mentions comparison technologies as part of the digital infrastructure of singularisation.⁷⁶ Applied to our case, this could mean programming portals able to automatise and edit the comparison of perfor-

72 As much as this may look like a business case, take into account that opera productions are to a lesser extent universally available commodities than books.

73 See Charley Locke, “A Twilight Filled With Followers and Fun—‘Grandfluencers’ Are Sharing a New Vision of Old Age,” *New York Times*, May 26, 2022.

74 Manovich, *Software Takes Command*, 340.

75 Manovich, *Software Takes Command*, 337–41.

76 Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten*, 54.

manances, a central genre of twentieth-century music criticism. Once successfully working on the base of recorded data, an application of this kind could also analyse live performances and thus create real-time reviews of musical performances based on objectifiable and negotiable criteria. Such a machine would certainly adopt known interpretation parameters, but the logic of data analytics implies it would also generate new criteria and parameters, new modes of reflection beyond our familiar semantic patterns of interpretation, beyond subjective experience coupled—deepened—with reflection.⁷⁷ Either way, the traditional sequence of a sonic event followed by a reflection in written form is no longer imperative from a technological standpoint. The very institution of the author, constructed in parallel with the figure of the composer, has been made optional by technological change. Given that texts are collectively shareable, why shouldn't they be edited collectively for the purposes of debate? And do we need authors when it will be possible to link analytic software with automated social actors such as bots?⁷⁸

Multimodality alters the conditions of language as the medium—in the large sense—of music criticism, while data analytics will influence the questions asked and the issues addressed. Network theoreticians have begun to look back on printed language as a kind of historical medium useful for some sort of pleasurable expression but fraught with capacity constraints.⁷⁹ While Habermas hopes users of social media may yet familiarise themselves with the role of authors and learn how to communicate in constructive ways,⁸⁰ these users already explore the ludic discursive prac-

77 With regard to the relationship between IT as a “technology for producing ideas,” the secular stagnation debate, and creative destruction see Philippe Aghion, Céline Antonin, and Simon Bunel, *The Power of Creative Destruction: Economic Upheaval and the Wealth of Nations*, trans. Jodie Cohen-Tanugi (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2021), chap. 6.

78 See Nicholas Diakopoulos, *Automating the News: How Algorithms are Rewriting the Media* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), 147–48.

79 “When visual images could not be easily stored and transmitted, before film, the major medium was print. The print medium generated extraordinarily subtle works—novels, poems, all aimed at creating images in the imagination—using the compressed, bit-parsimonious technology of the written word. The human mind had to supply much of the processing and imagination.” Eli M. Noam, “Next-Generation Content for Next-Generation Networks,” in *Society and the Internet*, ed. Mark Graham and William H. Dutton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 328–29.

80 „Auch die Autorenrolle muss gelernt werden.“ Habermas, „Überlegungen und Hypothesen,“ 489.

tices of social media. In our daily practice we adopt heteroglossia through a hybridisation of idioms of written and spoken language.⁸¹ We create texts combining written language and iconic elements. This is a language change many people embrace.

“Extraordinary Words”

Instead of (by all means plausibly) interpreting present language change from the perspective of cultural conservatism as an instance of regression or decay, people wishing to express themselves on musical matters could embrace the creative potential offered by digital media. Charles Dill and Stephen Rose have pointed out to which extent the evolution of music-related discourse in France and in Germany during the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries was encouraged by a general interest in the cultivation of language. Vernacular languages, as opposed to Latin, then still the language of church and science, were further sharpened and refined as a means for sharing knowledge of musical practices and articulating aesthetic judgements, catering for a growing public seeking orientation through music-related discourse.⁸² In essence, the much criticised “affective politics” of networked digital media,⁸³ their structural propensity to fuel antagonistic utterances and to polarize discourse, corresponds to a pattern that has structured a great part of critical discourse for well over 200 years, from the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns through the disputes between imitation of “outer” versus “inner nature,” “melody” against “harmony,” “Wagnerians” against “Brahmsians,” “British” versus “continental,” “tonal” against “atonal,” up to “romantic” versus “historical” performance practice. Stephen Rose spoke of “the waspish nature of early musical criticism.”⁸⁴ Today, networked digital media offer historically

81 See Jannis Androutsopoulos, “Participatory Culture and Metalinguistic Discourse: Performing and Negotiating German Dialects on YouTube,” in *Discourse 2.0: Language and New Media*, ed. Deborah Tannen and Anna Marie Trester (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 50.

82 See Charles Dill, “Music Criticism in France before the Revolution” (76), and Stephen Rose, “German-Language Music Criticism before 1800” (106), in *The Cambridge History of Music Criticism*, ed. Christopher Dingle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

83 Megan Boler and Elizabeth Davis, “The Affective Politics of the ‘Post-Truth’ Era: Feeling Rules and Networked Subjectivity,” *Emotion, Space and Society* 27 (2018): 76–78.

84 Rose, “German-Language Music Criticism,” 112.

unprecedented structural opportunities for fruitful and unfruitful public debate, and where those media divide, they can also connect and federate.

It was the paradoxical passion of those who wrote reviews of musical performances to express in words that which resisted language through indeterminacy. Whether or not one believed that the essence of music should be *ineffable*, the horizon of what was currently expressible served as a “liminal figure of immanence.” The effort itself to surpass the limit by writing a text constituted the critical subject, just as the perspective of subjectivity was already incorporated in the concept of horizon itself.⁸⁵ While it is possible to perpetuate this effort and experience, the language of the subjective—the language of the self-emancipating subject of history, the language of public oratory, all of which used to be music critics’ preeminent medium—has lost its status of reference point for many users of digital media. Hence music criticism based on arguments—and heroically (and sensually) grappling with the limits of the expressible—has become a language game making use of what J. L. Austin once called “extraordinary words,” not unlike the language games associated with wine tasting or spiritual epiphanies.⁸⁶

What is lost, after accounting for possible exaggerations of retrospective idealisation, merits to be mourned. Eventually, the decomposition of a culture of deliberation or even the public sphere as a whole would endanger much more than just music criticism. However, Lyotard has defined Wittgenstein’s invention of the language game precisely as an endpoint of a historical mourning process as it creates a kind of “legitimation not based on performativity.” It relieves expression and communication from the onus to legitimate what cannot be universally legitimated through language anymore. This is a process of both unlearning and learning. Lyotard concludes: “Most people have lost the nostalgia for the lost narrative.”⁸⁷

Protracted Practices and the Communicative Space of Vital Issues

So does the question of music criticism in the age of networked digital media end up in a wilderness, in an inextricable entanglement of genesis and demise, progress and regression, assertion and oblivion? In the last

85 „als Limesfigur der Immanenz.“ Koschorke, *Die Geschichte des Horizonts*, 49.

86 “What holds of ‘ordinary’ words like ‘red’ or ‘glows’ must also hold of extraordinary words like ‘real’ or ‘exists.” J. L. Austin, P. F. Strawson, and D. R. Cousin, “Symposium: Truth,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 24 (1950): 122.

87 Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, 41.

chapter of the *History of Music Criticism*, Christopher Dingle and Dominic McHugh claim that “music criticism will continue” almost no matter which changes affect its fundamentals and conditions: “Whenever and wherever music is made, in whatever genre, there will be those who wish to discuss, describe and debate it, argue, attack or advocate it, read, reflect and write about it in whatever medium is available.”⁸⁸ This is probably true, and also a bit less than that, a truism. It integrates the psychological motives of music criticism into a cultural system of practices. As long as this system exists, opinions on music will be expressed and published howsoever. As long as there are children learning to play the guitar and the clarinet, as long as singers embody historical anthropologies, as long as someone attends concerts identifying herself with the musicians and their effort, as long as someone contemplates musical artefacts by listening or reading, discourse may follow. Viewed under this light, music criticism will not survive, rather it will continue to be. Music critics writing reviews will become an anthropological symbol just like musicians with their premodern bodily crafted modes of production. The achievements of networked digital media will guarantee the persistence of music criticism as we knew it, provided that the global databases fulfil their promise of storage and retrievability. Music criticism will find its place in the long tail of ideas.

What Dingle and McHugh do not account for is the institutional dimension of music criticism. This is, though, where the problems lie. While a history of music criticism as an institution has yet to be written, Stephen Rose, Mary Sue Morrow, and Charles Dill provide valuable information about the process of institutionalisation in Germany and France until about the year 1800. The overall impression is one of a vibrant, manifold debate, and of an effervescent will to go public with reflections on musical execution, expression, aesthetics, and taste. Morrow, however, has also raised the issue of “continuity and the critical mass of opinion necessary for the formation of a thought collective,”⁸⁹ problematising the fact that most publications encouraging and collecting critical contributions were short-lived. The problem seemed to have been resolved in the twentieth century. By then, music criticism held a secure spot in generalist one-to-many media that purported to cover the universe of topics of general interest. Today, as the emergence of networked digital media is lessening the importance

88 Dingle and McHugh, “Changing Media of Music Criticism,” 705–6.

89 Mary Sue Morrow, *German Music Criticism in the Late Eighteenth Century: Aesthetic Issues in Instrumental Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 20.

of the older generalist media model and contributing to what is perceived as a fragmentation of the public sphere, Morrow's historical question of "continuity and the critical mass of opinion" is inverted. In the eighteenth century, the development of a federating media structure lagged behind the desire for a continuing public debate. Today, technological development may be too rapid to allow emergent media practices to become both common and entrenched.

Can music criticism thrive meaningfully in a fragmented public sphere with no medium to represent music-related discourse relevant for a general public? Does music criticism have to be an institution at all? Of course, it does not—who, after all, should request it? Resorting to the wisdoms of renunciation is always an option. However, certain questions open up one path out of the secular stagnation of the music-related generation of sense. It was the desire of a public to collectively know and discuss which constituted the unity of the multifaceted eighteenth-century reasoning on music, while the development of a federating ecology of media was still under way. The public's music-related-questions were of general interest, as Morrow, Rose, and Dill have shown. They were linked to personal growth and development, the right way of becoming a person of feeling, the right compositions to buy and study now that a fortepiano or a flute had been acquired for one's household. They were also questions about national character, questions of morality and taste. Common interest questions, rather than media, also constitute the discourse space in which Bauman's communication between groups and intellectuals acting as "interpreters" can take place, and sense can be produced along shared axes of relevance.

What are then the common-interest questions raised by music critics today? What new questions are emerging from the current music scenes? Can music be associated with vital issues, issues that bring together people from various walks of life? Can music-related discourse help construct one's singularity just as it served to develop people's subjectivity fifty years ago? What are the questions brought to the fore by social media? What will the questions generated by data analytics look like?

Should all our listening be in vain, should big questions related to music fall silent, the long tail of ideas will continue to offer a place for sumptuous remainders, rearguard battles, and special interest discussions. Should new questions make themselves heard, music criticism will survive, ceasing to continue to be what it was.

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Appendix 1

The Spirit Lost: Music Criticism and the State of Art Music

Peter Uehling (Berlin)

(English translation by Klaus Georg Koch and Alexa Nieschlag)

Why do I still practise my profession as a music critic? Apart from obvious material reasons, I do not know. It is not necessary to exaggerate the question at stake the way music-philosopher Heinz-Klaus Metzger does, claiming the continued existence of humankind depend on us listening more to music from John Cage. However, the impression that serious music seems to be right about nothing anymore does look by all means like an apocalyptic mark on the horizon.

My perplexity is being raised and nourished by three elements. The first is part of the general crisis of education and cultural knowledge which, for its part, is a crisis of the primary text. People do not read any more. Even in university classes students do no longer study historical texts in an aesthetically adequate way. At best these texts deteriorate into information about past states of civilization and ideologies. More likely they do mutate into mere rumour following the fact that only their secondary meanings are being perceived. As far as music is concerned, this process of deterioration is somewhat different in that music is now only perceived in terms of personal pleasure and displeasure.

In both regards the result is the same: the canon disintegrates. The want for entertainment, rehearsed through hundreds of channels, first dissolves the propensity to perceive and then goes on creating petty idiosyncrasies, vulgo “filter bubbles,” that finally become compacted by algorithms.

The second, more specifically musical of the three elements seems to contradict the first one. The quality of professional musical training and of practical skills is increasing, seemingly without any limits. More and more extremely skilled musicians appear on the stage, unhampered by technical difficulties. This has certainly made the work of orchestras more efficient, if we want to overcome the unease brought along by the use of a concept like “efficiency” in the context of the arts.

The effect of such an efficiency unhampered by technical limits is a distinctly strange emptiness. Practically every professional orchestra is now able to adequately perform works like Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* or Alban Berg's *Drei Orchesterstücke*. Virtually every string quartet excels at dissolving the problems of consonance into mellifluous sound. Neither the piano works of Chopin, Liszt, or Rachmaninow nor Bach's pieces for violin solo pose any serious challenge to contemporary soloists. However, if all technical difficulties posed by musical works, by instrumentation or instrumental technique are resolved, then a formerly constitutive "frictional surface" is lacking, or perhaps an intermediate void calling the interpreter's mediation between what used to be utopically technical or technically utopian on the one side, and the meaning of a work on the other. Today, such mediation seems to be no longer necessary since the artwork is becoming entirely realized in its appearance. And yet something is missing. We might call it, boastfully and ineptly at the same time: Spirit.

What is lacking to the instrumentalists, and here I am approaching the last of the three perplexing elements, is the challenge that from the Baroque until the times of Stravinsky and Strauss used to be posed by contemporary music. Instead, a death certificate may be issued confidently for the contemporary music of our days. Contemporary music has disappeared from the public sphere of our concert halls only to be given artificial respiration in the intensive care stations of dedicated festivals. Any influence on the culture of our time has been lost. What is occasionally performed in subscription concerts serves the organisers as evidence they are taking their responsibility for the presence of "serious music," a music in which the very organisers do not believe any more.

There are no more composers left who would be present in both concert halls and specialized festivals. A first group of composers supplies symphony orchestras with dreary sound games whose modesty in terms of instrumental technique proves the fact that no musician and no concert-institution is willing to engage in extended rehearsals. The others have been stranded at conceptual work while striving for novelty in music. "Concept," unfortunately, is usually just another word for "free association," associations that do not require any aesthetic perception because in the end there will be a punchline suitable to be carried home as a certain insight. Here we are back to the general crisis of education and cultural knowledge mentioned before.

Serious music thus does not pose any challenge to the public sphere anymore, and it ceased influencing public discourse productively. It is being

rightly asked why society should spend any more money on this kind of cultural practise.

Making observations like these at a personal age over 50 one is well advised to critically ask oneself whether perceptions are not the result of any *déformation professionnelle* or due to nostalgia. Perhaps the analysis presented above is based on standards and canons valid only 30 or 40 years ago?

To begin with, it isn't plausible either to assume youthful enthusiasm could provide more reliable insight than a thoroughly aged distanced view. And of course music continues to thrill me as a private person—as long as it isn't the music played in concert halls. Even if the parameters of my analysis should be “historical” by now: we are also dealing almost exclusively with historical art forms and historical institutions.

How should we value in this context the nomination of Kirill Petrenko as chief conductor of the Berliner Philharmoniker? Many claimed at the time this was meant as a kind of turn towards “art” after the era of Simon Rattle with its impact mainly on organisational matters. What would, however, “artistic turn” mean? Rattle had delivered his recording of Beethoven's symphonies pretty much in duty bound. Petrenko may be of a different caliber in terms of fanaticism and vivification, but this does not alter the fact that no one is actually longing for a new recording of Beethoven's symphonies. The same can be said about the symphonies of Josef Suk Petrenko is very interested in. It is not wrong to play these compositions but on the other hand playing them is an entirely irrelevant act, just as it doesn't make any difference whether an orchestra does play symphonies of Ralph Vaughan Williams or Bohuslav Martinů. Playing music like these has been an evasive manoeuvre for more than half a century now, just as performing a new work of Jörg Widmann today is an evasive manoeuvre meant to get around postwar modernism whose works are less handy to perform.

This is by no means to claim that our musical life receive a stimulating energetic impulse did music from Boulez, Stockhausen, and Nono regularly appear on our subscription concert programmes. Basically, this music is not performable and out of place on a concert stage, right as it would be the case with music of the Renaissance on the opposite side of history.

The reintroduction of works by Suk, Rachmaninow, Vaughan Williams, and their traditionalist colleagues tells us one thing: music from the twentieth century is by far not as atonal as the Second Viennese School's PR-departments were claiming. And the very transient effect of these restaged compositions is a proof of the fact that the artistic topicality of this concert-hall-music is actually a thing of the past. This out-of-dateness was ob-

scured by the Mahler-renaissance which did for one more time change our ideas about the concert repertoire. Yet Suk and the likes do not dispose of this very potential, and Mahler's has been depleted.

Our concert halls and symphony orchestras have reached the end of the line, and so has a splendid repertoire that went from Beethoven to Strauss. Modernity, which had got its bearings by the celebration of musical autonomy, croaked from that very idea or ideology. However, this idea of autonomy has always been belied by the fact that "autonomous" music did need a demand, a demand for national or highbrow middle-class self-assurance, for noble emotions as well as for scandals. A music free from any demand by listeners, musicians or institutions may be imaginable. Its fate is foreseeable as well. (The same can be said, by the way, of string quartets that have lifted the ideology of autonomy to tremendous heights. They now get broken by the very limited repertoire of always the same compositions by Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms, and Bartók.)

To say it clearly: listening as a form of reception holding the same dignity as reading literary texts and looking at paintings, sculptures, and films has had its place within the concept of autonomy of music, nowhere else. The fact that only few were able to realise this kind of perception in its fullest sense has encumbered what had been called "absolute music" with misled respect and perverted it into those functions of distinction described by Pierre Bourdieu. It may be interesting in this context that the first concert being immediately sold out in the Berliner Philharmoniker's 2022/23 season was the one in which film composer John Williams directed his own works. This may be excused as an exception, and the public in this case was not the usual one. On the other side this programme worked very much the same way the usual symphonic programmes do. Revolving within and around themselves they are speculating on the same effect as the well-known film melodies. Listening on this level does mean to recognise. However, while John Williams is speculating on this effect legitimately, based also on the leitmotiv-effect accompanying a film, in the case of a Beethoven symphony recognition as a receptive attitude does mean a distortion of the composed matter. Here recognition of musical elements would have to be reflected upon their function in the course of the musical process. In other words: the emotional effect of recognition should be accompanied by perceptive insight.

Whereas in "absolute music" a historically unique high ground may have been reached, the according symphonic and chamber music is not the only

paradigm, and the contemplative combined with analytic listening is not the only valid reception mode. Looking at opera and music theatre the situation does not appear entirely daunting. Being linked with action on the stage, opera is at least free from the lie of autonomy. For the moment, German *Regietheater* is still rather self-referential but it can be expected that the mostly sacrosanct orders codified in the scores will be disbanded, and this is going to release a new boost of creativity allowing for new insights into the repertoire. Of course this prospect may be a frightening one as well.

First and foremost, the human being that sings will remain an unpredictable entity of ineradicable individuality and limited perfectibility, as opposed to the drilled instrumentalist. Her and his charisma extends as far as into a form in which reception and production mingle with each other: choral singing. Certainly, in this realm, too, pseudo-expert bigotry may be cultivated. However, in many cases choirs do create a bond with tradition which can then be carried forward into our present by committed choirmasters. There are, thus, semiprofessional choirs of astonishing musical quality singing surprisingly contemporary programmes. Even if their concept of contemporary music may comprise music different from the one performed by specialised formations for contemporary—“*Neue*”—music, they are connected to newer tendencies proclaiming the end of the development of musical material and the use of music that is already present. It is understood that due to the necessarily longer production cycles these semiprofessional choirs get into closer contact with their compositions, compared to specialised formations scheduling only one and a half rehearsal-units for a first release. Thanks already to the time invested, these works acquire more value than any of the world premieres produced by Ensemble modern. Perhaps “value” in this case is no longer attributed based on aspects of “autonomy” but this does only stress what music is more than anything else: a social life event.

How does now music criticism relate to all this, given that the genre did evolve alongside the ideology of autonomous music? Whereas music criticism in the perspective of autonomous music tried to make the heard understandable to the non-expert citizen, contemporary music critics will notice that they are writing for readers who are not driven by the desire to get music explained. Often enough they tediously remark the critic must have attended a different concert than their one, so the question may be raised: Why someone seemingly sure of their judgements do read a review at all?

Music criticism does not want to “know it better.” Instead, it wants to widen readers’ aesthetic criteria and perspectives. In this sense, music

criticism does not occupy any position of authority one might consider as “microaggressive.” Whoever does attribute authoritarianism to it does not want to learn anything other than what he or she does—or does not—know. In other words, rejecting the mission of music criticism would mean abandoning the “culture of discourse” for a “culture of dispositions.” According to Markus Metz and Georg Seeßlen,¹ in this identity-oriented culture the much-praised ambiguities distinguishing a “culture of discourse” do vanish.

Admittedly, it is no use stemming oneself against change in the field of aesthetics as if one could clamorously call back former states of things. Naming again and again the powers that unmade the past, lamenting the consequences would, in the long run, be tedious and insubstantial. On the other side, who would claim in earnest that advertising ever fresher virtuoso-meat might be anything more than to commercially exploit new faces? The few old virtuosos left aren't being dethroned by the young ones. The contrary is the case: Martha Argerich and Daniel Barenboim, to make two examples, seem to continue to ascend Mount Olympus, all the more so compared to the short-lived careers of their young counterparts. The farcicality of the business does, however, concern both camps. The felicitations and good wishes accompanying the emergence of new talents onto the scene is no less ridiculous than the apotheosis of a virtuoso featuring an absurdly shrunk repertoire or a conductor lacking any concept of interpretation that transcends brilliant, nineteenth-century-style “witchcraft.” Both Argerich and Barenboim, differently from what can be supposed of the young virtuosos, still do have an idea of what “art” is, unfortunately rendering obvious the degree of helplessness a concept acquires once it has fallen out of time.

What is then left to be written? It seems astonishing and hardly understandable any longer which remarkable degree of status music criticism once could have and did have. In our days, the big questions of society pose themselves more immediately and urgently and perhaps request solutions in a more concrete way. This does change the climate not only for aesthetic reception but also for (re-)production. Every production must prove its relevance, on the lowest level (John Williams) its entertainment value, on a slightly higher level its societal wokeness (female composers, music forbidden by the Nazi regime etc.). But even if it may seem hard: music criticism

¹ Markus Metz, Georg Seeßlen, *Apokalypse & Karneval. Neoliberalismus: Next Level* (Berlin: Bertz + Fischer, 2022), 8.

does not only have to make up the balance of what has been lost and long for better times.

Had it once to decipher what “autonomous art” did tell about and tell to society, the task is nowadays to explain in which ways socially-oriented artistic production might still be emphatically art. Back then, as well as today, the challenge is to sensitise and enhance aesthetic perception thus relating and linking art and world.

Warum ich meinen Beruf als Musikkritiker noch ausübe – von den offensichtlichen materiellen Gründen abgesehen –, weiß ich nicht. Man muss nicht gleich übertreiben wie der Musikphilosoph Heinz-Klaus Metzger, der behauptet hat, der Weiterbestand der menschlichen Zivilisation hinge davon ab, dass wir mehr Musik von John Cage hören. Aber dass es nun in der ernsten Musik tatsächlich um gar nichts mehr zu gehen scheint, hat durchaus etwas von einem apokalyptischen Zeichen am Horizont.

Drei Momente sind es, die meine Ratlosigkeit verursachen und nähren: Das erste bewegt sich im Rahmen der allgemeinen Bildungskrise, die eine Krise des primären Textes ist. Es wird nicht mehr gelesen, auch im Studium werden historische Texte nicht mehr in ästhetisch adäquater Art und Weise rezipiert, sie verkommen bestenfalls zu Informationen über vergangene Ideologien und Zivilisationsstände, wenn sie nicht zum Gerücht werden, weil nur noch der sekundäre Abhub wahrgenommen wird. In der Musik ist dieser Degenerationsprozess anders gelagert, indem sie nur noch einem krud-individuellen Ge- oder Missfallen nach wahrgenommen wird. Das Ergebnis ist in beiden Fällen das Gleiche: Der Kanon zerfällt, weil das durch hundert Kanäle eingeübte Unterhaltungsbedürfnis zuerst die Rezeptionsbereitschaft zersetzt und dann belanglose Idiosynkrasien – vulgo Filterbubbles – schafft, die der Algorithmus weiter verfestigt.

Das zweite Moment scheint dem ersten zu widersprechen und ist musikspezifischer: Die Qualität der Musiker-Ausbildung verbessert sich in technischer Hinsicht anscheinend ohne Grenzen. Immer mehr technisch höchstqualifizierte Musiker erscheinen auf der Bildfläche, für die es keine Schwierigkeiten mehr zu geben scheint. Das hat die Arbeit der Orchester effizienter gemacht. Vom Unbehagen, im Zusammenhang mit Künsten von „Effizienz“ zu sprechen, abgesehen, entsteht dadurch ein ganz seltsames Vakuum. Wenn die technischen Schwierigkeiten eines Werks (wie des „Sacre du Printemps“ oder der Drei Orchesterstücke von Berg), einer Be-

setzung (alle Streichquartette sind mittlerweile in der Lage, die klanglichen Probleme in reinen Wohllaut aufzulösen) oder eines Instruments (weder die Klavierwerke von Chopin, Liszt oder Rachmaninow noch die Violin-Soli von Bach bereiten heutigen Solisten ernsthafte Probleme) gelöst sind, dann fehlt eine Reibungsfläche, in die früher gewissermaßen der Interpret einsprang, um zwischen dem technisch Utopischen und dem Sinn eines Werks zu vermitteln. Heute ist derlei Vermittlung nicht nötig, wenn sich das Kunstwerk restlos in der Erscheinung realisiert – aber irgendwas fehlt dann doch; man könnte so großspurig wie unbeholfen sagen: der Geist.

Was den Instrumentalisten fehlt – und damit komme ich zum dritten Moment – ist die Herausforderung, wie sie in der Zeit vom Barock bis zu Strawinsky und Strauss die jeweils neue Musik darstellte. Unserer heutigen neuen Musik jedoch kann man getrost einen Totenschein ausstellen. Aus der Öffentlichkeit der Konzertsäle ist sie verschwunden und wird auf den Intensivstationen der Festivals künstlich beatmet. Einen Einfluss auf die Kultur hat sie nicht mehr. Was im Abonnement gelegentlich erklingt, dient dem Veranstalter zum Nachweis seiner Verantwortung für eine Gegenwart der „ernsten Musik“, an die er selbst nicht glaubt. Es gibt keine Komponisten mehr, die zugleich auf Festivals und im Konzertsaal präsent sind. Die einen beliefern die Sinfonieorchester mit öde zu hörenden Klangspielen, deren technische Anspruchslosigkeit spiegelt, dass sich kein Musiker und keine Konzert-Institution wirklich dafür mit verstärktem Probenaufwand engagieren will. Die anderen sind auf der Suche nach dem Neuen beim Konzept gelandet, und „Konzept“ ist in der Regel nur ein anderes Wort für freie Assoziationen, die, und damit schließt sich der Kreis zur Bildungskrise, keinerlei ästhetische Wahrnehmung erfordern, weil sich am Ende eine Pointe finden wird, die dem Hörer als eindeutige und gesicherte Erkenntnis auf den Heimweg mitgegeben wird.

Die „ernste Musik“ stellt somit für die Öffentlichkeit keine Herausforderung mehr dar und wirkt daher nicht mehr produktiv in den Diskurs herein – zurecht wird daher immer vernehmlicher gefagt, warum man sich derlei Institutionen überhaupt noch leisten will. Wenn man so etwas als Mensch über 50 wahrnimmt, muss man sich immer skeptisch fragen lassen, ob man den Täuschungen einer *déformation professionnelle* oder gar denen einer subjektiven Nostalgie unterliegt, ob man eventuell nach den Parametern von vor 30 oder gar 40 Jahren bewertet. Zunächst ist nicht einzusehen, warum jugendliche Begeisterung ein wahreres Bild der Verhältnisse transportieren soll als eine über die Jahre gewonnene Distanz; und natürlich begeistert mich privat Musik noch immer und tendenziell immer

mehr (allerdings kaum noch die Musik der Konzertsäle). Und selbst wenn die Parameter der Bewertung historische sind: wir sprechen ja auch mittlerweile ausschließlich über historische Kunstformen und Institutionen. Wie ist zum Beispiel die Besetzung des Chefdirigenten der Berliner Philharmoniker mit Kirill Petrenko zu bewerten? Es war zu lesen: Nach der vor allem in organisatorischer Hinsicht bedeutsamen Zeit mit Simon Rattle soll es jetzt wieder um die Kunst gehen. Was soll das genau heißen? Schon Rattle hat seine Beethoven-Gesamteinspielung eher pflichtschuldig abgeliefert. Petrenko mag da ein anderes Kaliber an Fanatismus und Belebung sein – aber das hilft ja nicht darüber hinweg, dass niemand mehr wirklich auf eine neue Beethoven-Gesamteinspielung wartet. Genauso wenig wartet man allerdings auf die Symphonien von Josef Suk, für die sich Petrenko interessiert. Es ist nicht verkehrt, diese Stücke zu spielen, aber irgendwie ist es auch vollkommen egal, ebenso wie es keinen Unterschied macht, ob man die Symphonien von Ralph Vaughan Williams oder Bohuslav Martinů spielt oder nicht spielt: Das sind seit mehr als einem halben Jahrhundert Ausweichmanöver vor der Nachkriegsmoderne, die eben nicht so flott aufzuführen ist wie ein neues Werk von Jörg Widmann.

Ich möchte nun keineswegs behaupten, dass das Musikleben einen belebenden Energiestoß empfinde, wenn die Musik von Boulez, Stockhausen und Nono regelmäßig auf den Spielplänen des Abonnements erschiene, denn im Grunde ist diese Musik im Konzertsaal bereits so fehl am Platz – und oft gar nicht aufführbar –, wie es auf der anderen Seite der Geschichte die Musik der Renaissance wäre. Die Wiederaufführung von Suk, Rachmaninow, Vaughan Williams und ihrer traditionalistischen Kollegen lehrt eines: Das 20. Jahrhundert war längst nicht so atonal, wie es die PR-Abteilungen der Wiener Schule behaupteten. Und die sehr vorübergehende Wirkung dieser Wiederaufführungen ist der Beleg, dass die künstlerische Aktualität der Konzertsaal-Musik tatsächlich vorbei ist. Das wurde über ihre Zeit hinaus durch die Mahler-Renaissance verdeckt, die noch einmal unsere Begriffe des Repertoires verändert hat. Aber Suk und die anderen haben dieses Potenzial nicht, und das Mahlers ist ausgeschlachtet.

Die Konzertsäle, die Sinfonieorchester sind am Ende und mit ihnen ein stolzes Repertoire von Beethoven bis Strauss sowie eine Moderne, die sich an der hier zelebrierten Idee autonomer Musik orientiert hat und an dieser Idee oder Ideologie krepitiert ist: Dass auch die „autonome“ Musik eine Nachfrage braucht – nach nationaler oder bildungsbürgerlicher Selbstwertversicherung, nach hehren Gefühlen, aber auch nach Skandalen – hat ihre Autonomie immer Lügen gestraft. Eine wirklich ohne jeden Bedarf von

Hörern, Institutionen oder Musikern hergestellte Musik ist vielleicht vorstellbar – aber ihr Schicksal ist absehbar. (Ähnliches gilt übrigens auch für das Streichquartett, das diese Autonomie-Ideologie in ungeahnte Höhen gesteigert hat. Die Ensembles gehen kaputt am ewig gleichen, sehr kleinen Repertoire von Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms und Bartók.) Um es deutlich zu sagen: Hören als Rezeptionsform gleicher Dignität wie Lesen und Sehen hat hier und nirgends sonst seinen Ort gehabt. Dass sie nur den wenigsten wirklich in vollster Form möglich war, hat das, was man „absolute“ Musik nannte, immer schon mit falschem Respekt belastet und sie vielleicht zu jenen Distinktionsfunktionen pervertiert, die Pierre Bourdieu beschrieben hat. In der Saison 22/23 der Berliner Philharmoniker war übrigens das erste, sofort ausverkaufte Konzert jenes, in dem der Filmkomponist John Williams eigene Werke dirigierte. Man mag das als Ausnahme entschuldigen, und das Publikum war auch nicht dasselbe wie sonst. Aber es war auch im Betragen kein grundsätzlich anderes, und natürlich spekuliert die Rotation des immer gleichen symphonischen Repertoires auf den gleichen Effekt wie die sattsam bekannten Filmmelodien: Hören ist auf dieser Stufe Wiedererkennen. Während John Williams indes auf diesen Effekt spekuliert – schon aufgrund der leitmotivischen Verwendung im Film –, bedeutet er in einer Beethoven-Symphonie eine Verzerrung der komponierten Sache: Hier ist beim Wiedererkennen von Material immer dessen Funktion im Verlauf mitzubedenken, der emotionale Effekt des Erkennens soll begleitet werden von einer Erkenntnis.

Aber mag in der „absoluten Musik“ auch eine historisch einzigartige Höhe des Komponierens erreicht sein, so ist dennoch die symphonische und Kammermusik bei weitem nicht die einzige und das kontemplative Hören nicht der einzig gültige Rezeptionsmodus. Schauen wir in die Oper, so sieht die Sache schon nicht ganz so hoffnungslos aus. Sie ist zumindest von der Autonomie-Lüge befreit, indem sie sich mehr oder weniger eng mit einer Bühnenhandlung verbindet. Zwar dreht sich das Regie-Theater immer mehr um sich selbst, aber es ist abzusehen, dass die meist noch sakrosankten, von der Partitur vorgegebenen Ordnungen künftig aufgelöst werden, was einen gewaltigen Kreativitätsschub auslösen dürfte, der endlich wahrhaft neue Ansichten des Repertoires erlaubt – davor kann man natürlich auch Angst haben.

Vor allem ist der singende Mensch im Unterschied zum gedrillten Instrumentalisten noch immer eine unberechenbare Instanz von begrenzter Perfektibilität und unausrottbarer Individualität. Seine Ausstrahlung reicht hinein bis in jene Form, in der sich Rezeption und Produktion mischen, in

den Chorgesang. Dass sich in Chören auch eine Form von pseudoexperte-nhafter Borniertheit kultivieren kann, ist richtig. Allerdings entsteht hier eine Verbundenheit mit einer Tradition, die von einigen Chorleitern durch-aus engagiert auch in die Gegenwart geführt werden kann. Es gibt Laien- und semiprofessionelle Chöre von erstaunlicher musikalischer Qualität, die erstaunlich zeitgenössische Programme singen und dabei natürlich unter „zeitgenössischer Musik“ etwas anderes begreifen als die Spezialensembles für neue Musik, die aber doch mit neueren Tendenzen – dem erklärten Ende weiterer Materialerweiterung, dem Arbeiten mit vorhandener Mu-sik – erstaunlich eng zusammenhängen. Und dass solche Chöre durch die zwangsläufig längere Arbeit an solchen Projekten enger mit den Stücken in Verbindung treten als Profiensembles, die für eine Uraufführung andert-halb Proben ansetzen, versteht sich von selbst: Schon durch die investierte Zeit in die Erarbeitung eines neuen Werks erhält dieses Werk einen höhe-ren „Wert“ als eine von zig Uraufführungen, die etwa die Musiker des En-semble modern im Jahr spielen. „Wert“ wird hier nun vielleicht nicht mehr aus „autonomen“ Gesichtspunkten heraus zugeschrieben. Aber das betont nur, was Musik vor allem ist: eine soziale Angelegenheit.

Wie verhält sich nun Musikkritik dazu, die ja parallel zur Autonomie-Ideologie entstanden ist und immer die Aufgabe hatte, das Gehörte für den Bürger, der wenig davon verstand, aufzuschlüsseln? Dabei bemerkt man schnell, dass man oft genug für Leser schreibt, die sich gar nichts aufschlüs-seln lassen wollen, sondern öde bemerken, man hätte offenbar ein ande-res Konzert besucht als sie. Von Kritikerseite aus wäre zu fragen, warum jemand, der sich seines Urteils offenbar sicher ist, dann überhaupt eine Kritik liest? Kritik will nicht besserwissen, sondern die Kriterien und Pers-pektiven des Lesers erweitern. In diesem Sinne bezieht sie den Standpunkt einer Autorität, den man als „mikroaggressiv“ empfinden kann – aber wer so empfindet, will wirklich gar nichts mehr wissen, sondern nur noch seine Identität (vulgo: Unbildung) verteidigen, man befindet sich nicht mehr in einer „Kultur des Diskurses“, sondern in einer „Kultur des Dispositionen“ (Markus Metz/Georg Seeßlen: *Apokalypse & Karneval*, Berlin 2022, S. 8). Und es ist unverständlich, warum eine im Punktesystem und diskursfrei dargestellte Empfehlung weniger autoritär sein soll.

Allerdings bringt es nichts, sich einer Veränderung des ästhetischen Fel-des entgegenzustellen, als könnte man den vorigen Zustand herbeizetern. Die Gewalten, die ihn beseitigt haben, immer wieder zu benennen und de-ren Wirkungen zu beklagen, wäre auf die Dauer lästig und kraftlos. Dass die Ausrufung immer wieder neuen Virtuosen-Frischfleischs mehr wäre

als die kommerzielle Ausschlichtung neuer Gesichter – wer wollte derlei im Ernst behaupten? Die wenigen Alten, die noch übrig sind, werden von den Jungen keineswegs entthront, im Gegenteil: Martha Argerich und Daniel Barenboim entrücken angesichts der kurzfristigen Karrieren der Jugend in nachgerade olympische Sphären. Die Lachhaftigkeit des Betriebs steckt indes beide Lager an, die Zukunftsbeschwörung, mit der das Talent in den Ring geschickt wird, ist nicht weniger lächerlich als die Apotheose einer Pianistin mit absurd zusammengeschrumpften Repertoire und die eines Dirigenten, der keinen Begriff von Interpretation zu haben scheint, der über genialische Magie à la 19. Jahrhundert hinausreicht. Dass beide noch einen Begriff davon haben, was Kunst ist – womit bei den Jüngeren kaum noch zu rechnen ist –, zeigt, dass so ein Begriff leider auch hilflos wird, wenn er aus der Zeit fällt.

Was also bleibt zu schreiben übrig? Man wundert sich heute fast und versteht kaum noch, welchen Status Musikkritik einmal hatte, haben konnte. Die gesellschaftlichen Fragen stellen sich heute unmittelbarer, drängender und verlangen vielleicht auch konkreter nach Lösung. Derlei verändert das Klima nicht nur der Rezeption, sondern auch der (Re-) Produktion. Alles muss seine Relevanz nachweisen, auf der untersten Ebene (John Williams) seinen Unterhaltungswert, auf einer kaum höheren seine gesellschaftliche Wokeness (Komponistinnen, von den Nazis verbotene Musik usw.).

Auch wenn es schwerfällt: Musikkritik hat hier nicht nur die Verluste zu bilanzieren und sich nach besseren Zeiten zu sehnen. Hatte sie damals zu dechiffrieren, was an der „autonomen“ Kunst von der Gesellschaft sprach, so heute, was an der sozial orientierten Kunst noch im emphatischen Sinne Kunst sein könnte. Damals wie heute geht es darum, die ästhetische Wahrnehmung zu sensibilisieren und zu bereichern und damit Kunst und Welt aufeinander zu beziehen.

Appendix 2

From Paper to the Web: The Evolution of French-Language Commentary on World Music in the Specialized Press, from the 1990s to the Present Day

Benjamin MiNiMuM, in collaboration with Angèle Cossée*
(English Translation by Helen Tooke)

French press specializing in musical diversity, “world music,” first made its appearance in the 1990s. Over the past 30 years, following the emergence of the Internet, the major issues and the debate surrounding this music have evolved a great deal. A brief history of the media leaders in the sector, a broad outline of the development of technologies and practices in cyberspace and an idea as to how they were viewed by the music industry will allow us to better understand why.

Specialized Printed Press

At the end of the 1990s, the French music press was flourishing. One or more magazines were dedicated to each stylistic category, and there were even publications on each family of instruments, which easily gained themselves a loyal readership. The music industry was doing well, it was not tight-fisted with its advertising investments and did not hesitate to organize hugely expensive press trips to music events, which provided those involved with ample media coverage to promote all the news about their flagship artists.

A rather vague and eclectic category, World Music is neither a style nor an aesthetic.¹ It embraces a wide variety of musical expressions: from her-

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¹ See the dossier published in 1996 by the ethnomusicology workshops (*Ateliers d'ethno-*

itage to contemporary, rural to urban, sacred to secular, intimate to collective. During the last decade of the twentieth century, after the successful productions of the Real World label, launched by Peter Gabriel, and the Cuban supergroups' Buena Vista Social Club, these musical genres began to count for something in the commercial landscape, arousing growing interest from music lovers and professionals.

The specialized press still provides a reference for music fans. A broad knowledge of societies, their histories and cultures, is required to fully comprehend multicultural music. Knowledge acquired in the field or through the consultation of reference works is supplemented by the critical thinking and writing skills of the journalists, who often specialize in one particular music style or region of the world.

Little by little, specialized publications began to appear in France (traditional European music and dances have had a reference magazine since 1988). *Trad'Mag* offered articles, reviews, and above all an almost exhaustive agenda of concerts, festivals, and traditional dance and other events. *Trad'Mag* was set up and run by enthusiasts, mostly volunteers, and opened up to non-European music in the early 1990s.

In Switzerland, the pioneer was *Swiss Vibes*. This local magazine first came out in 1991 and extended its influence to France the following year. *Swiss Vibes* is devoted to black music (funk, soul, jazz ...) and "world music." It was published every two months before becoming monthly in 1998. To be noted is the outstanding quality of its texts, its photos, and its model.

World magazine, directed by a music journalist from *Libération*, appeared in March 1998, and ran for one year before resuming regular publication from 2003 to 2005.

In the spring of 1990, entertainment and record entrepreneurs and journalists founded the association Zone Franche,² with the aim of federating all those involved in the music of the French-speaking world, a mission that it still pursues today by readjusting its objectives in the light of the various developments in society and the professional sector.

As regards the construction of a professional database, the first works were of an editorial nature. In 1991, *Sans Visa*, the first Guide to Living

musicologie) in Geneva, dealing in particular with the issues and enquiry surrounding the collisions between traditional music and urban music and world music: "Nouveaux enjeux," *Cahiers de musiques traditionnelles/Cahiers d'ethnomusicologie* 9 (1996), <https://journals.openedition.org/ethnomusicologie/1042>.

² <https://www.zonefranche.com>.

Music in the French-speaking world, was released.³ In 1992, the quarterly newsletter, *Visa Permanent*, was sent to its members by post. In 1993, Zone Franche adapted its business directory to a Minitel service. This typically French system of alphanumeric data exchanges, without images or sounds, preceded the use of the Internet on the territory. Minitel, which was available from 1980 to 2012, loaned and then rented to the user or provided free access in post offices. It was operated by means of a screen/keyboard terminal connected to the telephone network and offered access to the telephone directory, messaging, and mail order services.

Faced with the evolution of the World Wide Web, the Zone Franche association launched the first version of its website in 1995. This was also the year when the second *Sans Visa* guide came out, delivering a very broad professional base and offering a real mine of information on artists, events, and aesthetics related to non-European music. Zone Franche celebrated its thirtieth anniversary in September 2021. We will return to its evolution further on.

Specialized Editorial Sites

The end of the last decade of the twentieth century also saw the appearance of the first music websites designed for publishing purposes. In 1997, a couple of journalists of Algerian origin based in France, launched PlaNet DZ, a website that echoes the culture of their country and has a lot of space for music. The following year Radio France Internationale created RFI Musique, where articles devoted to French and international music news can be found.⁴

On March 21, 1998, the multimedia design studio Mondorondo launched Mondomix.org, the first French-language site entirely dedicated to traditional and contemporary music. Mondomix grew out of the realization that it was relevant to promote music from all five continents on the global network; its contributors were a mix of cyberspace adventurers and specialized journalists, mostly from the world of the printed press.

At the end of the 1990s, editorial development on the Internet was not yet standardized in its conception or in the way it presented content. This

³ *Sans visa: le guide des musiques vivantes de l'espace francophone*, ed. Centre d'information du rock et des variétés and Zone franche (Paris: CIR, 1991).

⁴ <https://musique.rfi.fr/>.

means of presenting, recommending, and sharing music was rejected by the major groups of the music industry, who failed to understand its intricacies and functions, and avoided it like the plague. In 1999, the Napster software, which allowed the free exchange of good quality digital music files between individuals (peer-to-peer), escaped the control of its rights holders, who equated this practice with piracy.⁵ The big record companies fought Napster fiercely and, in 2001, succeeded in closing down its Peer-to-Peer service. At that time, they refused to collaborate with the parties involved in music promotion on the Internet.

Although imagination was then the ruling power among site and content designers, these were, however, held back by the technical limitations of the technological and communications environment. Connections were then made via a modem which transformed digital information into analog data so it could circulate on narrowband using the telephone network. Only texts and low-definition visuals could be published at the time. However, in 1995, a Seattle-based company made the RealAudio software available: this allowed music and videos to be streamed and listened to.⁶ From then on, multimedia elements and, in particular, video were inseparable from musical discourse on the web.

The Mondomix Adventure

It was in this environment and with this technology that the Mondomix team evolved. The site offered new content on a weekly basis, while gradually building a database of artists that would become referential. There were record reviews, portraits, and editorials, often commissioned because the interest in these aesthetics of otherness goes hand in hand with social and political enquiry. In reaction to current events, these could reflect, for example, questions about postcolonialism or the lack of ethnic diversity in the French political class, observations on the role of the Internet in the fight against dictatorships, or the attempts of the powers to control the use of the global network.

In addition, each week a newsletter promoted its content and provided distilled additional information on those musical genres that did not appear on the site. The Mondomix journalists were committed to disseminat-

5 <https://lu.napster.com>.

6 <http://www.real.com>.

Fig. 2 Homepage of Mandomix.com (October 17, 2011)

ing reliable information, collected at the source by meeting the artists, via press releases or targeted research, which they wrote by carefully working the substance, polishing the form, and injecting their own enthusiasm.

Ignored by the big players, with the notable exception of Virgin, which still distributes the Real World label, Mandomix reported on the musical life of independent artists and selected concert halls and festivals with which they gradually created partnerships. In January 1999, at the Cabaret Sauvage (Paris), Mandomix offered a daily multimedia follow-up of the Femmes d'Algérie festival, which presented cultures and highly talented artists, threatened in their own country by radical Islamist movements. During the festival, the Mandomix journalists broadcast a daily report on evening events, excerpts from concerts and audio interviews, as well as photographs taken on the spot.

This webcast was followed by French and Algerian Internet users, whose enthusiasm was catching. The initiative also attracted other festivals which,

in turn, commissioned similar performances in exchange for visibility. This activity contributed to the reputation of the media, which soon offered original videos too.⁷ Mondomix did not then directly generate revenue, but the mastery of new technologies and the Internet environment thus deployed brought business to the in-house multimedia creation studio.

In 2003, Mondomix also became a paper magazine, distributed free of charge in France through a network of cafés and cultural spaces or whenever partnership events took place. This new venture balanced its activities financially through the sale of spaces. As advertising prospects are based on the choices of the editorial staff and the proposals from advertisers are first validated by the former before being accepted, the team managed to ensure that the advertisers' interests did not interfere with the editorial line, which hinged on the artistic, ethical, and historical qualities of the subjects and the monitoring of new trends and aesthetic movements. The magazine attracted the collaboration of recognized journalists but also a new generation that included many talented authors. As the articles were remunerated, the editorial staff could ask its collaborators for precision in their search for information and the style of their papers, which were didactic, as well as sourced and committed through the convictions of their authors.

A complementary synergy started to develop between paper magazines and the Internet. The writings in the magazine were echoed and amplified by multimedia elements that could be consulted online. The creation of this widely circulated paper magazine, distributed throughout France, ended up attracting all the players in the sector. The website that became *mondomix.com* then had an English version and an embryonic Spanish version that allowed it to expand its audience of enthusiasts, amateurs and professionals, its partners, and its fields of investigation in Europe and other continents (Africa, South America, and Asia).

The popularity of the medium grew, but advertising revenues only partially managed to cover the expenses and salaries of the team which included several divisions, (writing, multimedia development, partnerships, and an advertising department).⁸ The difficulty of finding a stable economic model in a changing environment remained, impelling the company to increase its skills and to multiply ancillary services (technological or expert

7 See the Mondomix YouTube page at <https://www.youtube.com/c/mondomix>.

8 In 2011 the site had 30000 individual visitors per month, and in 2013 the magazine ran 50000 copies.

advice, film creations, books and compilations etc.). These missions were most often disconnected from the editorial logic, with the exception of cultural objectives which were an extension of the medium's commitments.

The Turning Point in the Noughties

Record sales began to decline in 2003, which signaled a change in the way subscribers were listening. This crisis, which worsened over the years, had a direct impact on the health of the music press. Advertising investments were becoming more cautious and increasingly conditional on editorial counterparts.⁹ In 2005, *World Magazine* ceased publication. In 2008 a new title, *World Sound*, arrived in the newsstands but it ran for only three years. In 2013, 14 years after its creation, *Vibration* filed for bankruptcy. In the summer of 2015, *Mondomix* ceased its activities. On July 31, 2017, *Trad'Mag* was officially placed in receivership.

From then on, the commentary on and presentation of multicultural music no longer had regular and dedicated critical support. The only sources of information were rare radio broadcasts, the number and recurrence of which were decreasing, and a few rare articles in the general press.

The Internet was no longer the experimental field that it had been at the end of the 1990s. The spirit of adventure had given way to the spirit of commercial competition, which imposed shorter and shorter timing for the dissemination of information, plus a greater number of publications. The response to these needs for quantity and speed of reaction often led to a decline in editorial quality and to neglect during the process of source checking.

With the evolution of technologies, the way music was accessed on the Internet also changed a great deal.¹⁰ In the early 2000s, many platforms for selling mp3s online appeared, but this model did not take off and, in the middle of the decade, streaming gradually prevailed. The general public gradually lost the habit of paying for the music they listened to, preferring

9 See the article from the Media Observatory *Action – Critique – Média (Acrimed)*: Émilie Laystary, “La presse musicale en mal de boussole éditoriale et de modèle économique,” *Acrimed*, February 14, 2014, <https://www.acrimed.org/La-presse-musicale-en-mal-de-boussole-editoriale-et-de-modele-economique>.

10 See Gilles Rettel, “Musique et Internet,” *Bulletin des bibliothèques de France* 47, no. 2 (2002): 45–50.

to invest in a subscription to access all the music without owning it, rather than paying for each song or album.

On the other hand, an increasing amount of music became available on online video platforms such as YouTube or Dailymotion. On these sites, information about the music is very limited. Advice on what to listen to is increasingly entrusted to sophisticated algorithms that make proposals based on the habits of users or music with the same tags—a series of generic keywords. Some rare platforms, such as Qobuz, offer their subscribers an editorial environment to relocate music in its historical context, through thematic texts or album reviews, which are generally positive and produced to complement the most visible projects. The mission of these sites is primarily of a commercial nature.

In 2017, *Pan African Music* was established within the fold of Idol, a digital distributor for independent music which provides many labels for streaming sites.¹¹ Led by a cultivated and competent editor-in-chief from Radio France, *PAM* offers quality and precise content.¹² It is written with care, by specialized authors. But as its name suggests, its exploratory field is limited to Afro-descendant music from the diaspora or the African continent.

Around that time, other independent web media were emerging and offering interesting content regarding the latest news on African music (Afrisson,¹³ Afrik Musique),¹⁴ the Maghreb and the Middle East (OnOrient),¹⁵ tropical music (Tropicalités)¹⁶ and so on.

The former editor-in-chief of *Trad'Mag* launched 5 planètes,¹⁷ while the online magazine 4'33 wondered whether, independently of style, music could be ecological.¹⁸ This ethical concern often intersects with diversity.

On the other hand, giving rise to a more personal, even intimate, form of communication, social networks have become a new source of musical discoveries and comments. Posts on these topics come either from professionals close to one or more artists, who most often present a project or event succinctly, or else from individuals who vent their feelings whilst rarely

11 <https://idol.io/fr>.

12 <https://pan-african-music.com>.

13 <https://www.afrisson.com>.

14 <https://www.afrik-musique.com>.

15 <https://onorient.com>.

16 <https://tropicalites.world>.

17 <https://www.5planetes.com>.

18 <https://www.4-33mag.com>.



Fig. 3 Still frame from the AuxSons.com presentation video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6QirpOmOw>

caring about proffering educational components. Social networks have allowed many artists to address their audiences directly, and their projects to exist and be disseminated without necessarily attracting the attention of the press, who have traditionally served as an intermediary between artists and their audience. However, using this interesting promotional tool requires learning to master its codes.

Although their future was unclear when they were created, social networks have now become, above all, vast commercial enterprises. The direct link between the artist and the public is increasingly biased by the selection made by algorithms and by advertising campaigns. Finally, networks follow a logic similar to that of streaming platforms, which promote concentration: the larger the account, the more visible it will be. This logic means devoting amounts of time and financial resources that are not within everyone's reach.

Towards a New Model: #AuxSons, Collaborative and Militant Web Media

Zone Franche was created in 1990 on the associative model whereby the Administrative Committee is regularly renewed by members' vote. Now the organizations involved number over 180, together representing all the trades of the sector (festivals, halls, labels and publishers, artists' representatives, media, cultural associations, markets...) and the heterogene-

ous aesthetics, heritage, innovations, and philosophies that make up world music. The association owes its longevity to the ability of its members to unite around transversal issues and values relating to the defense of musical diversity, the promotion of aesthetics open to the discovery and recognition of multiple cultural identities, and the dialogue between them: a happy “creoleness.” It also owes this longevity to the structuring and development of an economic sector in France around this music, thanks to the existing links with developing countries and the presence on our soil of diasporas from migratory waves, to the appetite of audiences for this music and to the progressive recognition of professional and public partners. And it owes it perhaps, above all, to the impetus of creativity, commitment, and the ability of artists, producers, and presenters to work with mutual understanding for over thirty years.

Zone Franche energizes and concretely supports the projects of its members and remains attentive to any new problems they may encounter. In 2009, Zone Franche set up the Visa Artists Committee, to provide concrete solutions to the growing difficulties related to the granting of visas encountered by professional bodies in the music sector who were working at an international level. In 2019, faced with the continuous decline in media presence of diversity aesthetics, the Zone Franche association decided to launch AuxSons.com.¹⁹ With its innovative, creative, and militant spirit based on solidarity, AuxSons.com is both a participatory platform open to all and an editorialized medium presenting content entrusted to the care of journalists, researchers, musicologists, local agents, and artists.

A Collaborative Platform

AuxSons.com is a tool at the service of artists and professionals, to enhance the dissemination of their projects. Several sections are open to them:

- The “Agenda” allows members to announce professional event dates (festivals, concerts, showcases...)
- “News” allows feedback from the field (news, project launches or particular initiatives, clips...)
- “New Releases” is dedicated to record news.

¹⁹ <https://www.auxsons.com/>.

To feed these sections, the user creates an account on AuxSons.com. They can then write an article accompanied by multimedia links and visuals which, once revised by the editor, can be published and shared. Today the collaborative part involves over 400 contributors.

An Editorialized Medium

The main content produced by AuxSons.com is chosen by an editorial committee composed of volunteer members of the association. The editorial line focuses on two main axes:

- purely musical articles that address the heritage, the roots, the currents of contemporary music from the five continents, and their history;
- points of view and debates on the interweave between music and social and political struggles (ecology, anti-racism, migration, or gender equality).

Each month the editorial board decides on the proposals of the editorial staff, which is composed of an editorial coordinator plus a journalist-come-associate advisor. Each week AuxSons.com presents a “Focus” and some “Playlists”:

- “Focus” comprises medium-length articles sometimes presented in a series of episodes on certain topics requiring further development. They are well paid for, which makes it possible to attract seasoned professionals and to obtain a good editorial quality presenting seriously sourced information, accompanied by relevant multimedia links.
- The “Playlists” are musical *carte blanches* entrusted to artists and iconic figures from the sector who share their top picks and influences.
- Finally, the “Must Read” section, concocted by the #AuxSons team, highlights the work of other interesting media outlets.

Being mainly financed by subsidies (Ministry of Culture, public or private companies),²⁰ by project aid, and by its members, the site AuxSons.com

²⁰ The Zone Franche association is supported by the Ministry of Culture, the Centre National de la Musique, SACEM, SSCP, ADAMI, SPEDIDAM and La Culture Avec La Copie Privée.

is detached from the balance of power within the music industry. It does not submit to the dictates of commercial news sources and sets its own calendar.

To increase its presence and visibility and to alert members to its breaking news, AuxSons.com sends a weekly newsletter to its subscribers and presents its new content daily on social networks (Facebook and Instagram). The same information is thus summarized in several separate ways, in order to persuade the reader to consult the article in its entirety on the site.

On the other hand, each year, #AuxSons publishes a paper magazine, *Les Cahiers AuxSons*, which brings together its main published content (“Playlist” and “Focus”) plus some newsflashes, which are sometimes rewritten to suit the formatting specificities of newsprint.

AuxSons.com is an atypical experience which aims to meet several types of needs. One is to appeal to a wide readership and thus offer content that meets current requirements in the technological environment: to be attractive, concise, and easily accessible. It also aims to satisfy the more demanding readers as concerns sometimes complex matters that require a broader and more thorough development. It is both the expression of a community that needs to communicate about its work and commitments, and also an attempt to reflect the issues and aesthetic experiments that this community and lovers of multicultural expressions encounter.

Little by little on French territory, and in an increasingly sustained manner, the rise of extreme right ideologies and the stranglehold on the influential media held by large groups devoted to the promotion of liberalism led the discourse on the music of diversity to become more and more political, reflecting an open and equality-minded societal commitment. This take on the future of the planet naturally intersects with ecological issues, and also the desire to take genders and sexual orientations, such as those of the cultural identities of minority groups or social or geographical origins, into equal account. This influences the topics as well as the vocabulary used, starting with the term World Music, whose post-colonial connotations are increasingly debated.²¹

²¹ For a debate report on the term “World Music” during the Belgian festival Voix de Femmes 2021, see Anouk Durocher, “Le monde c’est les autres? La World Music en débat,” *Manifesto XXI*, December 10, 2021, <https://manifesto-21.com/le-monde-cest-les-autres-la-world-music-en-debat/>; see also Souria Cheurfi, “La musique du monde n’est pas un genre mais un terme fourre-tout eurocentré,” *Vice*, July 23, 2020, <https://www.vice.com/fr/article/akzn9z/musique-du-monde-terme-fourre-tout-eurocentre>.

Since March 2020, the health crisis has led to worldwide upheaval for the global population and in all business sectors. It has interrupted the lives and/or careers of those in the music world who were diminished by their age or lack of professional anchorage. To hold out, others had to change their behavior and find new ways to connect. In this context, the importance of cooperation and the role of the Internet have increased at all levels (creation, production, dissemination, and visibility). This situation has strengthened the determination of the Zone Franche network and the Aux-Sons.com team to continue its struggles, to relay the voice of its sector loud and clear in order to convey its creativity and dynamism, whilst creating synergies and solidarity amongst those involved.