

practices. Through the close examination of these two exemplary cases, as well as through the laying of a theoretical groundwork for music-curatorial thinking, this volume begins to span the gap between artistic and administrative practices in CCM and those of the larger performing arts field.

## 1.2 The State of the Art

### 1.2.1 Scholarly Literature

While several fields touch on issues also related to curating in music, a significant scholarly treatment of the subject has yet to be found. While some prominent scholarly projects relate to the intermixing of artistic and organizational considerations in musical practice, this project will be argued to differ from earlier research in significant ways.

A first position in this area is Martin Tröndle, with his scholarly project to establish a theory of the concert as a basis for the field of *concert studies*. This approach has been outlined by Tröndle across two edited compilations, *Das Konzert* (2011) and *Das Konzert II* (2018). He is clear throughout both his texts and the articles collected in his compilations that the object of his research is the concert for classical music in both its historical development, and as it exists today, a field that he claims has received very little academic treatment historically, which also supports the position maintained here (2018, 25). While his chief concern is the classical music concert, and thus slightly different to this project, it nevertheless takes a similar perspective on contemporary musical practice, examining the constitution of its frame.

Tröndle argues that the classical concert as it exists today, with its separation of the participants in a concert event into a collective of silent, passive listeners and active musicians, is no longer relevant for a society where individuality is highly prized (Tröndle 2018, 42). In other words, the classical concert format is no longer adapted to the contemporary public, and must evolve to suit their interests. As a remedy to this problem, Tröndle suggests a broad program of experimentation with the various elements of the concert situation, all with the goal of finding various new ways of presentation that will catch the attention of a contemporary public.<sup>5</sup>

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5 As Patrick Hahn suggests, the metric of success that Tröndle uses in this part of his argument quickly reveals itself to be the market. His essay also supports the criticism that Tröndle defines his project extremely narrowly in terms of the traditional classical concert as it has persisted over time (see Hahn 2018, 18–19).

Tröndle's approach to defining the basis for a domain of concert studies is problematic in its framing of the field of concert studies using a *structuralist* methodology: distinct musical communities are understood as homogenous and self-same, and the relationships between them (i.e. what makes for a successful concert experience in pop music, or techno, or hip-hop, etc.) is established through an equivalency of relations (a is to b as c is to d). Therefore, neither the form of audience subjectivity constituted through characteristics of the concert event, nor the content being programmed are permitted to be called into question outside of a relativist understanding of community values. The diagnosed irrelevancy of the classical concert then places an impossible burden on solely the issue of concert setup and staging to solve, while unquestioningly upholding core aspects of *Werktreue* and the classical canon as seemingly faultless and beyond criticism.

Added to the methodological problems with this approach, Tröndle's project is, because of his underextension of the classical concert, dealing with the established canonical classical music repertoire and the implications for it of new and different kinds of stagings. The material is pre-assumed, and seemingly cannot be called into question, rather, only its "framing" is in need of further reflection for him, in a schema that thus implies that these can be freely separated from each other. This volume seeks to establish a more dynamic relationships between artistic practices, their mediation, and their reception. The focus is on understanding the situated assemblages of contemporary music festivals, rather than on application of presumed values. It is furthermore focused more on the dissolution of homogenous, container-based conceptions of cultural production (not a chief concern for Tröndle). For these reasons, the work of Tröndle does not establish a significant forerunner to the following project.

Jonas Becker's *Konzertdramaturgie und Marketing: Zur Analyse der Programmgestaltung von Symphonieorchestern* (Concert dramaturgy and marketing: an analysis of the program design of symphony orchestras) is subject to similar criticisms. Leaving aside that the work deals mainly with three symphony orchestras in Duisburg, Essen, and Bochum, rather than with festivals, the work would conceivably be relevant to this volume through its titular examination of the relationships between concert design and marketing. This connection is a fundamentally curatorial consideration, in its focus on the ways in which managerial and economic concerns can be reconciled with artistic ones (see section 2.4.2). Furthermore, the term curating is often implicitly understood as somehow synonymous with a form of program design by many who use it in writing about CCM, as will be shown in the next section.

Becker's conclusion seems to sketch the outlines of some important curatorial problems that would need to be solved in order to better realize non-normative concert dramaturgies, audience outreach, and more diverse programming at the three institutions analyzed. However his project is clearly one of description and not of

engagement or theoretical action. He states that due to certain resistances among programmers, musicians, and the audience, only modest amounts of change are possible (2015, 199–202). A balance is called for between “convention and innovation,” forming a synthesis that is already heavily weighted towards stasis, and is not further expanded upon (202). Unwillingness to thoroughly explore the constitution of the categories he describes means that he does not succeed in developing any useful theoretical tools for transforming the status quo. For instance, the dualism between “music-internal” and “music-external” (*inner- and aussermusikalische Themen*) is steadfastly maintained throughout, along with once again the untouchability and immutability of the concept of the musical work, preventing more fundamental analysis of the issues that are diagnosed to be pursued.

In contrast to the previous two positions, Christa Brüstle’s *Konzert-Szenen* (2013) has been a useful reference, in that the work follows musical practices over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries that understand the moment of their performance as not a moment of reproduction, but as an event happening in the moment. Through this shift, she is able to write an history of alternative concerts, ones that acknowledges that all senses of perception make up the concert experience, not just the ear, and that so-called “musical autonomy” should perhaps not always be the sole focus of the concert (Brüstle 2013, 9–10). She furthermore astutely points out that the separation into aspects “internal” and “external” to music, crucial to both positions above, may be better understood as “external to musicology” instead (*ibid.*).

The scope of Brüstle’s work does not however include approaches to festival leadership; her concern is with artistic practices. Her work is nonetheless significant in its portrayal of artists who see the mediation of their works as integral to their musical expression. Thus, while not explicitly positioning itself in regards to issues of arts administration, as with Tröndle or Beckert, Brüstle ends up deriving an approach to concert mediation out of artistic experiments with it. The trajectory of her work provides an important account of the historical factors in contemporary musical practice that have led to many of the mediational strategies employed by musicians discussed here. Because as a matter of course it does not focus on institutional questions, or questions of the festival event, the work is then nevertheless not a significant forerunner to this volume.

While no major scholarly projects may currently exist in this regard, there have been attempts particularly within the realm of journals and publications about CCM that have begun to explore the implications of curating in the field of music. A recent notable example was the May 2018 issue of *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, focusing on the theme of curating and its potential meaning in New Music practice. Among the articles was an interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist (by the director of Wien Modern, Bernhard Günther), underscoring the importance of that star curator as the symbol of curatorial practice par excellence in New Music’s imag-

ination of curatorial practice (Obrist and Günther 2018). This was complemented by an article by Jörn-Peter Hiekel contextualizing the field's interest in curating with music historical examples of earlier attempts at rethinking the concert format (Hiekel 2018a). This author also published an essay, situating the interest in curating by other fields within a history of curating's emergence as an independent field (Farnsworth 2018).

Also of note is a significant article in the New Music publication *MusikTexte* that asked a series of questions about festival leadership to the leaders of major European festivals themselves (Eclat, Wien Modern, Wittener Tage für neue Kammermusik, etc.). The article is noteworthy in its premise that festival directors themselves can and should be a source of discourse about their festivals themselves (Nonnenmann 2017).

Perhaps the most ambitious project so far has been the initiative *Defragmentation: Curating Contemporary Music*, a cooperation between the Darmstadt Summer Course, the Maerzmusik Festival in Berlin, and the Donaueschinger Musiktage, in cooperation with the former director of the Ultima Festival in Oslo. The initiative describes itself as a

research project aimed at enduringly establishing the debates currently ongoing in many disciplines on gender & diversity, decolonization and technological change in institutions of New Music, as well as discussing curatorial practices in this field. (Internationales Musikinstitut Darmstadt, n.d.)

The project consisted of internal meetings between festival directors and expert advisors in the fields they wished to address, as well as a final conference at the Darmstadt Summer Course in 2018. Whether the initiative will have any long-lasting effects remains to be seen, but so far has seemed to only act as a fig-leaf, addressing these issues superficially rather than show any fundamental willingness for change in either programming or festival infrastructure.

In their response to the *Defragmentation* conference in Darmstadt, the curatorial collective *Gender Relations in New Music* characterized the initiative as such:

The “Defragmentation” initiative—responding to our initial call to action [at the 2016 Darmstadt Summer Course]—is a long overdue opening into institutional acknowledgement of these issues; an important and laudable start. That being said, “Defragmentation” has yet to make any specific public commitments to serious structural change. Instead, the primary outcome of the overall initiative seems to be this week’s “convention”—an outcome that threatens to do little more than pay lip service to and tokenize the issues without tackling them head on. (*Gender Relations in New Music* n.d.-a)<sup>6</sup>

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6 Note that the author was involved in the drafting of this statement.

These issues remain unaddressed by the organizers. In other words, it seems as if, though there is gradually an acknowledgement of the importance of curating CCM—understood here as a cypher for critical knowledge production, an interest in issues of social justice, and a willingness on the part of organizers to reflect on how they are framing musical practices in their festivals—there still remains a lack of serious commitment to these issues on the part of festival leaders.

A further aspect that can be studied is how CCM practitioners use the words “curating” and “curator.” Examining the occurrences of these terms and the contexts in which they are used allows for an insight into how curatorial practices have been perceived implicitly by music practitioners. In order to do this, an opportunity sample ( $n = 16$  individual selected sources) of instances where the term has been used specifically by prominent figures in New Music and concert studies in recent years has been made, and its discursive context analyzed.<sup>7</sup> These consisted mainly of texts by musicologists, introductions to festivals and projects, essays in specialized magazines, and one interview. While this sample is small and statistically non-representative, it allows for a small survey of the use of the term across important figures in the German New Music community. The result shows both a range of meanings, and a general consensus about specifically two key characteristics of the term’s definition as it is currently being used.

The first finding is that the use of the term curating often seems to be used as a rhetorical marker to flag that the approach to organizing is based on some kind of theme, and therefore rather than operating within one single artistic tradition, is willing to engage with any related artistic discipline. It is also commonly associated with references to the visual and performing arts in this respect, and to practices that engage or navigate through multiple fields. An observed emphasis on experiments with concert staging, creating alternatives to established forms, relationships between various forms of knowledge, and by extension often also political considerations, means that curating is connotated with a renewed emphasis on the relationship between contemporary music and society, and a break in some form with the status quo.

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7 The following sources are significant instances of discussing New Music in regards to curating, curators, something being curated, or “curated by” (NB many sources are in German, where “Kurator, Kuratieren, kuratiert, kuratiert von” were searched for): Walker 2018, 405, 406, 409; Tröndle 2018, 11, 13; Wimmer 2018, 197; Lescène and Kreuser 2018, 28; Eckhardt 2018, 27; Roesner 2016, 10; Freydank et al. 2016, 95, 99; Freydank et al. 2018, 153, 156, 160, 161, 237; Gottstein, Skoruppa, and Neupert 2017, 8, 132; Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde Donaueschingen e.V. 2018, 73; Berliner Festspiele n.d.–b; Daniel Ott in discussion with the author, 28 October 2017; Knipper 2018, 1; Hiekel 2018a, 22–23; Zimmermann 2018, 32; Osterwold n.d. NB this author’s published statements on curating have been deliberately omitted, but see here again Farnsworth 2018.

A second finding is that an implicit understanding of the curator as a person who experiments with the design of the concert setting and format, similar to the concept of concert dramaturgy, emerges frequently. Interesting about this aspect of the understanding of curating in music is that it is related to a very specific profile of the curator in the visual arts, whereby a star curator turns the organization of the exhibition and its mediation into a quasi-artistic practice and as a form of authorship.

This in turn is connected to a less frequent connotation regarding curating standing for a subjective form of administrative control over a concert, festival, or venue. This is an acknowledgement of the potential for curatorial practice to turn into a new form of hierarchical control, where only the artistic vision at the top of the pyramid is permitted to realize their, as one put it, “megalomaniacal” vision (Gottstein, Skoruppa, and Neupert 2017, 132).

### 1.2.2 Literature on Curating Performance

The previous section having been necessary because of the lack of substantive scholarly reflections on the concept of curating in musical practice, in the neighbouring areas of dance, theatre, and performance, significant reflection on the role of the performance curator has existed for several years from multiple practitioners, and can help shed further light on the current understanding of curatorial practice in the performing arts.

Notable publications in this field include the body of work about theatre and performance curating that Joanna Warsza and Florian Malzacher have been writing, editing, and publishing over the past several years. These include the four-part “Performing Urgency” series with Alexander Verlag (Malzacher 2015; Campenhout and Mestre 2016; Burzynska 2016; Malzacher and Warsza 2017), Malzacher’s documentation of his *Truth is Concrete* project (see Malzacher 2014b), and Warsza’s catalogue for Public Art Munich 2018 (Warsza and Reed 2019). These compilations feature a mix of scholarly reflection on issues surrounding performance curating and often shorter, sometimes more personal texts focused more on describing performances themselves. Another major recent publication in this area is the recent anthology *Curating Live Arts* (Davida, Pronovost, Hudon, and Gabriels 2018), which takes an approach more from the direction of the interdisciplinary performing arts, which it refers to as “live arts,” as seen in the title.<sup>8</sup>

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8 See also in that volume a list of networks, conferences, and initiatives related to these issues in the “live arts” in both Europe and North America (Davida, Pronovost, Hudon, and Gabriels 2018, 2n3). See as well the list of recent education programs in this field in the same volume (ibid., 2).

Tom Sellar, at the Yale School of Drama, and editor of the journal *Theater*, has also dedicated two special issues of that publication to this problematic.<sup>9</sup> Sellar's understanding of theatre curating largely corresponds with the received definitions of the music practitioners surveyed above, however presented explicitly instead of as subtext, and within the context of academic papers and interviews, in particular his text "The Curatorial Turn," written in 2014, which would articulate several important aspects of this then-emerging field. Curators are for Sellar the negotiator of various genre categories in an artistic moment when practitioners are blending various influences and practices. They are able to contextualize for an audience these works, and helping give them access thanks to their knowledge of the history of various pertinent discourses of art history, drama, etc. (2014, 22). This corresponds with the uses seen above associating the word curating in music with transdisciplinary artistic practice.

In defining the so-called curatorial turn in the performing arts, Sellar identifies historical precedents for the practice, discussing in particular how the interdisciplinary mixings and political practices of the 1960s and 1970s would lead to a wave of engaged and experimental programmers in the next generation of the 1980s and 1990s (2014, 22). While Sellar names important institutions in the North American context, such as the Wexner Center in Ohio, the Walker Center in Minnesota, and the Brooklyn Academy of Music, there exist many at least somewhat analogous institutions in Europe as well, such as the German network of free theatres (*Freies Theater*).<sup>10</sup>

His diagnosis corresponds with similar progressive practices in New Music festivals that would occur in roughly the same time period. As will be shown in Chapter 4, composer Hans Werner Henze's founding of the Munich Biennale in 1988 in an attempt to encourage young composers to create experimental new music theatre works, along with the well-documented effect of the 1968 student protests on his thinking, also fits this description well (see section 4.2.2). The Donaueschinger Musiktage's integration of sound art and installations into its festival as of 1993 can also be understood as early evidence of embracing multimedial and perhaps interdisciplinary approaches to music-making (Köhler 2006). Even Matthias Osterwold's Maerzmusik festivals, examined briefly in Chapter 5, could be described in Sellar's words as a "multiplicity of intersected forms," and resonate to an extent with this diagnosis (Sellar 2014, 22).

In his attempt to describe the titular "curatorial turn" of the article, Sellar however distances such associations from his definition of a more recent form of performance curator, saying that a "newer group of independent performance curators ... has emerged in the past decade alongside a tidal wave of site-based, urbanist,

9 Vol. 44 no. 2 (2014) together with Bertie Ferdman, as well as vol. 47 no. 1 (2017).

10 See Brauneck and ITI Germany 2017.

participatory, and relational performances” (Sellar 2014, 23). This new role is likened to the independent curators of the art world, and conceptually aligned both with the importance Sellar puts on contextualization, as well as with the *auteur* position of this form of curating in the visual arts (in other words ignoring the curatorial as a methodological approach). This in turn fits with the understanding of the curator in music as being associated with the subjective artistic control over the entirety of a festival or institution seen in the previous section.

Furthermore, and once again corresponding to the implicit understanding of curating above, “skepticism of conventional structures” for presenting theatre has led theatre curators to experiment with various formats for presentation (Sellar 2014, 28). This happens both on the level of individual productions, which no longer necessarily need to conform to the standard requirements of a production, as well as on the level of the festival or institution itself (28–29).

Related to this is an association between curating and institutional critique in the theatre. As Sellar writes:

But in the fiscally fragile, intensely collaborative, and interreliant community of theater makers, public criticism and even internal criticism of program choices remains rare. So, could the performance curator introduce a critical orientation and influence to artistic planning? That trait alone would seem to distinguish them from producers, who generally regard criticism as a press and marketing tool rather than a guiding element for their own work. (Sellar 2014, 27)

This facet of the concept begins to connect with another of its observed uses in music, namely that it is being used as a way of signaling one’s breaking with convention and taking a more critical attitude towards the structures of musical institutions. While this may be more widespread in theatre, in the contemporary music community, there remains a lack of institutionally-critical practices.<sup>11</sup>

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11 Historical practices associated e.g. with Fluxus, like Mauricio Kagel (see e.g. his film *Ludwig van*, 1970), as well as more recent practices like those of Johannes Kreidler (e.g. *Product Placements*, 2008) or Trond Reinholdtsen (the Ø series, 2015–) are notable exceptions, however the marginality of these few examples suggests they are the exceptions that prove the rule. Furthermore, while e.g. Bill Dietz points out the distance of musical practice from the institutional critique movement in the visual arts (2017, 9), Matthias Rebstock argues that this can be attributed to experimental music theatre practices have also been historically distanced from radically institutional critical practices seen for instance in the field of theatre. He writes that “[m]ost works of new or experimental music theatre in the 1970s were performed within structures that New Music had built, especially in the milieu surrounding radio broadcasting institutions. Initially, not many structures evolved parallel to the opera houses. [24] The foundation of free opera ensembles did not set in until the 1980s, gaining a further impetus in 1990s Vienna and Berlin. [25] As opposed to Freies Theater, the formation of a Freies Musiktheater was hence less political and less societally or socioculturally motivated” (2017, 532). It could thus conceivably be argued that the lack of analogous independent politically-

Related to this is an understanding of the term curator put forward by another prominent theatre scholar on the issue, Florian Malzacher. For him, the term is understood as a “self-provocation” (Malzacher 2017, 17). He explains that calling his practice curating is not just exchanging one term for another, but rather demanding a different approach from oneself, a way of questioning one’s mediating practice through a change of title, effectively reflecting this aspect of curating discussed above.

Significantly, these definitions of the performance curator from the field of theatre seem to closely forecast the understandings of curating music implicitly used by musical practitioners surveyed in section 1.2.1. This not only shows the proximity between experimental theatre and the experimental musical practices of New Music (which can also include Music Theatre), but also the need for scholarship uniquely focused on musical practice itself, in order to identify possible divergences from or extensions to the definitions put forward by Sellar and Malzacher.

### 1.3 Scope and Overview

The first concern of this volume is to develop a theoretical basis upon which a study of festivals for contemporary music can be undertaken. The intention is that this basis be beneficial for the further analysis of both these and other festivals, serving as a new theoretical framework in which to understand them. As will be explored, there exists a gap in the scholarly literature around the conceptual, artistic, and music-historical ramifications of current experimentation with the mediation of CCM festivals.

In the interest of spanning this gap, this book will also engage with a significant body of work that is already critically examining the structures of the festival format, namely the field of curatorial studies. Using this field as a starting point for analysis will make it possible to follow the histories of both music festivals and arts festivals back to a common ancestor, the universal expositions, revealing the set of basic theoretical assumptions that underpin both of these types of events. This approach allows for a transfer of concepts from the curating of large-scale arts events to those of contemporary music, in turn setting the basis for a rapprochement between various festival formats that are not often considered together. This is furthermore significant in that it is approaching festivals for contemporary music in

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engaged venues for music theatre works akin to those of theatre or the visual arts accounts at least partially for the discrepancy between New Music and other performing arts as to their engagement with political topics. This is because these other disciplines would develop more radical forms in independent venues, which would then make their way into larger, more established institutions through processes of canonization and the hegemonic appropriation of artistic critique as of the turn of the century (see also Boltanski and Chiapello [1999] 2005).