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Curating Musicking as a Mode of Wakefulness in Interesting Times

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I

Who would deny that we live in interesting times – as in the apocryphal Chinese curse "May you live in interesting times!" We all know the litany of contemporary woes, from Covid-19 to rapacious turbo capitalism to the pesky and by-no-means-post-colonialism, from right-wing populism to religious fundamentalism, from systemic racism to persistent sexist mindsets, from the descent of public discourse into shitstorming to an increasingly insidious mistrust in science.

Behind all of these looms a climate crisis that often becomes invisible precisely because of its immense import: While it is chattered about everywhere, it does not provide us with the rapid gratification of palpable improvement through collective action - and thus many of us, short-term emotional animals that we are, already seem to have become bored with the very subject.

Only quite recently have we realised that, tiny in the grand flows of space and time as each of us is, we as a species can effect enormous change to our planet - and we visibly do not know how to deal with this realisation. Like termites, we continue to devour our habitat that shelters us, knowing it will collapse one day. And we the already well-fed cling to the belief that we the eaters might be those who survive when it finally disintegrates.

It must be said at this point, that musicians and music lovers tend to not care so much about such matters – at least not when they are with music. Time and again, musical communities all around the world have lovingly asserted how far removed their music is from wordly matters, how high

above the daily fray, untouched by politics, an antipode to science, in its serene, quasi-spiritual counter-world, where beauty, complexity, contemplation and emotion reign. The need to believe in such a phantasy has always been especially pronounced in interesting times: in war and post-war zones, when powerful people found themselves in desperate straits, music was often seen to offer its listeners and makers a momentary glimpse of a better place than the real world chaos around them – music was a means to look into the past with a soft focus or to glimpse a pre-shine of a better future. A place to lose yourself in, to sink into and feel safe, a place where there neither hunger, greed nor fear, only the infinite intricacies of pitch, timbre and rhythm may occupy your entire being – "Music for a while / Shall all your cares beguile", as Henry Purcell & John Dryden let singers sing.

This, of course, applies to contemporary eurological art musicking, too, of course (often called "New Music" with capital N). The architecture of the concert halls in which this music mostly is performed is usually designed to keep the noisy world (and its *hoi polloi*) outside. Concert halls are machines built to produce an artificial silence which this often-delicate art needs to be heard at all. And while its composers occasionally may acknowledge a real-world-beyond-sound in the lyrics they choose, most of them would still deny that their music as such, the sonic matter that they make, should be asked any probing questions about its real-world content. Many would insist that contemporary music should be appreciated only from within the cultural context in which it appears: outsider listeners, whether they are from another social context or from another culture, even from another art form, should either accept contemporary music's discourse on artistic and aesthetic quality - or risk ridicule by the initiates. In this attitude, contemporary eurological art music is a kind of tribal music – the music of a globally dispersed, self-elected, often arrogant tribe. The New Music scene, for quite a while now, has painted itself into an arcane social corner that wants to in keep the outside at bay. But such self-isolation cannot actually make the maddening world go away.

In previous times of crisis, music was still made without any music-specific constraints. Musicking in general was seen a positive thing even in wars and autocratic regimes - even if some or many musicians were deported or killed, even if some of its styles became forbidden for a while. Live music making, throughout conflicts and dictatorships of all kinds, was usually upheld as a symbol of community - any community, really. Even the Cosa Nostra had its own music to which the mafiosi danced their deadly tarantellas.

Not anymore. The carefully constructed bubble of music has been burst. The virus has banished musicking from all the vestiges of a community practice that it had stubbornly retained. Musical live concerts with packed audiences used to be a remarkably resilient format: Through crises and conflicts and other disruptions, concerts remained popular. Since the early 20th century, people could have simply stopped going to concerts and other live music events, listening only to recordings at home. But they did not – they wanted to witness music made live, in the same space, sharing the same air.

Well, sharing the same air has, at least for a while, lost its positive connotation - and so has the concert format. An architect friend who works in a Montréal office specializing in building concert halls has told me that long-planned projects in Asia and the Americas are currently being put on hold: the architects are asked to devise new types of cultural venues that would be corona-proof. And that request usually includes more flexible, multi-purpose spaces that can easily be re-configured for alternate forms of music performance and presentation - presumably such that can prevent us from sharing the same air. Maybe they will also let in some outside noise. Corona thus is already changing the very architecture of our music houses: there will be no going back.

But the world of eurological art music is also under other kinds of pressure – before the current health crisis, turbo capitalism had already closed down many orchestras in North America and Europe. In this symposium, we will take a hard look at the colonial entanglements of current eurological musicking practices – and such debates are increasingly carried into opera

houses, radio stations and orchestras as well - and these might even affect their budget negotiations with their state sponsors. Populists, religious fundamentalists and self-appointed culture warriors of all colours revolt against the perceived cultural hegemony of eurological art music, sometimes because of its association with elite high culture and social class, sometimes because it promotes and requires its listeners to have an open mind and discerning ears – all simplifiers hate overtones they cannot control.

And ever since #metoo and BlackLivesMatter became slogans that brought age-old and ubiquitous wilfully unseen und unheard suffering into the focus of even those who had so far managed to turn a blind eye, the personnel and the social reality of classical and avantgarde music too have both come under a process of increased scrutiny that in the case of #metoo has already resulted in abruptly ended careers, intense personal feuds and even prison sentences - for accusations that only years before would have certainly prompted the high art communities of music to close ranks. Thankfully not anymore. Not even in India, where some of the most respected masters of Indian classical music now face public accusations of sexual misconduct.

And as to the Anthropocene – only a few weeks ago German public radio ran a feature about how the rare woods needed to build classical western orchestra instruments are not only a major driver of deforestation in the tropics, but also threaten some of these trees with extinction. And before Corona curtailed our incessant travelling, several initiatives already had started to question the eurological music business model that relies on both nomadic musicians and audiences: we travel somewhere to play music and we travel somewhere to listen to music. This is a model which started to grow exponentially at precisely the historical moment when the post-war avantgarde bloomed – and indeed, it seems to me that these two parallel growth stories were intimately connected: more than any other music, the audience of “new music festivals” (often situated in small towns and remote locations) has been an audience of travellers who will occupy up many

otherwise vacant local seats.[1] I am the first to admit that I am supremely guilty of this behaviour. Questioning this systemic translocalism in the context of Corona and the Anthropocene may even put some of the *raisons d'être* for certain practices of new music curation into jeopardy.

In my talk, I want to stay close to the question of curating with decolonization and contemporary musicking in mind. But I am deeply convinced that all these aspects that have started to eat away at the once so magnificent cloud castle of contemporary eurological art music making are inseparable from each other – when we start to address one, we will time and again discover that we actually need to address all of them. In the Anthropocene, we must realize there is no outside for us to flee too, no separation we can sustain - that in fact there is nowhere humans can go to escape other humans, that the only thing we can do is to "stay with the trouble" as Donna Haraway has put it.

II

Curating music events always is a process of exclusion. We choose from what is on offer. What is on offer, then, is driven by all kinds of societal forces. Some artists are pushed to your attention, some others are your own "discoveries". Each curator has pet artists, often for the only reason that they found them before someone else did. Each local, regional, global scene has pet artists, mostly for reasons that have little to do with the art they make. I say all this not to attack curators, or any scene, but to make it clear that curating, being a primarily social and not so much an art-driven activity, is subject to the exclusion mechanisms of the wider society it operates in.

In Live Arts such as music, the situation is exacerbated – what is on offer here is usually only something that has passed through many processes of exclusion, starting with the attitude

[1] To a great part motivated by the one-time-only performances of world premiere works, which no other festival would show because they had already lost their "virgin" charm by this first performance.

of parents who for many years sponsored private lesson fees, with access to the right teachers and schools, often through entrance exams and competitions. The right teachers and jurors then, and only if they wish to, can connect the young live artist to a wider network of professionals. Once established there, there is the small matter of writing grant applications, getting someone to fund your work: Live Arts are costly because they require other people. The work of the curator can only begin once the work and its creative worker has passed all these hurdles, once it is out there. The work of the curator then – ideally - is then to propel them from local cultural acceptance towards canonical relevance.

This reality notwithstanding, eurological art music institutions and ideologues often and unabashedly use the poster slogans of capitalism: that only the best can make it, that success in this system is based solely on merit. Really? When we realize that this is the same supposedly merit-based system that put the current US president into office and made a sex predator musician the rector of my alma mater, a very self-important German music university which also sheltered a lecherous composition professor, we may begin to doubt such assertions. In such a duplicitous world, racist and colonialist attitudes do not need to be a conscious conviction: they can manifest themselves in thousand little discouragements, even in condescendingly positive feedback: “I did not think that a … could be such an excellent …” (insert your words). Those intimidated by this system need a lot of stamina to continue their music, because they will never know if their rejection was really based on merit. Many who are talented, seeing the mountain they would need to climb, do not even try.

This multi-layered selection process offers ample room for social prejudices and all kinds of likes, dislikes and -isms to assert themselves. Especially when you think and feel in a lazy manner. The world is full of interesting musics, but you only listen to those made by people like you. Or those you already know how to access. Or those you do not need to research, only “approve of” or “find interesting”. Or those you imagine your “so-called stupid” audiences will like - even though it has been my experience that many audiences are much more curious

than the curators think. You just need to convince them with the sonic and musical evidence, not with conceptual declarations.

I believe that in curating, the disregard for and the invisibility of certain artistic practices and artists is often nothing more than the result of sloppy thinking and lazy research: research that does not want to see through the system of exclusion that it relies on – and that does therefore not even look for ways to counteract it. The kind of colonialist, white male-centered curating and programming that we still see in many of our music institutions and festivals to me is not so much a moral problem as a lack of professionalism. Merit-based selection? A question of artistic quality? Not so much. If you really want the best, why not look everywhere for it? Why would you allow the faceless algorithm of your social environment make your curatorial decisions?

To me many music seasons and festivals rather read as if someone had been sleeping on the job. In today's information galaxy, decolonization and gender-awareness to me are moral or political arguments only on a meta-level – first and foremost, they are failures of research - and a lack of the ability to listen with your ears awake. But those who choose can simply not afford to snooze.

III

So we have arrived at the core of this talk: How does one counteract the ill effects of the artistic pyramid of exclusion when one is curating at its top? How does one stay wakeful to the world's musical and artistic diversity even while engaging in an inevitable process of selection?

The most powerful tool of this waking up to the world is what Dipesh Chakraborty has called "provincializing". Provincializing means to look at everything that you think is central and dominant - and rethink it as one of many possibilities. Let us quickly look at how one could provincialize a few assumptions in the dominant music practice.

Western art music? Is a music that came out of a small landmass, situated on the Northwestern Corner of the Asian continent. Indeed, Anglo-Indo-Portuguese Composer Clarence Barlow often likes to call Europe the "North-West Asian Subcontinent". Using this name for Europe does not diminish its achievements, but it also reminds us of geographical realities that are often obscured by the term "the West" which always sounds as if it were half the globe.

The sit-still-and-listen concert? Is a format that was introduced at a time when musicians could not any more rely on feudal sponsors and subscriptions and thus were forced to sell tickets to their performances. Playing music in a bigger setting had formerly always been a gift, a kind of decoration which was provided so you could enjoy yourself while walking and talking – Haydn famously performed most of his London concerts in the Rotunda, a kind of shopping mall for the nobility of London, with restaurants, shops and an orchestra in the same space. Now the same music became a merchandise – and suddenly it was necessary to eliminate all walking and talking so that everyone would get their money's worth of sound. Hence the need for silence – and music made to be heard in silence.

The need for virtuosity in music? If you want to play music to competitive people, especially if your music must survive in a capitalist economy, then you must introduce the concept and reality of competitiveness also into music making. But most of the criteria for good music employed by musicians the world over, such as depth, beauty, elegance, spirituality, fulfillment of etc. cannot really be quantified and need time and sensibility to grasp - while speed and dexterity are immediately accessible to every observer and listener. So virtuosity becomes a necessity to convince the superficial listeners in a paying audience that they have witnessed something that is indeed worth paying for.

The idea of an avantgarde? Is, of course, closely linked to the North West Asian idea of progress and social evolution that peaked in the early 20th century – North West Asian technological, financial and social progress as the beacon that leads the world to a better future. In parallel, North West Asian musical life seems to still think that eurological music can lead the world to a better music. Other music traditions do not believe this parallel – or, if they do accept the parallel, they still rightfully question the premise.

For example, it seems too early to tell whether the avantgarde movements of European music were really decisive for the future of music – in the long run. I sometimes think that maybe they were birthing pains that this North East Asian music needed in order to be able to enter into productive exchange with other musics on the planet.

A kind of catching up: early 20th century composer Ferrucio Busoni would have appreciated this perspective. Around 1900 he remarked that European classical music was still young, like a child: it had not yet suffered any hardships, any setbacks, it had not yet lost its self-importance.

Maybe in future histories of music the entire history of 20th century Eurological art music will be written under the sub-heading: “The opening up of European music” and will be lined up with all the other globalization and hybridization processes of music all over the world – especially the two hybridization epochs of Chinese Music: first during the Tang Empire (the pan-Chinese hybridization) and a few hundred years later under the Ming and Qing Emperors (the hybridization of Music in China with traditions from beyond the borders of China).

In thus highlighting these four basic premises of eurological music making, I do not want to say that they are problematic per se, and therefore should be unliked or even

abolished. Nothing of the kind, these are all amazing cultural achievements and sources of much musical wonder. I just wanted to describe them as accidents of circumstance, as points on a wide spectrum of equally rich musical and cultural possibilities rather than, as so many musical colleagues tend to think, as the natural winning outcome of universal cultural progress and natural selection.

Provincializing means exactly that: not abolishing or despising your own tradition – just coming to the insight that it is but one of many traditions, and that what we think of as the norm, the best or the most developed, is in truth only the product of particular contexts. A change in these contexts might require us to change our opinion.

And, if as a curator you really insist to focus on a particular type of music, just say so in your announcements: do not refer to your event with a misleadingly inclusive title such as “Festival of New/Contemporary Music”. Rather, use a more accurate and specific designation such as “Festival for Written Music Composed to Order by White Male Composers over 30”.

Again, this is not a moral argument – we need not be asked to listen to and engage creatively with other music making traditions and other music makers because they morally should have a place at our table. Rather, decolonization must rely on the rather sober and calculated insight that it is a) highly unlikely that section of the world’s population with a specific skin colour has found the only future-proof way of thinking and creating music and that it is b) even unlikelier that its most notable creators should all be male.

Monocultures are never really healthy. We live in interesting times, times that change us and our music, and we need all the musical knowledge, music making and thinking we can muster, in order to continue with this form of artistic expression. Or as Boaventura de Sousa Santos puts it: The cognitive empire of eurological thinking seems to be coming to an end. Not in any catastrophic sense - more in the sense that its power to explain our world on its own terms seems to decrease. We see that in order to survive in our world we need

cognitive, artistic, and yes, musical ways of seeing the world that lie beyond those that eurological thinking offers us – not least because those seem increasingly to be part of the problem.

This speech here is, however, not intended as a new age lecture, promoting irrationality and new religions. IN fact, to me it is rather eurocentrism that appears to be an irrational attitude. Is it not the case that claims not covered by facts are unreasonable? Then: Is it not irrational to give schools that promote mainly European music between the years 1500 and 2000 the rank of "music universities"? Is it not irrational to call an academic subject "music theory" (the theory of ALL music) when its proponents mainly look at European compositions between the years 1000 and 2000? Is it not irrational to assume that only because you have never bothered to learn the culture, the rules and the technical constraints of, say, gagaku, that you believe your music to be inherently richer and more developed?

Too many provincial thinkers and musickers, particularly in Western culture, have mistaken the world they know for the world that counts. To say it again: it is not wrong to be proud of your tradition and its musical achievements - it is just unreasonable to believe that it is the best or most advanced or most artistic tradition. To me, such claims are the cultural equivalent of populism.

I would like to plead for less musical populism and more engagement with the real world: and that will require intense study, research and engagement with the aesthetics of other ways of making music. It will require the energy to get up from your comfortable armchair and to move from a phil-harmonic sensibility (one who loves harmony) but towards a wider sensibility - one might call it "philo-sonic" (one who loves sounds).

IV

Wakefulness and ***Provincializing one's own perspective*** are thus important steps towards trans-traditional, non-

hegemonic, and reality-based curatorial visions. While not easy to implement, they are quite easy to understand. Things become more complex with the third essential step that I would like to call ***Misunderstandings must be Co-Creative*** or ***How to think through Cultural Appropriation, Identity Discourse and the Looting of Music.***

One of the first reflexes in rethinking festival programming, academic curricula and discourses on music always seems to be to frame decolonization in terms of a fair representation of previously excluded demographics, traditions, styles and practices. Curators and managers scramble to find black or indigenous or people of colour they can program in their otherwise unchanged concerts - preferably women, just to hit two birds with one stone. This is laudable, and certainly a quick and relatively easy fix - but it is also a grave misunderstanding.

Decolonization does not mean garnishing your programme folder with female and "exotic" names who all make music in the eurological mode. While it is really important to discover and highlight the exciting work of those who were marginalized in your own community of eurological musicking, decolonization needs to go beyond the confines of the eurological. It cannot only be about looking at compositions for the western-type ensembles and practices you are familiar with, it must mean engaging with different musical paradigms and concepts of musicking. This will most certainly affect the very way you work: venues, audience arrangements, ticketing, and concert timings, rehearsal schedules and audience engagement must all be re-thought and especially: re-practised. The reason for this is simple: because if not, you would be engaging in musical looting.

Heated discussions about looted artworks and their restitution in Western museums have been a feature of our cultural sphere for a long time now. First the discussion centered on works stolen by Napoleon, then those looted by the Nazis or the Soviet Union, before the discourse turned to the art of indigenous peoples, primarily in Africa.

Music, for some reason, has not been much affected by this discussion, even though phonogram and sound archives in these museums host many recordings, instruments and documents from the same traditions, communities and cultures. But music is not an object, it is an intangible heritage. Does one really steal something from a community if one records them? The sound of that moment would be gone anyway – if anything, the recording might actually preserve something precious that would otherwise be lost.

That statement is certainly true – and without these archives we would never know the diversity of musical expressions that have already been lost to Christian evangelical zeal, military conquest and capitalist economic modernization everywhere. But it is also misleading: For the looting of music does not, like the looting of objects, take place at the time and place of the recording. Rather, it takes place at the place and time of listening. How you listen to and make others listen to such recordings or live music is an indicator of whether you engage in musical looting or not..

As far as I can make out, three modes of music looting have been rampant over a very long time already:

1.) **Re-placing local traditions**: Ethnomusicologists who engage with local communities and record their musical expressions, often arrive at a critical stage in that culture: at a time when these communities change their listening habits from their own music to the hegemonic music they have encountered. Often only some old people still know a few traditional songs. The youth associates personal growth and inter-generational rebellion with the music of the political or economic hegemons, and does not any more want to fully engage with the tradition – neither making it nor listening to it.

    This process of replacement of music within source communities is one which many North American indigenous traditions have experienced for a long time already - and which now is reaching indigenous communities even in remote areas of Central Africa, the Pacific or New Guinea. In essence, this process together

with the salvage missions into which many ethnomusicological field recordings turned, amounts to looting – replacing the local music with the glass beads of hegemonic music and then re-placing this local music into archives elsewhere.

The scary thing is: this is looting with a long afterburn phase – for it continues to do its insidious work long after political decolonization. Indeed, one of the most pernicious agents of this kind of tradition replacement has been the recent arrival of streaming platforms such as YouTube and Spotify. The musical looting of indigenous and local music traditions very likely follows the famous hockey stick graph, with an unprecedented and rapid acceleration of the loss of traditions over the past 15 years. Pushbacks are rare, but this is an area where active restitution could maybe be a thing even in music, as it is slowly beginning to happen at many of the First Nations cultural centres financed by some Canadian provinces.

2.) Re-framing alien traditions within a familiar aesthetic and temporality The context-free sit-still-and-listen concert open to all who pay is a 19th century European bourgeois tradition which has deeply transformed many music traditions whose sonic display practices often are much more bound to social context, earth and time. When a ritual becomes a concert, but also when a typical courtly display format such as classical Hindustani musicking is misrepresented in spiritual and essentialist terms in Western concert halls, the loss of context translates into a loss of cultural signification. Presentation formats and contexts are essential components of a musical experience – to claim they are not, and to just frame such musical expressions in a denuded western presentation context cuts off the core aesthetics of the music presented. A more imaginative framing perhaps?

In the same vein, Johannes Fabian and Martin Scherzinger have variously described how, for example, the romantic debate about absolute, chronological, metronomic time versus inner, felt, experienced musical

time was displaced into colonial discourse – in two distinct ways: firstly by dividing the "other" traditions into those who were backwards in musical evolution and those who were in a place of 'eternal wisdom', i.e. 'non-dynamic' time (as opposed to the dynamic time of the West) and then by proposing that Western time with its dominant chronometers and rigid times was counterbalanced by the "other" peoples of these world, the Hopis, the Indians, the "Africans" and so on (basically, every non-European civilization) who had supposedly all had different, non-chronological concepts of time – and whose fluid, elastic and non-linear time concepts were somehow on the side of the Western idealists and romantics and not on the side of the engineers and businesspeople.

Music from these traditions thus played a great role in this debate – as munition for a inner-European conflict in which it had no stake. Does this not sound faintly similar to colonial soldiers who had to fight in the European World Wars of the 20th century?

3.) **Re-purposing external traditions for internal artistic use**: Re-purposing happens when elements from a tradition are copied and pasted into a musical event in such a way that their own distinct aesthetic purpose is lost. This aspect is the one with the most pitfalls.

On the one hand, it directly strikes at the heart of the well-meaning intentions and the curious ear of eurological composers who were and are inspired by something they heard in another tradition's music and tried to make it part of their own compositions and performances: whether it was the sound of a Chinese instrument or the functionality of a Ghanaian rhythm etc.

On the other hand, it challenges programmers and curators who will present a musical tradition in their festivals or seasons as an exotic tidbit from a distant land. In both cases, the music not only loses its original meaning, it also is re-purposed to serve the aesthetic desires of the colonizers. This re-contextualizing is a kind of aesthetic looting: the music that once was part of a

lively cultural context that included poetry, disputes between different schools, different flavours of music from different parts of the country etc. has now just become a singular PR-soundbite, a superficial token that is represents and gets confused with a real and rich musical tradition.

This confusion is probably at the root of Pierre Boulez's statement that the music traditions of India and China are admirable but dead. What he heard of them in Paris probably was indeed dead, as dead as a stuffed Polar Bear in a Natural History Museum. To display the music of another tradition in our context without engaging with its inner diversity and complex contemporaneity - is that not akin to showing animals in zoos?

What all three modes of looting have in common is thus that they rob the local musical communities not of their music per se, but of their ways of engagement and meaning-making in dialogue with the listener or, how mêLe yamomo calls it, their "sonus". They mistake such music for a commodity, for a projection screen for one's own discourse, for a specimen. What is robbed here is the co-evalness of this music tradition, the autonomous dignity of this musical expression and the dignity of its experienced traditional listeners and makers, whose opinion and musical epistemologies seem to count for precisely nothing.

V

It may have struck you that with my last example of musical looting, my critique of programming seems to negate the first two steps I mentioned before: wakefulness and provincializing. What would be the point of being wakeful, of sourcing new musical practices from other traditions than the dominant eurological music – only to be then accused of looting when one presents them in one's series or festival?

Well, as with so many things, it often is not what you do but how you do it that makes a difference. What will not really work well is any vestige of a discourse on “The Other”, any trace of “Us and Them”, any construction where the invited music does its artistic and aesthetic work mainly for you and not also for itself. Decolonization happens when someone engages with music beyond their own needs, values and aesthetic desiderata – in other words: when they let go of their looted acquisitions and give back agency to the music itself.

In other words, one of the first questions one would need to ask is: do the invited artists see any artistic benefit in this project – or is it only a money gig to them? This is a question many organizers and curators have forgotten to ask even of their eurological artists: the capitalist assumption being that money is enough of a reason for everything. This does not mean that one should pay the artists less, but that each artistic project needs to be inspiring to both sides. And this is something that must be a part of the project design from the very start.

How much potential for artistic growth does this project offer both for the artists and for their context? Do we have enough time to let such a growth process happen? What can we do to feed it, to make it worthwhile for every participant to make this music in this context? How can the audience empathize, feel, experience the rich web of references that an artist brings with them – how can a Senegalese griot performance move away from the exotic passepartout and, as a performance, become as rich in connotations and associations and cultural references for your audience as your familiar Stockhausen, Ligeti or Steen Andersen piano compositions?

This might require new formats of audience and musician engagement, maybe other senses and sensibilities – and almost certainly new ways of organizing a festival or a concert series. This organization might often require an approach that I would like to call “co-creative misunderstandings”.

Co-Creative Misunderstanding is a kind of polylogue, where each of the participants actively tries to understand unfamiliar musical phenomena through their own "regime of sensations and perceptions", as Jacques Rancière calls it - and responds to them using their familiar or traditional or idiosyncratic artistic responses. This polylogue soon will create a thousand plateaus of understanding, partial understanding and misunderstanding. At the same time, the participants in the process are asked to always try to find a common ground with each other.

In the tension field of such a creative process between different aesthetics, knowledges and musickings and good will to understand the other, I would have hopes for the emergence of co-eval relationships between the traditions and musical backgrounds of all participants: because no single participant has decisive control of the result that will emerge from the process, no single participant will have the authority to offer an interpretation either.

And that precisely is the goal: as long as we the curators offer booklet- and media-ready interpretations of another practice or tradition or of the meaning of the collaborative process, we exploit it through the act of framing it for our purposes. In interacting with traditions of expressions that we or our audiences do not know we must force ourselves to go, not against but beyond interpretation.

VI

To go beyond interpretation does not imply leave critical and conceptual thinking behind. Quite the opposite! Interpretations-as-such tend to crop up everywhere, they are reflexes of our mind. Interpretations are the fuel of co-creativity: each participant interprets from within their own aesthetics – and in thus interpreting, the musicians create misunderstandings that lead to new creative ideas. It is precisely in such processes of co-creative misunderstanding that we need to employ our fully aware and active critical

faculties – in order to examine these new ideas, to give them air and water, to prune them and to orient them towards the sun.

I think that in order to arrive at a sustainable and resonant decolonization, we need to return to the etymological roots of the word “Curator”. Its current meaning, that of an itinerant conceptualist who assembles, dismantles and re-assembles artistic expressions, aesthetic significances and societal concerns into new, ephemeral, momentary events formats, is a relatively recent meaning.

In the art world, curators have for hundreds of years already been guardians, caretakers, preservers, contextualizers of collections and performing traditions. They care for art as a gardener would care for plants. It is this older sense, rooted in the Latin word “curare” [to heal, to care for, to nurture, to worry about] that a curator in a decolonized music world that seems to be drifting aimlessly through very interesting times would need to operate.

A nurturing caretaker of processes, a watchful guardian of co-evalness, a defender and enabler of creative misunderstandings … In this perspective, curating musical expressions today can be an important calling, a process of finding out not what the music scene, much less one’s contemporary music peers expect, accept and will praise.

I think we must look beyond petty parochial aesthetics applied to musical activity, and pay close attention to the finessed listening, the inner drives, the wordliness and the saintliness of all kinds of music. Curating becomes a sustained research into burning question: what kind of musical engagement, which degree of musical sustenance, how much musical resilience and musical warmth do our very own interesting times need - and how can the music made today become a map through the apparent chaos of the human and the non-human world in which we all may, hopefully, continue to live together.

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