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The composition class as an aesthetic think tank

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There were times when "school" was a success label in music. Notre Dame School, Mannheim School, New German School, Second Viennese School, New York School, Old School Hip Hop, New School Hip Hop, or in photography the Düsseldorf School; in philosophy, the story goes anyway from the Platonic Academy to the Frankfurt School. These names appear in books and are used habitually in the language. Here, attitude and practice united the generations. Terms were coined.

If a composer wanted to proclaim or found a "school" today, a Shitstorm would be guaranteed, from all sides. These times are over; a school, that is, the general consensus in composition education, would mean style, reifying standard, and if something should not be, it is that a teacher passes on a teaching. This is forbidden in hyperindividualism. In any case, the tradition of New Music is primarily the break with tradition. Everyone, it seems, agrees and is glad that there are no more schools, even retrospectively it seems ridiculous if someone today tries to launch another 'school' pseudo-historiographically somewhere in the past. And didn't the pupils even call their Schoenberg "master"? School means authority, rules, dogma, sectarian elite circles and potential abuse of power.

Even the word "education" in the context of adults seems rather toxic, reminding us of Gulag and 're-education camps', that is why one has devised the friendlier word "training" at some point. With one's personal trainer, one trains his or her skills: ear training instead of listening education.

In this environment vegetates also the worst of all accusations in art: No, not fascism or boredom (which can still be provocative), but if a piece is "didactic". When in such a frontal situation as in a concert or theatre, anything is kind of 'taught', one feels soon 'indoctrinated'. Knowledge transfers or something like insights have nothing lost in art. We are not in school! Tut, school! Worst of all accusations.

And it goes even further with these swear words: "academic". Heaven protect us from "academic composers"! They sit in the "ivory tower" far away from normal reality and construct sounds together and thus have their obscure music theories. In Mannheim there is even a state *pop academy*! (The second Mannheim school.) Do punk bands, after they have attended all the compulsory seminars, make their graded bachelor's degree...? Who actually wanted academic state pop? And who sits in these university walls? Officers, of course – the laziest people on earth, unrenounceable and alimented by the taxpayer until the end of their lives! Rock 'n' roll is something different.

What can I say? - In September, I will take up a position as professor for composition and theory at the Academy (academic!) of Music Basel, for composers' education according to all

the rules of art didactics. At least I don't get civil servant status, civil service status has been abolished in Switzerland for quite some time, unlike in Germany, where the professor to be approved has to swear an oath of allegiance to his fatherland in the principal's office - the sentences are read out - "so help me, God".

It is paradoxical. You teach at a school of music, but a 'school' must not take place there. Ceci n'est pas une école. One should know what the teacher stands for, but at the same time he or she should embody the swiss army knife of aesthetic cosmopolitanism, so be the microinterval conceptual music theatre sound installation symphonist. The student individualist, the teacher universalist. How does this work together? Welcome to the institute for institutional criticism!

No more grazing on scruples. One is not forced to accept such a job offer, nor to study composition of new music (or even 'pop'). But there are reasons to pursue art education at state institutes. The truth is also: Sven Väth had his great tracks in the 90s produced by a classically trained pianist. The majority of Kraftwerk's members are academics. Art colleges have always enjoyed great demand. The still relatively young literary institutes in the german speaking area (Hildesheim, Leipzig, Vienna, Biel), despite all the prophecies of doom from 'institutional prose', have become an integral part of contemporary German-language literature, and the accusation of uniform "language trend forges" has long since become part of their reflective agenda. And the local avant-garde of theatre (Pollesch, Gob Squad, She She Pop, Rimini Protokoll, Monster Truck, to mention only a few) has its origins in the stable of applied theatre studies in Giessen. Even if the termination of one's university studies represents the common start-up certificate, there must be universities from which one can first break out. Even a successful PhD is only a high level university drop-out; nobody 'finishes'. Yes, learning is never an end. What's so bad about learning? The defence against 'schools' has something insincere by the early-gassed, or is a reflex of over-internalized postmodern anything-goes. Yet there are new cultures of teaching and learning. The 'tutorials', learning videos by volunteer teachers for volunteer pupils, have become very popular on the internet. (Not to mention the fantastic popularity of Wikipedia, herald of non-commercialism on the thoroughly commercialized web.) Fun and beauty of school! Basically, with the YouTube learning videos, the renaissance of the lecture is taking place, a format that until recently was considered to be outdated and wrong from the point of view of higher education pedagogy and learning psychology. In not very short videos, a high density of information is transmitted. And people are watching them.

So it would be the best thing to do, you also design now, I mean it seriously, tutorials, for very fine overtone spectra, for special sound effects in the inner piano, 8 reasons why Bauckholt's music is so cool, the 10 best endings in New Music since 2010, instrumentation tricks with live-electronics, Olivier Messiaen: a Turangalîla Tutorial. This all sounds a bit ridiculous, but it's only a small step from the ridiculous to the sublime. Behind the Messiaen tutorial is the work of Olivier Messiaen.

These would be things the students could do. There would be learning effects in many directions, from the content of the subject to the rhythmic-formal design of such videos to the communicative consequences they have on the audience. Couldn't avant-garde composers be

music influencers? The composition class as YouTube channel; the professor as tutorial tutor. So the seminar's final achievement is to create an instrumentation tutorial.

And what if the students subsequently also compose „learning video music“ for the concert hall? Let me put it this way: If it works, it would be a feat! Bach's cantatas are also protestantism tutorials. Otherwise: apply what you have learned, and deconstruct the line between tutoriality and atutoriality, between the head start of the artist and the old wisdom of the critics infinitely.

It is said that the composition teacher Arnold Franchetti (1911-1993) taught his students exactly his own style, and if a note was written differently than how he, Franchetti, had written it, it was a mistake like a fifth parallel in Bach. Nothing against copies of styles, but in this exclusive manner it sounds like a catastrophic understanding of compositional education practice, in principle remaining in the nature of composition treatises at the time of the Counter-Reformation; but from a distance it also seems quite funny and maybe even really instructive - because in school one often learns something different than what they think one is about to learn.

Whenever I had lessons with a renowned composer, of course I listened to what he had to say, but I also looked at him as a type, not only studying with these people, but studying these people: How did they become what they are, what character traits are decisive there, what resistance do they actually work against, how do they furnish their flat, their working space, what colour do their pens have, does the chair have backrests, how do they nourish themselves, how do they chat in social gatherings, how often do they get drunk, what is their psychological disposition, what productive and obstructive quirks do they have, even information about their love life seemed relevant to me, and so on. It is naïve to ignore these things.

Not only can Baroque counterpoint be learned from Claudio Monteverdi, but also a lot for electronic music, and lessons in media art from Hildegard von Bingen. Reading off the form idea of the formed, the achieving of the achieved, getting a notion of the explosive from the fireworks, considering the reasons of the rejected in the great work - then the past speaks to the minds of the present, then theory becomes practice again.

Well, with a Franchetti one would probably not stay long. But no matter how positive or negative the teacher-student relationship may be, Karl Jaspers once said that with each pupil, one cherishes a viper in one's bosom. In the seminar rooms of art, closeness and distance are both prevalent, and here the highest sensitivity of the teachers is required in order to deal constructively with the generation idiosyncrasy.

Schoenberg's widow once revealed that she had never liked Webern because, as she said, he had "petty-mindedly" tried to outdo Schoenberg. Petty, childish, however, just not as the teacher himself did. Outdoing is first of all a good intention, it may or may not happen, the decisive thing is that something new comes. The safest way to not become a classic is to emulate the classics. It really doesn't make much sense to want to pass on a ready-made style. The only progress in art is towards more diversity and differentiation. The world is enriched

when young composers are original minds who create innovation. It is essential to promote this.

What I have missed in composition education, practically everywhere, at conservatories, in courses and private lessons, is precisely this: the promotion of creativity. Form analysis, instrumentation, programming skills, critical feedback, all good and important, but the composer's profession also looks like this: You get a deadline, and by then you must have come up with something witty. That too can be professionalized. Ideas do not just fall from the sky, you can do something for them to come to you, to develop yourself by going through life with the will to create, with a sense for what is possible, for the not-yet-existing.

Let's take a look at Mozart: The common chronicles say that he never composed at the piano, the genius could think up everything in his head and practically put it on paper without any need for correction. However, the first Mozart biography from 1798 also reports that he was compositionally active at the piano, especially during the night hours - although he was indeed not busy with his works then, he had worked in advance, pre-experimented, theme figures, cadential positions, melodic building blocks placed into his repertoire. Just let it flow, without direct implementation and conversion into a piece product.

In my opinion, this is the basis of composition teaching: developing and discussing material. Activating the senses, encouraging students to experiment, supporting audacity, to come to what is called an 'idea'. Later, we talk about what a 'piece' might be.

Then: *aesthetics of the present*. Coming together and studying contemporary art, not only new music, but also pop music, experimental film, photography, all manifestations of the artistic. I consider it not only interesting, but inescapable, that also an important video, a major installation or a staging style as well as philosophical texts become the subject of studies when it comes to understanding art. And then, we also take a closer look at the design of websites, apps, devices; read the feature pages as well as the business section. All of this reflects consciousness of the present, creative thinking, rhythm, rhetoric, our relationship to things, economic calculus, accesses and boundaries, symbols and deeper truths. That one discusses new ways of speaking gender – after all, a change in phonetics of great significance; that one reflects the form of the Twitter timeline - short texts, but a long stream - in its impact on our reading habits, on our temporal sense of information; that one studies Facebook, this series of news, holiday pictures, funny films, puns, advertising, YouTube links and sheer like-begging as an overall function of the filter bubble and conclude from it on the nature of algorithmic composition; that one examines the TV series system (work series was yesterday, today one plans 'seasons'); that one compares the effect of quotas for enterprise executives and those for certain pitch registers in musical pieces; that one transcribes the speeches of politicians into sixteenth-tone scales - let's hear what remains. And that it doesn't end with analyzing: We are artists, so how can we push these things forward, intervene in them, redefine them, even think ahead, develop visions. New music is also science fiction, it should be. As a composition class, form an *aesthetic think tank*, where one inspires, cheers for one another. That the world is listened to, observed and executed with creative attention.

This also means, despite all individualism, to develop a sense for the social relationships in which art thrives at all. The academy is the place to meet, discuss, learn and be creative. To

think the sound, to create the sound, to hear the sound, and to criticize by musical intelligence. There can only be expression where impressions took place before, there is not just feedback, also feed-forward. And actually it is more important that an idea comes into the world, not by whom it comes into the world.

Of course, there is a lot of responsibility for the individual, as well as the necessity of earning money and pride, without which such a demanding work as composing can hardly be achieved. The composition class is the place where in a uniquely concentrated form occurs what later takes place between concerts, public reviews, commissions and networks; but it is also the space that is as protected as possible from market conditions, where individualism and a sense of community enter into an initial, prolific relationship.

A work is net-work, from inspiration to realization with musicians, the composer is net-worker, note-network-operator, network-worshipper. Nevertheless, he cannot get past days, weeks, months of solitary enclosure. Also beautiful.

At the end of the studies, the student should have something to say and be able to express it. Expressive competence is one thing: being able to put ideas into practice, having a wide range at hand, showing aptitude for tricky formal situations and social rehearsal challenges. But the concept must be right. Because the bad piece cannot be improved; additional melody ornaments do not compensate for a detuned instrument. On the other hand, it is quite difficult to screw up a good idea. In every Beethoven symphony there are still instrumentation deficiencies, indeed. For such a thing, one has editors in literature (or meanwhile more and more software), but it is not the actual role of the composition teacher to monitor compliance with technical standards; these are not definitely defined anyway and often even prevent innovation. For some students, the mistake already starts with the fact that a sheet of music is provided with the treble clef. Those who write for treble clef are copying! What does the clef actually lock? What if the teacher prohibited the clefs? Teaching also means emptying, learning also means to unlearn. When composing, you first compose composing itself, with pens as well as with the eraser. You have to find out something like Mozart developed for himself, that it is particularly productive for you to work on your general repertoire at night. A professional pianist cannot help but practice five to eight hours of piano every day – every day. Although I don't force a student, I expect: so much time, at least, should a composer every day - every day! – spend on composing. Bach sometimes had to write a cantata every week; also a school. Today that doesn't mean producing music eight hours a day (as some students attend so many master classes that they end up not being composers but class masters), but doing something for composing; trying out how a spectral chord sounds better or worse, sensitizing oneself to the rhythms in which people in the subway wipe their mobile phones, imagining an everyday action as a sound sequence, imagining a sound sequence as an everyday action, etc. - cadential positions, melodic building blocks, theme figures, just with today's media.

The composition teacher should be absolutely generous with passing on of his artistic experience. Schoenberg was even willing to teach Cage without payment, as long as he gave him the - actually self-evident - promise to dedicate his whole life to art. Some also dedicate their whole liver to art; the 'art and liver' jokes are justified, the composition professor's job

sometimes includes giving tips on how to get a huge orchestral score written without a slipped disc (I unfortunately did not know).

Anyway, if one doesn't devote 95 percent of his or her time and power to art, he or she must be a genius or won't become an artist. The share of university teaching can only be partial. Anyone who has become a composer could write in their CV just as well: studied with Joseph Haydn and Gertrude Stein. Because he or she will also have 'consulted' them. Every good artist is also a good autodidact.

That's why a proper art class today is a lesson of many voices. University teaching has its meaning especially in the teamwork of various teachers - as if each professor embodied its own faculty in the *University of New Music*. Preliminary Basel programme from my side: training in inventiveness. Look at everything aesthetic of the present. Constantly expanding the concept of music, even dissolving it. Music as media art, music as a social, political and historical-cultural matter and urgency, in other words something conceptual and conceptually always new. Education in conceptual listening - we are first and foremost listening-workers. In addition, technological advances, from sensor technology to live video. The Upper Rhine Lowlands as the Silicon Valley of music; perhaps the first garage of it.

What is a school in the best sense of the word? An achievement by teachers and students that stands for something, where concepts are coined, where there is a culture of conceptualization.

In terms of the programmatical, it is now primarily necessary for us artists to assert ourselves in the face of the political: to bring freedom of art, internationality and global awareness, historical awareness, a sense of possibility and aesthetically challenging things into society again and again. Develop the fundamentals of the musically possible, intervene in the whole with them, make a contribution to make the world more beautiful. Even the smallest work counts, just as in democratic elections, where every vote falls into the balances.

Translation: Johannes Kreidler and Haosi Howard Chen