
Empowerment and Disempowerment in the Participatory Culture of *TransCoding*

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In this article, I consider implications of outreach practices in the field of contemporary music for the field itself and for the professional artists involved. I am interested in what happens if we facilitate access to contemporary music for audiences of any kind of demographic, break down barriers, share authority between participating non-professionals and professional artists and allow all participants of a project influence on jointly created artworks. I investigate in how far the organisational or structural change in the creative practice and the creative outcome – that comes along with bringing new players into the field – has consequences on the personal practice of the professional actors in such a project. I base my article on theories of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, communication scholar Henry Jenkins, art historian Claire Bishop, musicologist Elena Ungeheuer and my own research into social structures of the contemporary art field, and apply them to a single case study: the artistic research project *TransCoding – From ‘Highbrow Art’ to Participatory Culture*, funded by the Austrian Science Fund. Using the method of thick description, I take the reader through the history of *TransCoding*, give account of field experiences and put the found patterns of cultural-social experiences into a theoretical context. I investigate the power shifts from professional artists to audience that occurred on the basis of creative, participatory processes within this project. In doing so, I would like to raise questions and stimulate discussion with regard to the conditions and social organisations of creative practice in the contemporary music field, the distribution of power and how this is felt when ‘bringing new audiences to new music’ into the core practice of professional artists, the actual creation of a new work.

1. INTRODUCTION

There are in fact very few other areas in which the glorification of ‘great individuals’, unique creators irreducible to any condition or conditioning, is more common or uncontroversial. [Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu on the area of art in (Bourdieu 1987/1993: 29)]

The conference ‘Bringing new music to new audiences’ at De Montfort University in 2018 in the framework of ‘The Interfaces Project’ featured powerful outreach and arts projects in England and abroad that were concerned with facilitating access to contemporary music for audiences of any kind of demographic to enable an (often interactive) experience of New

Music. During the conference, artists and researchers mostly addressed content, development and structure of these projects and their impact on the audiences. I would like to focus on a different topic, namely the possible implications of outreach practices for the field of contemporary music itself and for the professional artists involved. I am interested in what happens if we facilitate access for audiences, break-down barriers, share authority between participating non-professionals and professional artists and allow all participants of a project influence on jointly created artworks. I investigate how far the organisational or structural change in the creative practice and the creative outcome – that comes along with bringing new players into the field – has consequences on the personal practice of the professional actors in such a project. This approach highlights problematic issues that may arise concerning artistic values, artistic practices and artists’ branding; it draws attention to power stratifications in the field and touches on broader institutional forces, namely market exchange, that is, the way contemporary art is sold and bought.

I base my article on theories of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, communication scholar Henry Jenkins, art historian Claire Bishop, musicologist Elena Ungeheuer and my own research into social structures of the contemporary art field, and apply them to a case study: the artistic research project *TransCoding – From ‘Highbrow Art’ to Participatory Culture*, funded by the Austrian Science Fund. In the manner of what sociologist Clifford Geertz calls ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973), I take the reader through the history of *TransCoding*, give an account of field experiences and put the found patterns of cultural-social experiences into a theoretical context. I investigate the power shifts from professional artists to audience that occurred on the basis of creative, participatory processes within this project. I look at the conditions and social organisations under which our artwork was created. I compare it to the conventions and symbols that are important for the maintenance and reproduction of the professional life of artists within the field of contemporary classical music, investigate how these factors influenced the participatory situation between art team and

online community in the project, and why problems occurred.

In doing so, I would like to raise questions and stimulate discussion with regard to the conditions and social organisations of creative practice in the contemporary music field, the distribution of power, and how this is felt when ‘bringing new audiences to new music’ into the core practice of professional artists – the actual creation of a new work.

2. THE CASE STUDY: *TRANSCODING*

TransCoding – From ‘Highbrow Art’ to Participatory Culture was a participatory arts-based research project run by an international team of artists and researchers from February 2014 to September 2018 under my direction as project leader, principal artist and principal investigator.¹ The project was funded by the Austrian Science Fund as PEEK-project AR 259-G21² and was located at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Graz, Austria. In *TransCoding*, my team and I engaged with an online community in the framework of participatory culture, using social media in the context of artistic practice to involve the said community in the making of several multimedia artworks:

[We] encouraged participation and shared discourse in the contemporary arts by actively involving an online audience in the making of a multimedia artwork. Our main target group was an internet-literate young audience, mostly drawn from popular culture, who might not necessarily be considered the typical audience for experimental contemporary multimedia performances. The blog at <https://what-ifblog.net> served as the central social media and content base, and also as a contact point for our community. *TransCoding* facilitated interactions between the participating members and the professional artist(s) through calls for entries channelled via the project’s social media hub. (Lüneburg 2018: 11)

By doing so we aimed for a ‘reconsideration of the ways in which art is produced, consumed and debated’ (Bishop 2012: 3).

2.1. Where did the idea of the project originate?

I can determine two different sources of inspiration that led to the formulation of the project and the project’s objectives. In 2012, even before *TransCoding* was conceived, three colleagues and I, an international team of four artists, decided to collaborate on a project

¹In the description of the project, this text draws on my monograph *TransCoding – From ‘Highbrow Art’ to Participatory Culture: Social Media – Art – Research* (2018).

²PEEK is the programme of the Austrian Science Fund that supports artistic research with the objective of developing the arts and unlocking new approaches in arts practice.

for violin, interactive electronics, soundtrack and video. Our team consisted of a sound artist, a visual artist, a composer specialised in interactivity, and myself – a performer and collaborator in the area of classical contemporary art music. We later formed the original arts team of *TransCoding*. Inspired by the short video *Judith Butler: Your Behavior Creates Your Gender* (Butler 2011), we had chosen the topic ‘Undoing Gender’ as a basis for the creation of our artwork. Judith Butler discusses how gender can be understood as performative and as something that evokes a series of effects through our own behaviour. ‘Undoing Gender’ seemed to us to be perfect for artistic stage presentation: a person ‘performs’; she or he acts and shapes her or his gender, again and again in different ways, and by doing so, takes on identities that seem desirable for this day, this special hour or situation, or this part of her or his life. Having found our topic, we agreed on a collaborative setting between the four of us and set out to explore different foundations for funding.

In the same year at the university of Applied Science Darmstadt/Germany, I taught media students in the aesthetics of the contemporary arts. Those students mostly came from popular culture. At that time the song ‘Gangnam Style’ by the Korean artist Psy and the remix culture around it went viral on the Internet, and Psy became a worldwide-known artist. My former students and I were fascinated by the hype around ‘Gangnam Style’, and we discussed what motivated people to put hours of creative labour into remixing and parodying this song, to make it their own and re-publish their cover version on the Internet. Was the easiness and spontaneity of social media an important factor in doing so? What was it about the content of the song that inspired people? My students were interested in how a song goes viral (and its creator becomes so popular), and I became curious as to whether this enormous creative potential of social media could possibly be tapped in order to gain new audiences for the world of classical contemporary music. Accordingly, when I was approached by the University of Applied Science in St Pölten, Austria, to apply for a so-called PEEK project at the Austrian Science Fund, I saw an opportunity to bring together both areas of interest.

2.2. Making ‘Highbrow Art’ accessible

With the support and agreement of my original arts team, I combined both objectives – the team’s intended artistic collaboration on ‘Undoing Gender’ and the question of whether social media could be a tool for gaining new audiences in contemporary art music – in the artistic research project *TransCoding – From ‘Highbrow Art’ to Participatory Culture*. We agreed that

in this project our practice-based arts research should not only be about unlocking new approaches and contexts for the arts through the artistic process. Our goals went further – namely, to search for strategies which allowed us to involve an online audience in our arts practice that was hitherto not available for the experimental contemporary arts; to apply findings and theories from media sociology to an artistic process, and to investigate their applicability and meaning in the arts; to define the (commonly hierarchical) relationship between the arts team and its audience – the online community – as one of permeability and mutual influence (Lüneburg 2014). In *TransCoding*,

[a]ll were invited to participate in the community through any (feasible) means of expression: music of all genres, poetry, prose, drawings, photos, videos, interviews, links or ideas. Our main target group was comprised of digital natives who were technically savvy, aged between twenty and thirty-five, and were interested in expressing themselves creatively while coming from popular culture. However, participants outside of the target group were equally welcome to join the community. (Lüneburg 2018: 11)

We aimed at creating a link between the world of young people coming from popular culture and that of internationally working multimedia artists to thus make ‘highbrow art’ more accessible by using social media as a tool for communication and exchange.

2.3. Social media as communication tool

Our main communication platform was the blog *what-ifblog.net*, on which we wrote blog posts under the categories ‘Art we Love’ (to introduce our topics of multimedia art and contemporary (art) music), ‘You, Us and the Project’ (where we featured community participation), ‘Identity’ (which was the main topic for the content of the artwork and the blog) and ‘Making Of’ (where we gave insights into our creative processes). Through our social media channels, we invited community members to interact with us and influence the emerging artworks. Additionally, we presented situations and material for our community members to create their own artworks, which could be with or without immediate relation to *TransCoding*. On *what-ifblog.net*, we initiated ‘Calls for Entry’ that served as a means to inspire the community to upload their creative contributions that were later incorporated in the main artworks of *TransCoding*. These consisted of: the multimedia performance *Slices of Life* for violin, of which the content and aesthetics of the video and soundtrack were strongly influenced by the community’s contributions; the audiovisual installation *Read me*, which could be personalised for (and by) individual community members; and the total of content, texts, images and

music that were displayed on the social media site’s platform around our main hub *what-ifblog.net*. We regarded them an extra work of participatory art. Art historian Claire Bishop, one of the central theorists of participation in visual art, writes in her book *Artificial Hells*:

[in participatory art] the artist is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of *situations*; the work of art as a finite, portable, commodifiable product is reconceived as an ongoing or long-term *project* with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a ‘viewer’ or ‘beholder’, is now repositioned as a co-producer or *participant*. (Bishop 2012: 2)

This is how we conceived the communication processes that materialised in online chats, comments and likes on our social media sites and in blog posts, guest blog posts, the artworks of our community members and the results of the calls for entry that we conducted: they were outcomes of an ongoing ‘art situation’ we had jointly created with the online community.

We experienced not only successful long-term interaction, but also ruptures and discontinuities within the process. I would therefore like to explore some theory on the social construction of the arts fields in which we were operating, and set them in relation to occurrences on our social media platforms. This will serve as a basis for analysing why problems arose within the participatory setting.

2.4. The social practices of *TransCoding*

The act of composing and performing is not only individually, but also socially constructed through everyday practices by professional creators and their audiences. In ‘A Holistic View of the Creative Potential of Performance Practice in Contemporary Music’ (Lüneburg 2013), I identify some of the relevant building blocks of the social construction of the field of contemporary art music. The conditions for establishing a concert aura between performer and audience, for instance, include:

the audience and their values and expectations; the vision of the performer (expressed in impression management and programming); the venue (as a physical location with social connotations) and the vision of its promoter (expressed in an overarching programming idea and impression management); the performer-audience relationship (including verbal and non-verbal communication, inspirational and visionary qualities, and the emotional attachment and motivation of followers). (Lüneburg 2013: 71)

All social agents involved – performer, promoter, composer (expressed through the selection and the content of the works programmed), and the audience – take a position in the social construct of this field. Which chances and which risks did the social construct of

TransCoding induce? What did it mean for the participatory setting and the community, and the individual disposition of the participating artists?

2.5. Authority of the community versus authority of the team

The original arts team was competent in and saw the value of collaborative artistic processes, which is why we had come together as a team to jointly develop an artwork. Upon assuming that these values could be easily transferred to a larger participatory concept such as *TransCoding*, we had underestimated the situation. The impact the participatory setting had almost immediately on our professional disposition and our artistic work took us by surprise. The influence of the community on our art making became, in fact, palpable quite early in the project, when they did not accept our choice of topic and did not follow us in our vision of ‘Undoing Gender’. The gender topic polarised and evoked resistance. People who were deeply involved in the theory and practice of the gender debate gave us feedback that there was only an ‘all or nothing’ in this: either we would exclusively deal with art, theory and topics that were expressly based on gender theories, which would also concern the choice of artists and art we presented on our blog, or we should discard the topic. Others in turn stated that ‘Undoing Gender’ was of no interest to them; they felt it was outdated and they were not inclined to engage in it, as it was of no concern to their lives.

This was the first time that the authoritative power of our community became obvious, via the (negative) reactions or non-reactions of people on our social media channels. Our visitors were, in principle, interested in our project, but they would not participate due to our choice of topic. Since we needed to gather as large a community as possible to make our concept of participation work, we consequently had to change the basic conditions of our project within the first three months. We needed a topic that would somehow be important for each and every one of our members – culture, age, or nationality notwithstanding. We therefore changed ‘Undoing Gender’ to the more universal question of ‘identity’ to suit our diverse and international community.

However, further fundamental conceptual issues soon emerged: when we, the team of *TransCoding*, actively offered the online audience influence and shared authority for the first time, and asked for text contributions on visions and dreams that they would include in the evolving artwork, we received approximately 20 individual text fragments by different community members. As a team, we had already collaboratively composed a soundtrack with the title ‘What if we had wings’, and after consulting with

my colleagues I incorporated the contributions into a text-based film that concurred with the music. After the premiere of this initial artwork of *TransCoding*, audience members approached me to inform me that they were explicitly touched by the texts in the film. Our contributors, to whom I had presented a documentation of the premiere online, were also delighted and proud seeing their texts in the artwork. Unfortunately, it was not a success from my colleagues’ perspective. They felt no connection to the content of the texts, and took issue with the multitudinous material included in the film. They claimed that, for the kind of focused aesthetic they were seeking in their personal artistic practice, a single text fragment would have offered ample opportunity for exploration so why use all of the material we had received? Where they would have centred their artistic focus on one text or word, we now had 20 text fragments with which to contend. We had no control over the content of the texts, or the way words were used. Instead, we felt obliged to use that which had been given to us, because our contributors should feel that their contributions mattered. A difficult and emotional discussion evolved: we had already set our original topic ‘Undoing Gender’ aside, and we were faced with discussing the quality of contributions (or the alleged lack thereof), the validity of communication via social media, and the randomness and diversity of the texts given to us. My colleagues felt that we gave away too much of the authority over the artwork, and we were all surprised by the impact this had not only on the art but also on our own arts practice. They subsequently proposed moving the procedure of involving the community to a much later point, when our own art would be more established. They were convinced that by doing so, we would be able to channel the contributions into a more ‘desirable’ direction, and at the same time, the community would not exert so strong an influence.

Nonetheless, our research objective was different, and as project leader I had to ensure that it was followed: we had to aim for permeability in the relation artist-community; to encourage creative empowerment of the community; to allow for mutual influence and authority in the creative process; to break with traditional hierarchical pattern and to search for a discourse between professional artists and young people coming from popular culture – much in the sense of how Henry Jenkins and his co-authors Ravi Purushotma, Margaret Weigel, Katie Clinton and Alice J. Robison define participatory culture in their paper *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture – Media Education for the 21st Century*:

[a] culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creations ... In a participatory culture,

members also believe their contributions matter and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least, members care about others' opinions of what they have created). (Jenkins et al. 2009: 3)

Accordingly, we had set out to develop strategies that invited genuine, practical and non-hierarchical participation, meaning that each contributor found a compelling reason to participate, had a stake in the process and claimed ownership in the outcome – all for the purpose of making 'highbrow' art more accessible, and opening the boundaries of our field by allowing people from different sociocultural and aesthetic backgrounds to participate in the creative process. However, a fundamental issue had emerged that could not be ignored. My colleagues found our postulates so incompatible with their personal and professional dispositions that they left the project shortly thereafter. In retrospect, this was at least partly a consequence of conceptual issues in the research design, of which we were not aware at the outset.

3. MOVING CONCURRENTLY IN TWO ARTISTIC FIELDS

From where did our problem stem? When studying an artistic field of a given society 'the task is that of constructing the space of positions and the space of position-takings [prises de positions] in which they are expressed' (Bourdieu 1987/1993: 30) In our case, there were two given societies whose impact could be felt either directly or indirectly in the setting of *TransCoding*. The society in the foreground was that of the total community around *TransCoding*, including passive visitors to our social media platforms, active commentators or contributors, the *TransCoding* team and the research mandate. The space of positions, that is, the structure of the field, was determined through *TransCoding*'s worldwide operating social media channels, the calls for entry through which we invited participation, the communication strategies, processes and interactions between community and team members, the aesthetics and tastes conveyed and discussed through artistic contributions and blog posts, and the evolving participatory crossover artwork. The second society that was in the background – the impact of which was nevertheless felt equally strongly by the members of the original arts team – was that of the classical contemporary art and music world. Here, the space of positions was determined through the expectations of our professional peer groups with regard to what constitutes the value and specific aesthetics of high-class artworks in sound art, visual art, interactive art and performance culture; but it was also verified by the symbol of the 'genius artist' who is expected to follow her or his inner creative calling with no obligation

whatsoever to the audience. Interestingly, in her essay *Konzertformate heute: abgeschaffte Liturgie oder versteckte Rituale?* (Concert formats today: abolished liturgy or hidden rituals?), musicologist Elena Ungeheuer describes the almost religious nature of the concert format:

A concert shows many ritual components of quasi-liturgical character. There is the high priest (the interpreter), the first and supreme witness (the composer), there is the holy message (the music) that experiences an authentic exegesis through the priest, there are asymmetries in conduct between what's happening on stage and in the audience (who is allowed to say/to do what? who is not?), there exists an asymmetrical dress code, we have the outcome of happiness amongst the attendees of the concert, there is the adequate behaviour 'afterwards', when the work of the star on that particular day is jointly judged, as if commenting on the quality of the sermon. (Ungeheuer 2011: 127; translation from German by the author)

The contrast to *TransCoding*'s participatory setting could not be more profound. The classical music world celebrates rituals of almost religious nature with strictly separated spheres of creating, acting and 'worshipping', whereas in *TransCoding* we used common, profane tools such as social media to directly interact and communicate with our audience; we did not operate in a concert hall, but without a concrete venue, not face to face, but in the worldwide void, the Internet; instead of detaching the creative act from outer influences and especially from our audience, we revealed the making of the artworks and allowed our community insight into and profound influence in the creative process. Prestige, that is usually ascribed to one single creative artist in the society of the contemporary classic art, was shared with many in our participatory society around *TransCoding*; in the latter, the recognition of the creative community had to be always at the foreground, whereas in the former, we had little expectation that our own peer group would grant us, the members of the arts team, recognition for the evolving participatory artwork since it clearly deviated from the aesthetic expectations of each of our professional fields. As Bourdieu says, 'the structure of the field, i.e. of the space of positions, is nothing other than the structure of the distribution of the capital of specific properties which governs success in the field and the winning of the external or specific profits (such as literary prestige) which are at stake in the field' (Bourdieu 1987/1993: 30). In *TransCoding*, the two societies and artistic fields that were equally inhabited by the participating professional artists were in fact almost mutually exclusive. What governed success in one was an impediment to success in the other. We had encountered what sociologist David Swartz calls 'the problem of relations

between individual dispositions and external structures . . . and more generally the problem of relations between material and symbolic aspects of social life' (Swartz 1997: 49)

4. EMPOWERMENT AND DISEMPOWERMENT

My colleagues seemed to experience the community's empowerment as personal and artistic disempowerment. What was the difference between the situation of the community, their disposition and my own? Through *TransCoding* the community gained incentives for their individual creative practice, they experienced personal pride and enjoyed social connections, they could claim their individual ownership of the installation *Read me*, and stood in direct personal exchange with a professional artist; furthermore they gained insights into the domain of contemporary music and had the opportunity to have their art appear in the show *Slices of Life*. They seemed to enjoy being featured and written about on our various social media channels and in the monograph *TransCoding – From 'Highbrow Art' to Participatory Culture: Social Media – Art – Research*. The community exerted influence on the topic and shape of the artwork through the choice and composition of their stories, imagery and sounds. They affected the emergent fields of interest and content by passively rejecting or actively reacting to what we presented. They shaped the overall narrative through their own storytelling. They influenced the musical material by introducing me to their own compositions via challenges on our SoundCloud group, and by offering me their compositions to be woven into the soundtrack of *Slices of Life*. They had a strong aesthetic impact on the visual aspect of the artwork through their photos and/or films, which they contributed in response to our calls for entries. In the process they had gained power.

My colleagues, however, had to share creative authority, even though they questioned the value of the community contributions, felt uncomfortable in the dissolution of their personal practices, and doubted the validity of communication processes with anonymous strangers. Moreover, they experienced the disclosure of the 'making of' and giving the community insight into their creative processes as an intrusion into their personal space. They were concerned for their reputations among their personal peer groups, because they were 'caught' in a participative situation, which they felt they could not control artistically. Being part of the project had pushed them into a situation in which they had not foreseen the impact on their art and arts practice. Given their personal professional dispositions, there was not

cogent, external reason why they should adjust their dispositions to the conditions presented to them by the framework of the project, other than the obligation to fulfil the research mandate. Success, to them, would have meant the creation of an artwork in the framework of *TransCoding* that would be accepted by their professional peer group, and hopefully served their reputation in the field. That could not be guaranteed.

What was different for me? I had started this project as a performer, and only to a small, tentative part as composer. Consequently, I did not need to defend a reputation or live up to my branding as a composer. The relationship with my audience, on the other hand, is always of professional importance to me. It clearly belongs to the social construction of the artistic field in which I work. For me, this is an aspect that led me to appreciate and value the participatory and communicative idea. Additionally, I gained new perspectives on the preferences and interests of my audience through the interaction with *TransCoding's* community, and enjoyed the direct communication with them. By changing my viewpoint and looking through their eyes, I learnt about my own domain, the field of contemporary music, and was concurrently introduced to the popular culture they liked and from which they came. With the personal challenge of becoming a composer, I grew as an artist and gained new professional skills and insights. And last but not least, I experienced a deep feeling of satisfaction and relatedness that was grounded in the community feeling and the work in this communal project. To me, success meant nurturing a lively interaction with the community, which led to their active participation and creative contributions that I later incorporated into the artwork. Following our research objectives, success necessarily required that the influence of the community would be palpable in the content and aesthetic of the main artworks, and that authority in the process and the outcome would be shared. Hence, an artwork different from the aesthetic expectations and values of my peer group was indeed welcome, and served as a sign of the permeability of our relationship, and of the mutual influence we had on each other. The recognition through the artistic research community, and in the first instance, from *TransCoding's* online community, was of far more relevance to me than that of my peer group from the field of contemporary art music.

The community did not receive any financial benefit from the project, which was part of what made them such a strong and influential factor in the social construction of *TransCoding* – they volunteered their creative labour, which increased the team's obligation to grant them a voice. It may be concluded that, to them, success was when their interests were heard

and acknowledged by us, their creative works seen, and recognition through the community of *TransCoding* was granted. Success also meant that they were featured as a person and through their artworks, not only on the Internet, but also through my international performances of our joint work in the classical contemporary music scene, and through the research and the monograph on *TransCoding*. Whether the participatory model of *TransCoding* had a legacy for future audience engagement of the involved participants could not definitely be determined. Due to the online character of the project and its geographically widespread range, we were not able to follow up audience numbers in clearly defined environments. However, out of the project new artistic collaborations between former participants developed that led for instance to an opera production, to joint performances in small-scale concert venues and to plans for future collaborations in a follow-up research project.

In *TransCoding*, it was impossible to ignore the impact that the relations between the individual dispositions of the members of the arts team and the external structures of the participatory framework had on the project's creative and organisational processes. *TransCoding* was undertaken with the direct involvement of a community that influenced the resulting artworks. Whether this process was fruitful for all actors involved was a point of controversy within the original arts team. It depended greatly on the field with which an actor felt affiliated, and the way this field was socially constructed. Acting within the social field of *TransCoding* necessarily meant relinquishing the idea of being a 'unique creator', acting as 'irreducible to any condition or conditioning' (Bourdieu 1987/1993: 29), and being bound only to oneself and one's art. In my opinion, the beauty and the richness of *TransCoding* laid instead in the fact that we questioned the '(widely accepted) nature of an artist's exclusive authority in art production' (Lüneburg 2018: 173), nurtured the communication between artist and audience, embraced the mutual conditioning, and created a link between us that changed the traditional power relation into one of permeability and shared influence. Whether this meant empowerment or disempowerment depended entirely on the personal disposition and professional viewpoint of each single actor in the field.

5. CONCLUSION

What can be said with regard to the conditions, social organisations and symbolic structures of creative practice in the contemporary music field and in music outreach?

5.1. 'Purposiveness' versus 'Purposeless Purpose'

In many aspects, music outreach and its emergent arts practice are of a purposive nature. We introduce new audiences to new music for the purpose of making them knowledgeable and enthusiastic about a genre we attribute wealth and relevance to; we strive to include audiences through interactive or participative artworks to break down barriers of social or symbolic exclusion and further equality, diversion and democratic approaches in the art field. We search for modes of presentation that enhance the emotional and cognitive experience of the audience. Art music, however, is widely practised in an 'autonomous sphere of purposeless purpose and disinterested spectatorship' as posits art theorist Steven Wright in his work *Toward a Lexicon of Usership* (Wright 2013: 12). In the last century, artists of all genres, including the field of contemporary music, tried to reconcile those two strands and dissolve the boundaries between them. Fluxus, conceptual art, graphic scores, the Scratch Orchestra, happenings, interactive and participative arts projects or music outreach come to mind. However, this appears to be an almost utopian postulate. The two contradicting paradigms seem not to be compatible, but rather mutually exclusive. *TransCoding* lay in between both: not conceived as an outreach project but as an art project, we nevertheless intended to bring new audiences outside our peer group to new music which means we acted purposively.

5.2. Inclusion of the audience versus autonomy of the arts

Bringing new music to new audiences by including them in the creative core practice of professional artists and allowing them to substantially influence the actual creation of a new joint work has its lure and its pitfalls. Instead of consuming art as passive bystanders, audience members get emotionally and practically involved and gain decision-making power with regard to content, form and aesthetics of an artwork. In the process, they potentially challenge artistic values, individual practices and the sovereignty of the professional artist. The symbolic empowerment of the audience, when entering and permeating the usually autonomous sphere of art, can be felt as personal disempowerment, loss of control and even as a loss for the arts from the professional artist's perspective.

5.3. Market exchange – single authorship versus collaborative practices

When touching on broader institutional forces, namely market exchange and the way contemporary art is sold and bought, further issues arise. The development of an artist persona carefully built over the years through an

artist's art production, the aesthetic values and creative processes an artist stands for, and his or her individual branding for the market, do not necessarily adapt to art situations and artistic outcomes in collective practices. On top of the fact that typically 'collective projects are more difficult to market than works by individual artists' (Bishop 2012: 2), professional artists may furthermore feel that they risk their reputation in the market by inviting non-professional audience members into their creative practice and offering them influence and equal participation in the artistic process.

Through the experience of *TransCoding*, I became interested in the power and control mechanisms of the field that are reflected in the difficulties, opposition and antagonisms that occurred. It has opened up a whole plethora of new questions about democracy, empowerment, inclusion, equal participation and power stratification in the field of contemporary music with regard to all actors involved. With this article, I would like to stimulate discussion, and encourage analysis, if democracy, empowerment and equal participation is really always desirable and doable. If yes, I wonder where does it lead us within the social, material and symbolic structures of our field and where does it lead us as artists and in our art?

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