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Frank Cox, and Wolfram Schurig

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Critical Composition Today

Edited by Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf

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Contents

Foreword

HARRY LEHMANN

Avant-garde Today

A Theoretical Model of Aesthetic Modernity 9

FERDINAND ZEHENTREITER

Sensory Cognition as an Autonomous Form of Critique

Reflections on redefining a “critical theory of art” 43

DIETER MERSCH

Medial Paradoxes

On Methods of Artistic Production 62

CLAUS-STEFFEN MAHNKOPF

What Does “Critical Composition” Mean? 75

RAINER NONNENMANN

The Dead End as a Way Out

Critical Composition: a Historical Phenomenon? 88

ERNST HELMUTH FLAMMER

A Critique of Negativism

Possibilities and Limits of an Aesthetic of “musica negativa” 110

FRANK COX

Critical Modernism:

Beyond Critical Composition and Uncritical Art 126

GERHARD STÄBLER

Sharpened Senses—Open. Responsible. Challenging

Composing Now 155

GÜNTER MAYER

Advanced Composition and Critical (Political) Ambition 171

NICOLA SANI

Critical Thought in New Italian Music Between Political

Commitment and Globalization 185

GORDON DOWNIE

Aesthetic necrophilia: reification, new music, and the

commodification of affectivity 196

Biographies

Foreword

“Critical composition,” or at least its manifestation among the generation that defined itself through this term, has long since grown old. On the other hand, critique—which is in any case a constant in modern thought—is more necessary than ever, and has indeed been articulated forcefully again in recent times.¹ For this reason, the Gesellschaft für Musik und Ästhetik held an international, interdisciplinary symposium under the title “What does ‘critical composition’ (still) mean today?” in September 2004 at Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart. The texts published here stem from that project. The symposium’s aim was to examine the question of what “critical composition” was intended to be, what it means today, and whether/how it is possible today.

The composers generally associated with critical composition are from the generation between Luigi Nono and Klaus Huber on the one hand and Mathias Spahlinger on the other hand, a generation that therefore also includes Helmut Lachenmann, Nicolaus A. Huber, Vinko Globokar and others. These compositional approaches share firstly a fundamental left-leaning political stance in relation to their own position in society oriented toward a decided political commitment, and secondly the conviction that the treatment of musical material must be “critically” oriented. The positions of this generation have meanwhile gained astounding recognition, which must now—in the face of the rapid societal changes since the late 1980s and also the “competing venture” of post-modernity, which seemingly denies the younger and middle generations access to a critical form of composition—be problematized. More fundamentally, we must ask how a critical, socio-critical, and indeed politically sensitive mode of composition can be possible at all if it is not to lead to orthodoxy, stubbornness, or narrow-mindedness; how, then, a cosmopolitan, universal and plural orientation that integrates the experience of the present is possible. In order to render the transition from a First to a Second Modernity² comprehensible, different contributions from composers, musicologists, philosophers and sociologists have been collected here.

The translation of all texts except those by Frank Cox and Gordon Downie was carried out by Wieland Hoban.³ We thank the *Ernst von Siemens Musikstiftung* for their kind support, without which this publication would have been impossible.

Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf

Freiburg, May, 2006

1 See, for example, Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, *Kritische Theorie der Musik* (Weilerswist: Velbrück Wissenschaft, 2006).

2 See the contribution from Harry Lehmann in this volume.

3 Unless otherwise indicated, in all cases in which citations from other authors appear in the texts, these were translated by Mr. Hoban.