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Research Erases the Non-Researchable

There is a connection between the university development towards artistic research and the current rapid decline of abstract art or art of emptiness and refusal of expression. I have observed both in the last 20 years, i.e. since about 2005. Art such as "8 Grau" by Gerhard Richter, or other monochrome tendencies, or other manifestations of a successor to the "Black Square", has since disappeared from the 'market'. What has remained is a talkative art, a rhetorical art, an art that always has good (political, socio-critical) reasons - the art of good reason. Only such an art is accessible to research, only such an art can be used to make a statement. Research is therefore carried out where researchable things can be found. And what is no longer 'researched' today, what is not accessible to 'research', no longer has a chance of being heard - how could it? How could silence make itself heard?

Musicology has always suffered from the fact that it has necessarily had to limit itself to what is discursively accessible - and has accordingly always been despised by the "real" musicians, who instinctively knew that the discourse at best only scratches the surface of what music really is. What is new is that today it is the "real" musicians who are leading the discourse, the composers and performers who are striving for a PhD, and who seem to forget what else is slumbering beneath the discursive surface - even worse: the forgetting is joined by a musical practice, a composing that tends to be limited to surface phenomena. Only that which is accessible to the discourse is composed, while the unsaid or unspeakable, which actually - or once? - is music, is now suppressed and disappears from the stage.

In a composing that is subject to the compulsion of having to be research at the same time, one and the same mechanism is at work in the approach/strategy/attitude, despite all its outward diversity. And this approach, forced into line, is that of a certain kind of discursivity. Everything that constitutes the respective work is held in such a way that it could just as easily be narrated, that one could always turn it into a written text of artistic research or a thesis. In principle, everything that happens is 'said', nothing is 'shown'. Everything has a theme - like a sonata. There is nothing more than thematic and motivic, nothing more than rhetoric. Everything knows what it is doing and why. Everything can be justified, everything is argued out and follows an argumentative economy. Everything is revealed - nothing remains to be discovered. No more questions. Only

answers. And answers murmur 'meaning'. But whoever says meaning means interpretation. It's about establishing the sovereignty of interpretation and placing it above what is interpreted. It is about the exercise of power, about discipline and the monetary value of art.

For art itself, on the other hand, meaning has no meaning. This goes so far that it does not even shy away from the attribute of "senselessness", it can even emphatically affirm it. Because 'senseless art' can just as well be understood as art that cannot be perceived by the senses. Duchamp's non-retinal is the precursor to this. It was once there to deprive art of its tradition of craftsmanship and descriptiveness. Nowadays, however, it once again serves as a justification for a great deal of craftsmanship and descriptiveness in all the art-research art with its references, documentations, rhetorics, statistics, etc.

But senselessness can do even more than just the magic trick of an art that cannot be perceived by the senses. The most subtle of all places of art, and at the same time its greatest challenge, is to a certain extent its negativity, is precisely where it escapes sense and significance - even if this escape from sense is only temporary, and even if it is almost certain that the trap of meaning will inexorably snap shut afterwards. The envisaged place therefore also has a temporal dimension: the interval of postponement. But the inexorability of the end of the period of postponement of sense, of meaning, of signification is not identical with its erasure - on the contrary: it is precisely the erasure that leads to its own self-cancellation, so to speak. For while it cancels the signified in the act of signification, it experiences the subsequent difference between the two precisely in this act. This difference thus creates a distance, another interval, but this time as a timeless space between the two, the space of an erased erasure. This in overall, this emptiness is achieved by art, celebrated by music, while this space is surrounded with marble columns whose capitals glow with gold leaf.

But all this seems incompatible with the usual attributions of meaning, elevations of significance and justification strategies of artistic research, and will remain incompatible with it as long as it proves incapable of reflecting precisely this 'negativity'. However, artistic research only deals with the 'positive' - and calls that "knowledge production". But the production of knowledge is only a guarantee that art will be missed once again - art that touches on not-knowing and tirelessly spells out for us the inability to know.

