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## Outsourcing Progress: on conceptual music

No content, no form, is any longer immediately identical with the inwardness, the nature, the unconscious substantial essence of the artist; every material may be indifferent to him if only it does not contradict the formal law of being simply beautiful and capable of artistic treatment. Today there is no material which stands in and for itself above this relativity, and even if one be raised above it, still there is at least no absolute need for its representation by *art*.<sup>1</sup>

—G. W. F. Hegel

Politics and poetry have one thing in common—the letter *p* and the letter *o*.<sup>2</sup>

—Joseph Brodsky

Never accept images that have been created for you by someone else. It is always better to form the habit of learning how to see things for yourself: then you are in a better position to judge for yourself.<sup>3</sup>

—Malcolm X

### Cannot Contain This

The New Conceptualism, conceptual music, *Konzeptmusik*: whatever nomenclature one may choose, in recent years, the trend has had a wide-scale impact. At the 2014 Darmstadt New Music courses, Michael Maierhoff's *EXIT F* (2012) for four hot air balloons and ensemble was performed in an outdoor concert with large screens more usually associated with stadium rock than the sedate world of new music, alongside Stefan Prins's *Generation Kill* (2012) for musicians who also make use of game controllers and are projected, both 'truthfully' and in ways which interpolate digital glitches to foreground the obvious inauthenticity of mediated image. As Prins describes it, this represents

a society which is more and more monitored, on the increasing importance of internet, networks and social media, which are fuelled by video's [*sic*] taken with webcams and smartphones, on video-games and on wars fought like video-games, on the line between reality and virtuality which gets thinner by the day.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. 1, tr. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988 [1818–29/1835]), 605.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Brodsky, quoted in Alexandra Berlina, *Brodsky Translating Brodsky: Poetry in Self-Translation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) 143. As Berlina notes, this aphorism was minted by Brodsky in Russian, causing the clumsy number agreement when translated into English.

<sup>3</sup> Malcolm X, quoted in bell hooks, 'Spike Lee Doing Malcolm X: Denying black pain', in *ibid.*, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (London: Routledge, 2006 [1964]), 180–92 (181).

<sup>4</sup> Stefan Prins, *Generation Kill* programme note (online at: [http://www.stefanprins.be/eng/composesChrono/comp\\_2012\\_03.html](http://www.stefanprins.be/eng/composesChrono/comp_2012_03.html)) <last accessed: 20 April 2015>. One might recall—with this combination of stadium rock and the virtual realities of modern warfare—that on this occasion the most mainstream of mainstream rock assuredly 'got there first': the

Elsewhere, Ensemble Decoder presented Alexander Schubert's techno-inflected, and dry ice-heavy, *Lucky Dip* (2013), while Ensemble neon premiered Johannes Kreidler's Wagnerian (in scale at least) *Audioguide* (2013–14), a seven-hour new music 'talk show'-cum-multimedia music theatre piece. One of the three 'Darmstadt Fora' was devoted to the topic 'New Conceptualism: A Dead End or A Way Out?', with one of the participants, the philosopher Harry Lehmann, elsewhere presenting a paper which focussed on 'Conceptual Music and the Content-Aesthetic Turn', while Peter Ablinger discussed both 'Composition beyond Music' and 'Music beyond Composition', the latter also the focus of a series of practical workshops run by Ablinger. The audio-visual mediatisation of Jagoda Szmytka's *Limbo Lander* (2014), too, might well be held to be a significant part of the same trends, as might aspects of Ensemble Adapter's performances of, say, Paul Frick's *Destroy Erase Improve* (2010) and *I'm 100% Confident Babe* (2014) or Sarah Nemtsov's respectively effects pedal- and KAOSS pad-processed *implicated amplification* (2014) and *drummed variation* (2014). If there had ever been a point at which New Conceptualism was somehow, radically and rightly, pointing at and prodding a certain self-satisfaction and insularity within new music, by 2014 it had gone mainstream.

Nevertheless, conceptual music perhaps ought, at least on first impression, to be either a contradiction in terms or too obvious to need mention. The relative semantic 'weakness' of music—its difficulty in depicting specific 'things' in ways which are generally communicable without commentary which goes beyond the musical—ought either to mean that it signifies nothing specific enough to be considered a concept or that, by the same token, music (especially in its more abstract, non-texted forms) deals with nothing but the deployment of ideas and concepts. One might suspect that the element 'new' in a strictly musical version of conceptualism represents a desire for a (nostalgic) return to conceptual art that, as it were, really meant something, whether in the hands of Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, and Joseph Beuys, or Tracey Emin and Damian Hirst. Indeed, substituting 'music' for 'art' in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy's* description of conceptual art yields a recognisable description:

While some people find conceptual music very refreshing and relevant, many others consider it shocking, distasteful, and conspicuously lacking in craftsmanship. Some even simply deny that it is music at all. [...] Most conceptual music actively sets out to be controversial in so far as it seeks to challenge and probe us about what we tend to take as given in the domain of music.<sup>5</sup>

Johannes Kreidler's *Fremdarbeit* [*Outsourcing*] (2009) may be seen as paradigmatic of the trend, not least since the compositional work 'proper' was, according to the detail of the score, largely outsourced to a Chinese composer and an Indian programmer. In what follows, an examination of the piece proposes that it merely *repeats* the exploitation it might otherwise be held progressively to reveal. Far from restating,

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media saturation, particularly of rolling news, and virtuality of the first Gulf War lie at the heart of U2's early 1990s 'Zoo TV' tour.

<sup>5</sup> To be sure, not all of the pieces already noted neatly map onto this description precisely: Schubert's *Lucky Dip* is, to my mind, a very strongly crafted piece where the conceptualism is precisely to do with the thorough integration of a techno aesthetic ostensibly wholly alien to the territory of new music; by contrast, Nemtsov's *implicated amplification* seems, to the ear at least, to be a quite straightforward, elegant bass clarinet study, but for the 'tasteless' bluntness of the effects pedals, especially the exaggeratedly clunky shifts of tone between, say, distortion and octaver.

even if long *après la lettre*, the progressive politics of conceptual art, the musical repetition of such ideas imply a reactionary politics even where they are couched in progressivist terms.

In engaging with the political dimensions of the New Conceptualism in music, through the particular example of a case which overtly engages in political territory, I mean no critique of the individuals involved, whether that be Johannes Kreidler—whose work I examine in particular here—or any other composer who has been associated with the term (in some cases perhaps even unwillingly or unfairly), including Martin Schüttler, Hannes Seidl, Maximilian Marcoll, Michael Maierhof, Jennifer Walshe, Sarah Nemtsov, Trond Reinholdtsen, or Peter Ablinger. I sympathise strongly with Rancière's suggestion in this context that

It can be said that an artist is committed as a person, and possibly that he is committed by his writings, his paintings, his films, which contribute to a certain type of political struggle. An artist can be committed, but what does it mean to say that his art is committed? Commitment is not a category of art. This does not mean that art is apolitical. It means that aesthetics has its own politics, or its own meta-politics.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, the particular case examined here is doubly interesting precisely because it is so often so challenging to separate Kreidler from his output. His proximity to the work—the direct involvement of Kreidler as a visible actor in its creation—is, in many cases, a vital part of the apparatus which validates the work *as* art. In the case of *product placements* (2008), say, which takes 70,200 samples and compresses them into 33 seconds of audio, the contextual elements which Kreidler presents alongside the piece—variously conceived of as music theatre, performance, or 'action piece'—are integral; without them, the piece would, arguably, fail to contain that which forms its purpose. In this piece, Kreidler attempts to register the 70,200 samples with the Gesellschaft für musikalische Aufführungs- und mechanische Vervielfältigungsrechte (GEMA), which collects fees on behalf of musical creators arising from performance, broadcast, or other forms of usage. Technically, all sample usage would thus have to be registered with them and *product placements* represents the *expansio ad absurdum* of such a process. Here is an artefact, which takes the form of a conventional piece of fixed media in many senses, yet the *content* of the artwork lies outside its own frame. The artwork, as such, is arguably empty here. As an artwork, it is a MacGuffin.

### Pure Pleasure Seeker

*Fremdarbeit* is explained by the usual English translation of its German title, 'outsourcing'.<sup>7</sup> Although the piece is, in many respects, a conventionally scored and

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<sup>6</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, tr. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 60.

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted, however, that despite the clarity of the usual English translation, the German word is both a curious and interesting one to have selected. Literally, to be sure, a *Fremdarbeiter* would be a 'foreign worker', but historically it referred to (principally civilian) workers "of foreign nationality or citizenship employed in German economic enterprises. During the period of World War II it could be used to refer both to 'forced labourers' (*Zwangsarbeiter*) and to those working in German territory who originated from countries friendly to the Nazi state, although in this latter case the word which would come to supplant *Fremdarbeiter* in the parlance of the Germany of the later 1950s onwards, *Gastarbeiter* ('guest worker') was already in use. Despite the significance of the term's usage in the Nazi era, it is important to note that it is, in fact, of much older currency, common throughout the first half of the twentieth century. It is doubtless hardly surprising that the most neutral, but also most clumsy, possible expression was avoided, which would have seen the piece titled *ausländische Arbeitskraft*. See,

performed piece, it features a moderator who, the score advises, ought normally to be the composer. The moderator introduces the piece, and provides commentary in between its four movements. The gentle ambivalence of whether the moderator's commentaries are part of the piece 'proper' may be seen in the indication of duration given in the score: "11' music plus *ca.* 7' moderation", while the 'recording of the entire piece' on Kreidler's own website lasts for just over 11 minutes. The piece's duration, as given in Kreidler's worklist, however, is 23 minutes.

The moderator also has stage directions: "Wholly matter-of-fact, objectively; without acting", so the 'moderator' is not a 'character' as such but, really, a moderator. Given the content of what the moderator has to say, audience members may well think that this role does properly belong to the composer, that the composer ought to take responsibility for the piece. To explain, I quote the moderator's opening address (nearly) in full, which is delivered after the audience members have been given a hand-out:

Ladies and gentlemen, the piece which now follows requires a moderator. You ought not simply to listen to the music; you need to know something about it! And a programme note would be insufficient. But the music isn't a 'fill-in' between the spoken presentations. On the contrary: the presentation is to enable you to attend to the music more precisely. At the top of the hand-out, you will see the website of Xia Non Xiang, a composer from China, who composes to commission from \$10. Xiang lives in Peking and is, according to his own description, poor and must support his parents, wife, and child, but studied at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. He caters for every wish of the commissioner. In recent years, I have developed my musical language, which works through the combination of live performance and accompanying samples of other musics; perhaps some of you know it. I sent Xiang my recent music and asked him to write something in this style. [...] My work has been concerned for a long time with the introduction of 'alien' elements to ask questions regarding identity and, politically speaking, property rights and copyright. I call this 'music with music'. Now Xiang had to plagiarise this in turn—China is well known for plagiarism. [...] At first he was extremely annoyed, because normally he writes music for the weddings of Americans *etc.* and, though had heard a little of the Western avant-garde, he had never composed anything like that. After some hesitation, he agreed to a fee of \$30. You can now hear the first 'sorry effort' he wrote for me [...].

The moderator—again in the premiere, and most subsequent performances, Kreidler himself—argues that, at the very beginning of the piece, the plagiarism is very skilfully done, but as the piece progress "falls into a tonal pattern" rather distant from Kreidler's music more broadly. Perhaps hardly surprisingly, the moderator observes that, in the world of new music, plagiarism is not only undertaken 'by hand', but also automatically, algorithmically, via computer programming. He describes having acquired the details from the German foreign office of one Ramesh Murraybay, an Indian programmer who had, between 2005 and 2008 worked on computer audio software but, having come to the end of his contract and having no further employment in Germany, he had since had to return to India. As the moderator describes the arrangement:

I gave him the same pieces with the request that he analyse them algorithmically so that the computer could compose a new piece [...]. He agreed unhesitatingly to undertake the work for \$15: he has to support a wife and four children, who can live

for a week on that. I received, by the by, €1500 commission monies, plus the mechanical copyright and performing rights income. Murraybay figured out that, aurally, my music consists of 25% samples—which are *ca.* 70% pop, 20% speech, and 10% classical music—and 75% instrumental music, of which 53% are pointillist and 23% linear, with the remainder indefinable; about 46% is of moderate volume, 39% loud, 15% quiet; there are at least 30 timbres. He was then able to generate one such piece himself from these data.

It is probably worth noting that Kreidler's subsequent income from the piece is, by the standards of new music, substantial: to date, *Fremdarbeit* has received 15 performances across Europe and North America, given by such leading and well-known ensembles as Ensemble Mosaik, Ensemble Nadar, Decoder, Ensemble Dal Niente, and the London Sinfonietta.

Significantly, there is a break in the second movement: bar 46 of the movement is missing, replaced by a pause in which the moderator reports: "Well, at this point there's a misunderstanding. The computer has composed something which goes beyond the range of the piano: Murraybay simply didn't know exactly how high the piano could go; it's not a particularly popular instrument in India. We'll just carry on now, where it returns to the playable area of the instrument."

The third movement, hardly surprisingly, integrates these two approaches. Murraybay designed a program which could work with the idioms of this music, which could then be used, in turn, by Xiang, at a cost of a further \$15 to Murraybay and \$30 to Xiang. Yet this introduced a further error: between Murraybay and Xiang, more instruments than would be available for the piece were deployed. As the moderator describes it: "Now, it would have been too expensive to add more instruments, but I also didn't want to throw this away, since it would also have cost more if he had to do it again, so we'll do it now so that you'll hear the extra instruments as samples through the speakers [...]. If you close your eyes it's almost the same." A final movement pushes these ideas yet further: as a sort of 'remix', the demands were that it be formed 80% of Kreidler's music, 20% of ragtime music, and also include a sample of the singing of Maria Callas. As Kreidler, moderating, describes it: "What I wanted to achieve is something like those pictures by Roy Lichtenstein, which are re-paintings of Picasso images, but following Lichtenstein's example, as a sort of cheap print."

## Familiar Feeling

Claims for the significance and value of *Fremdarbeit* tend to revolve around what it exposes, what it brings to light. What is being questioned is, to be sure, obvious, even if the shape of the answers *Fremdarbeit* deploys is far from clear. In short, the issue at stake is whether *Fremdarbeit* exposes exploitation or whether it merely repeats it. As Kreidler describes the concerns of the piece, there are two central aspects: "The question of authorship (who composed that piece?), when having assistant composers from a very different background asked to compose something in a style they wouldn't compose themselves, and the aspect of monetary value and exploitation in a globalized world."<sup>8</sup> The two questions are, in the end, profoundly intertwined, if in surprising ways.

In the 'documentary' of the piece prepared by Kreidler, after the moderation between the second and third movement, Kreidler is interrupted by an audience

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<sup>8</sup> Johannes Kreidler, in Julian Day, 'The Culture of Copying: Monetary Value and Exploitation. An Interview with Johannes Kreidler', *Runway: Australian Experimental Art*, no. 25 (2014) (online at <http://runway.org.au/culture-copying-monetary-value-exploitation/> <last accessed: 1 April 2015>).

member who claims first, that what is undertaken here is “nothing but exploitation” and that what the audience hears in the concert is not Kreidler’s music. The responses of the moderator—on this occasion not contained within the score—are instructive. In the first case, Kreidler responds:

Well, that’s globalization for you. This keyboard was probably also made in China and sold here at a much higher price. The clothes I’m wearing come from third-world countries and are sold here for a lot of money. That’s the system we use all the time and no one seems to mind.

The second question prompts a second, more detailed answer:

Of course it’s my music! I bought it. Legally, it is my music—I own the patents. You can buy things like that. But of course, no one really owns a work of art anyway, not even the composers from Asia. The musicians who play the work are also involved and they play on instruments built by instrument makers. The instruments themselves rely on centuries of technological developments. Every musical score contains centuries worth of knowledge and craft. What I’m doing here is just honest for once. When Jörg Widmann sits in the Grand Hotel in Dubai composing Viennese waltzes, that’s cynical. I’m not hiding anything. And composers who do nothing but write their little structures should be ashamed.

Both the question of ‘writing little structures’, especially in the context of what globalization ‘is’, and the claim that at least *Fremdarbeit* is honest about what it is doing, require further scrutiny. Nevertheless, I am unconvinced that this particular outburst from the audience was unprompted. The quality of delivery seems—to me at least—to suggest that the questions had been planted in advance and are posed by an actor, playing the part of the justifiably outraged. Kreidler’s answers, too, have the ring of the fully prepared, in which case the criticism of exploitation *and* a particular refutation of that critique would be, self-reflexively, integrated into the piece from the outset.

Kreidler’s supporters, hardly surprisingly, see this activity in a strongly positive, politically progressive light. Julian Day argues that

like Andy Warhol and Jeff Koons before him, Kreidler is unafraid to expose, frame and embrace the capitalist cycle of production in his work. The discomfort that different audiences have felt in experiencing *Fremdarbeit* exemplifies the consistent ruptures in art between the idea of unique objects and mass reproduction, high art versus low art platforms, asymmetrical power structures and conspicuous versus embedded wealth.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, Seth Kim-Cohen suggests that, in asking for an engaged art, he is looking for one that does not pretend that realities like “global capitalism or the AIDS epidemic or global inequality or war or global warming or gun violence” do not exist. His demand, indeed, is for

an art that acknowledges that the same societal systems and the same institutional reasons that license ‘stand your ground’ laws and climate change denial, also

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<sup>9</sup> Julian Day, ‘Pop Will Eat Itself: Hidden Cycles of Exchange in Contemporary Sound’, *Runway: Australian Experimental Art*, no. 25 (2014) (online at: <http://runway.org.au/pop-will-eat-hidden-cycles-exchange-contemporary-sound/> <last accessed: 1 April 2015>).

authorize the norms of artistic encounter and the frameworks that sanction most varieties and strata of artistic experience.

Artwork of this sort, Kim-Cohen suggests, “displays a kind of self-awareness about its own relation to these issues and does its best to be transparent with regard to its own status and mechanics in the various structures within which it operates.”<sup>10</sup>

To an extent, I sympathise. Yet even the positive Kim-Cohen is compelled to admit that “Kreidler’s bald-faced presentation of global capitalism’s abuses doesn’t absolve him of complicity.” For all that Kim-Cohen argues that “*Fremdarbeit* slips between the clenching grasp of easy indictment by making its complicity so conspicuous”, I am not so convinced, even though it is surely true that, as the compositional profit-and-loss account is enumerated, one’s thoughts might well turn to the value of the ticket in one’s pocket and the values of the concert hall in which one sits.<sup>11</sup> This argument, from my perspective, seems to avoid questions of what has *been done* to those carrying out the work ‘itself’ in *Fremdarbeit*. In all of this, I am reminded of Rancière’s insistence that politics is precisely concerned with what *can be said*; it is a question, in this sense, of who has the right to speak, *elided* with that which *can be spoken*.

Politics is first of all a way of framing, among sensory data, a specific sphere of experience. It is a partition of the sensible, of the visible and the sayable, which allows (or does not allow) some specific data to appear; which allows or does not allow some specific subjects to designate them and speak about them. It is a specific intertwining of ways of being, ways of doing and ways of speaking.<sup>12</sup>

In precisely this way, Fanon’s note in his study of the marginalisation of the West Indian population of the French Antilles that “[t]he Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter—that is, he will come closer to being a real human being—in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language” takes on a renewed significance.<sup>13</sup> The colonised subject is, within such a system of oppressive activity, allowed to become ‘truly’ human only so far as the language of the ‘culturally superior’ coloniser can be mimicked. Such issues, too, cannot be disassociated from questions of capital, as Fanon describes it, since, according to his study (and experience) “[o]ne is white above a certain financial level”, which is to say one is regarded as authentically ‘human’ if one is capable of acquiring an ‘appropriate’ level of (financial) capital.<sup>14</sup> Of course, *Fremdarbeit* draws attention to the second of these questions, but only at the cost of repeating the construction of a subject who is forced—according to the letter of the score precisely via the authority of capital—to ventriloquise a language which is not his.

Hardly surprisingly, a further trope of colonial discourses is repeated too in the failure of those languages to speak to their Western audiences ‘authentically’. The moderator of *Fremdarbeit* draws attention to the failures of Murraybay and Xiang to express mastery of the language of new music, even interrupting the second movement to emphasise this, rearticulating what Bhabha refers to as the “almost the

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<sup>10</sup> Seth Kim-Cohen, *Against Ambience* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2013), n.p [e-book].

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Jacques Rancière, ‘The Politics of Literature’, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, tr. Steve Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010 [2004]), 152–68 (152).

<sup>13</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, tr. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto, 2008 [1952]), 8.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.



same but not quite”(-ness) of colonial mimicry.<sup>15</sup> *Fremdarbeit*, even while drawing attention to the structures of exploitation with which new music—because Western capitalist—is ineluctably entwined, nervously produces inferior subjects, colonised by that very discourse. Kobena Mercer, drawing on Bhabha’s work, insists too on the significance of ‘fixity’ in the construction of these stereotypes of colonial fantasies. Though Mercer’s concern is, first and foremost, with Black British experience, what he describes as “the rigid and limited grid of representations through which black male subjects become publicly visible” is pertinent here too. As Mercer observes, the grid of representations “continues to reproduce certain *idées fixes*, ideological fictions and psychic fixations, about the nature of black sexuality and the ‘otherness’ it is constructed to embody.”<sup>16</sup> In *Fremdarbeit* it is significant, surely, that computational brilliance is elided with an Indian programmer, and musical plagiarism with a Chinese composer-for-hire. One might be reminded of bell hooks’s trenchant critique of Madonna’s *Sex* (1992), in which, despite its appearance of cultural diversity,

people of color are strategically located, always and only in a subordinate position. Our images and culture appears always in a context that mirrors racist hierarchies. We are always present to serve white desire. And while *Sex* exploits the myth of jungle fever, Madonna is carefully positioned within a visual framework where the big black man and the black woman appear as a couple who are her sexual servants; no readers could imagine that Madonna is partnering herself with a black male. No, all her images of conventional heterosexual coupling are with ‘nice’ white boys. Black female sexuality is stereotypically represented as degraded. In the much-remarked and visually powerful come shot, Madonna stands over the prostrate naked body of black female model Naomi Campbell (not an anonymous fantasy image) and mimics a golden shower, by squirting lotion on the reclining figure. This image conveys a serious visual message about race, gender, and nationality. In keeping with sexist/racist iconography, the black female is symbolically subordinated by white male power; in this case it is Madonna assuming the white supremacist patriarchal role.<sup>17</sup>

This adoption of the powerful role, which dominates the other even within a context which ostensibly potently valorises otherness, might recall another, no less problematic, position described by Mercer: “As Foucault and Deleuze (1977 [1972]) pointed out, after bourgeois modernists retreated into melancholia, it was the Marxists who took up this mythic self-image of the heroic intellectual, claiming to speak on behalf of ‘the oppressed’ as a universal class.”<sup>18</sup>

Who speaks—who is allowed to speak with and for self and other—is central in any such context. In Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s performance piece *The Year of the White Bear and Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West* (1992–94), in which Fusco and Gómez-Peña were exhibited in 12-cubic foot golden cage as ‘authentic’ natives of a previously undiscovered island off the coast of Mexico, carrying out their day-to-day activities, including “sewing voodoo dolls, reciting stories in gibberish, watching TV, lifting weights, and working on a laptop computer.” A hand-out explained, amongst many other things, that “[h]is frequent pacing in the cage leads

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<sup>15</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004 [1994]), 127.

<sup>16</sup> Kobena Mercer, ‘Reading Racial Fetishism: the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe’, in *ibid.*, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1994 [1986]), 171–219 (176).

<sup>17</sup> bell hooks, ‘Power to the Pussy: We don’t wannabe dicks in drag’, in *ibid.*, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (London: Routledge, 2006 [1994]), 9–26 (23–24).

<sup>18</sup> Kobena Mercer, ‘Black Art and the Burden of Representatiojn’, in *ibid.*, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1994 [1990]), 233–58 (249).

experts to believe he was a political leader on his island” and that “[h]er facial and body decorations indicate that she has married into the upper caste of her tribe”, but also that their diet consisted of “Diet Coke and burritos” while, sexually, they were “quite affectionate in the cage, seemingly uninhibited in their physical and sexual habits.” As Richard Schechner describes the reaction, though many realised that this was a performance piece, many did not, but even those who did, Schechner claims, “readily played the part of colonizer—gazing, probing, objectifying.” Amongst those taken in, some sought to free the imprisoned Guatinauis, while others complained to administrators of whichever space in which the piece was then taking place. Yet others wanted to have sex with the Guatinauis, but many “simply enjoyed the exhibit at face value: ‘interesting, unusual, and rare natives on display.’”<sup>19</sup>

It is, though, I would argue, of significance that Fusco is Cuban-American, while Gómez-Peña is Mexican-American. The significance is highlighted in the reaction to Brett Bailey’s *Exhibit B*, which exhibits certain striking similarities to *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit ...*. It, too, (re)stages the human zoos of the nineteenth century, with chained black performers presented in more-or-less static tableaux, designated, for instance ‘Found Object Number 2’. Thomas Gorton’s *Dazed* interview with Bailey—undertaken in the wake of the show’s cancellation at the Barbican following protests by anti-racism campaigners—seems sympathetic to Bailey’s project and compelled by his claim that the purpose of the piece was assuredly anti-racist and politically progressive. Nevertheless, Gorton does note that Bailey is a “white South African artist”.<sup>20</sup> In short, the critique might run, *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit ...* enacts, indeed embodies, its critique of racism from within, while *Exhibit B* deploys othered bodies, the meaning of which is encoded by an artist who does not share, is not a participant in, that otherness.

## The Flipside

Such critique would be valid if, in fact, *Fremdarbeit* really was as it has been described. Yet, though the description of the piece—a description which the moderator’s role makes *part* of the piece—seems to have been taken as a ‘true’ representation of its nature, there is rather more to *Fremdarbeit* than this. Indeed, that the story which underpins *Fremdarbeit* has not been subject to rather more scrutiny should come as something of a surprise. One of the central questions in *product placements* is, precisely, where the frame of the art work ‘proper’ ends. To be sure, the piece takes the form of a thirty-three second sound file, but it *is*, too, the music theatre of the press conference held at GEMA to discuss the use of sampling which the sound file deploys.<sup>21</sup> One might even go further. Though the GEMA press conference appears to be real enough, Kreidler’s phone call to report his need to submit 70,200 copyright clearance forms is evidently staged (or, just as well, *re-enacted*). While it is perfectly possible that Kreidler did indeed fill in 70,200 copyright clearance forms *to* submit, there is no actual reason to have done this: the piece—considered in this case to

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<sup>19</sup> Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013 [2002]), 319.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Gorton, ‘Brett Bailey: “I’m pissed off” with Barbican cancellation’, *Dazed*, 25 September 2014 (online at: <http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/21940/1/brett-bailey-im-pissed-off-with-barbican-cancellation> <last accessed: 26 April 2015>).

<sup>21</sup> Indeed, precisely this breakdown between the mediated and the ostensibly real is one of the central ongoing concerns of Kreidler’s output, literally thematised in *Feeds. Hören TV*, framed as a sort of TV game show, including a closing section in which an actor depicting ‘Tristan’ is repeatedly, and unconvincingly, stabbed to death to the accompaniment of an assortment of 8-bit and 16-bit game over musics.

include its own documentation—requires nothing more than the existence of a large number of reams of paper and a van. Printing out forms and filling them in would be time consuming and unnecessary, which is not, I repeat, to say that this is not what Kreidler did. But that there exists a more efficient way of presenting this piece which does not require the mammoth effort of its ‘real’ version should give rise to questions regarding other pieces, to be sure. Unsurprisingly, it seems to me that there are questions to be raised regarding *Fremdarbeit* and, moreover, that doing so makes it all the more remarkable that the piece has largely been received as it has.

The names of the Chinese composer and Indian programmer themselves require further investigation. To be sure Xia and Xiang are both perfectly viable elements within a Chinese name—indeed there are many individuals named Xia Xiang—, but Xia Non Xiang, the name Kreidler gives for the figure of the Chinese composer in *Fremdarbeit*, is not a Chinese name. In fact, there are several fairly clear jokes in the name: Xiang is a particular set of dialects of the Chinese language; reading this with the privative prefix ‘non-’, one might end up with the result ‘not Chinese’. Without the privative ‘non-’, what is left, Xia Xiang, is an entirely real Chinese name, but is also the name of an oriental floral perfume by Revlon, from the late 1980s. That said, this is hardly the limit of the constellation of possibilities that might be denoted by Xia or by Xiang. What is most significant, here, is that there is no possibility that this is truly a Chinese name.

A similar situation obtains in the case of Ramesh Murraybay, though the joke is less obvious in this case. Ramesh is a perfectly common Hindu name—meaning ‘preserver’—but Murraybay is not. In truth, the only likely reference to be found splits the surname in two, so it reads Murray Bay, the former name of Malbaie in Quebec, originally *Malle Baye*, a literally poor bay in which ships ran aground, It should, perhaps, go without saying that the only results yielded by an internet search for either name are in the context of *Fremdarbeit*.



Figure 1: 'Xia Non Xiang'

Kreidler has conveniently made available the photographs of both ‘Xia Non Xiang’ and ‘Ramesh Murraybay’ in the score of *Fremdarbeit*, so a reverse image search is a straightforward task. The image which purports to represent Xia Non Xiang is, in point of fact, a crop of the profile picture of Shoucheng Zhang, presently the J. G. Jackson and C. J. Wood Professor of Physics at Stanford University.<sup>22</sup> The origin of the image used for Ramesh Murraybay is more difficult to trace since it is of someone who formerly worked or studied in Mechanical Engineering at the University of Minnesota; the page featuring his image was last crawled on 21 July 2008. However, he bears a striking resemblance to a Ramesh Raghupathy, whose LinkedIn page reveals him to work in mechanical or industrial engineering in the greater twin cities area, suggesting he has not moved far from his alma mater.<sup>23</sup>



Figure 2: ‘Ramesh Murraybay’

Perhaps, one might argue, Kreidler has simply concealed the ‘real’ identities of the Chinese composer and Indian programmer by giving them pseudonyms. Yet there is no need to have provided images of them save for the illusory ring of truth these provide. Furthermore, once one’s scepticism has been aroused it seems obvious that a much simpler, easier solution exists than the one which the complete score of *Fremdarbeit*—including the moderator’s sections—describes, which is to say that the piece was written, in all of its specifics, by Kreidler himself. In this sense, the performance of *Fremdarbeit* has a similar relationship to the whole *piece*, the theatre piece which *Fremdarbeit* is, to that which the fixed media piece *product placements* has to the theatrical action *product placements*.

If *Fremdarbeit* is wholly fictional—which is nothing more than to say that everything in the score is a part of the piece’s action and need have no ‘real’ referent—then the work that *Fremdarbeit* does in the world changes markedly. Many of the things with which Kreidler is charged vanish immediately. The piece does not simply,

<sup>22</sup> See: <https://physics.stanford.edu/people/faculty/shoucheng-zhang> [last accessed: 1 April 2015].

<sup>23</sup> See: <https://www.linkedin.com/pub/ramesh-raghupathy/0/48a/762> [last accessed: 1 April 2015].

problematically, repeat the act of outsourcing in order to make its point. No composers or programmers in the developing world were exploited in its creation, since those individuals posited by the piece are merely characters. Indeed, the figure of the moderator, so tightly intertwined with Kreidler himself—a part he plays in almost all performances, of course—is a character too. It is worth recalling the seemingly paradoxical stage direction given to the moderator: the part, to be performed ‘without acting’, is one which can only be an act. It is also worth noting that, for all the moderator’s insistence that, for instance, the first movement does not end up sounding like Kreidler’s music, to my ear at least it sounds *exactly* like Kreidler’s music. That sound—the degree to which Kreidler’s instrumental music often has the remarkable quality of sounding almost exactly as if it has been produced by MIDI—is pointedly highlighted by the moderator’s darkly ironic note that, at the point that samples do indeed begin to substitute for live, acoustic instruments in the third movement, one may hardly notice the difference.

In the first case, the precise status of the way in which Kreidler’s statements are intertwined with the political bears closer examination in the first instance, not least because it is not clear what the object of discontent here is and how it is being examined. It appears as if new music is deployed as a means to criticise outsourcing yet the argument might easily be reversed. Kreidler claims that he wanted to work with those two central concerns—questions of authorship and questions of globalized exploitation and value—“[b]ecause it is possible and no one has done it before, as far as I know. Music is often regarded as quite abstract, which is not true. So that made me more ambitious to do it.”<sup>24</sup> Moreover, if ‘composers who do nothing but write their little structures should be ashamed’, as the Kreidler-moderator-figure states within the documentary version of the piece, then perhaps the concept of outsourcing is being used to critique compositional practice. If the piece is political, in the sense that I understand the term, it is here that its politics lie. As Rancière stresses,

[i]f there is such a thing as an ‘aesthetics of politics’, it lies in a re-configuration of the distribution of the common through political processes of subjectivation.

Correspondingly, if there is a politics of aesthetics, it lies in the practices and modes of visibility of art that re-configure the fabric of sensory experience.<sup>25</sup>

What political art *does* is to make things visible that were previously not; politics itself, says Rancière’s Plato, “begins when those who were destined to remain in the domestic and invisible territory of work and reproduction, and prevented from doing ‘anything else’, take the time that they ‘have not’ in order to affirm that they belong to a common world.”<sup>26</sup> What *Fremdarbeit* makes *visible* is surely not outsourcing and its iniquities; these are familiar to any Western audience. What it *does* make visible is the degree to which any musical endeavour is almost unavoidably complicit in some sort of history of exploitation, if not in actual exploitation in the moment of its instantiation. One might go further and observe that these ethical considerations are treated *just like* material, as something which can be abstractly deployed for conceptual, aesthetic ends. As Michael Rebhahn has explained the move: “the focus of artistic interest has shifted: from the *how* of construction to the *why* of aesthetic substance – to the question of a composition’s significance outside of an esoteric

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<sup>24</sup> Johannes Kreidler, in Julian Day, ‘The Culture of Copying: Monetary Value and Exploitation’.

<sup>25</sup> Jacques Rancière, ‘The Paradoxes of Political Art’, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, tr. Steve Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010 [2008]), 134–51 (140).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

system of reference.” Yet in this case, *concept* is deployed *as if* it were material. Doubtless Rebhahn is right that

[t]he number of those composers who are content to have occasional success with ‘well made’ works seems to be in decline. A vital interest in the effects and perception of musical works outside of the scene’s sheltered spaces, which have lost all connection with the cultural discourse, is more and more noticeable.<sup>27</sup>

However, the critique is turned inward toward *precisely* the sheltered spaces of ‘new music’ itself and, moreover, though the insistence on new work being *technically* well made may subside, this is only replaced by an insistence that new work be well conceptualised. One might just as well regard the piece as relocating musical autonomy, rather than repudiating it. Indeed only the musical structures avoid autonomy.

A second issue is more problematic. Even turned inwards towards the world of new music, as *Fremdarbeit* seems to be, it is nevertheless an example of its own criticism. Even situated autonomously within, facing toward the centre of, the hermetic sphere of new music, that hermeticism cannot be other than fictional. Indeed, it is precisely within the piece’s own fiction that its most troubling aspects lie. While the piece does not actually exploit anyone—Xiang and Murraybay are only off-stage characters, so they hardly could be exploited—it does *nevertheless* still produce colonial stereotypes in just the manner criticised by Fanon, Bhabha, Mercer, and hooks alike. Though individuals remain unexploited within *Fremdarbeit*, its discourse repeats a colonial one; the other subjects it depicts are fictional functions of the musical theatre, but they represent recognizable stereotypes. The *idées fixes* of colonial subjects are, to repeat hooks, “strategically located, always and only in a subordinate position.” That these subjects are fictional does not change the way in which they are *made to speak*. *Fremdarbeit* does not present but, rather, *produces* marginalised colonial (and colonized) subjects. Madonna’s *Sex* was a volume of fantasy, to be sure, but it seems no less culpable because of that. Only the autonomy of music—another heritage of the nineteenth century, indeed—conceals the stereotype. Yet, once revealed *as* fiction, the ground of the piece falls away. As Bhabha puts it:

In the ambivalent world of the ‘not quite/not white’, on the margins of metropolitan desire, the *founding objects* of the Western world become the erratic, eccentric, accidental *objets trouvés* of the colonial discourse—the part-objects of presence. It is then that the body and the book lose their representational authority. Black skin splits under the racist gaze, displaced into signs of bestiality, genitalia, grotesquerie, which reveal the phobic myth of the undifferentiated whole white body.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Michael Rebhahn, ‘No problem! Approaches towards an artistic New Music’, lecture given at ‘New Perspectives for New Music’, Harvard University, 13 April 2013 (available online at: <http://hgnm.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Rebhahn-Lecture-Harvard.pdf> <last accessed: 26 April 2015>). The points raised here reiterate and amplify those made in Rebhahn’s earlier lecture, ‘I hereby resign from New Music’, delivered at the Darmstadt New Music Courses in 2012, that title echoing Beuys’s 1985 statement, ‘I hereby resign from art’.

<sup>28</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 131.