Music Research in the Digital Age: IAML-IMS Plenary Session

Remarks: Dörte Schmidt

New Philological Strategies in Music History and the Politics of Research

My part in this discussion is to bring up the complications appearing in musicological research beyond the pragmatic dimensions, and to link them to the purposes of musicology as a discipline to which the interplay of mediality is essential.

Perhaps it could be useful to briefly outline my perspective: As a university teacher and scholar, I am a historian with philological, systematical, and analytical interests. So I do not divide these fields, but rather link them closely—and in doing so, I am perhaps pretty European, if not German. One consequence of this is, that I do not believe in universalities as a result of either philological, systematic, or analytic research. A second consequence is that I take the advantage of doing quantitative research (the keyword being "big data") as a challenge for beginning a discussion about the conditions and methods of qualitative research—in music history, the discussion about the relationship between quantitative and qualitative research will get to a new level. So far this is known mainly from the social sciences. This situation defines my own research, as well as my work with students and the way in which I try to show them how to deal with digital sources.

The digital age changes the modes of access to sources—this is only at first sight a rather trivial observation. It causes what I would call the "access paradox", for it is able to pass below the hierarchies of archives based on the uniqueness of analogue sources of any kind. Being no longer devoted to a fixed place with fixed rules of access, digitized sources tend to increase the permeability of the scientific community. In many fields, it is no longer restricted to elite specialists, but open to participation by a broader community of interested people beyond the professional sphere. From the perspective of the production of digital data this causes new needs for a professionalization in source critique linked to documentation, in the authentification of source information, and last but not least, in long term archiving and accessibility not only for the big, but also for smaller institutions. Without any doubt this needs inter-institutional and transnational collaborative solutions that go far beyond the

average responsibilities of computer centres. And it needs institutionalised interfaces between research, documentation, and technique. The collaborative Center Music Edition Media at Detmold-Paderborn, funded by the German Minister of Education and Research, can be seen as a sort of pilot project for this.[1] But in the long run, this can not to be established on the level of individual and limited research programs, but belongs to the level of cultural heritage and forces durable political decisions—it has to be budgeted in public institutions. We should not leave this to the market.

On the other hand, from the perspective of the professional users of digital data, this demands a professionalised and collaborative debate about source documentation, as well as about methodology under the conditions of digitalization—not in a hierarchical, but in a functional way. This affects the ways of searching and proving the authorities of digital resources.

I do not want to put this to discussion mainly from a political perspective, but first with respect to the consequences of digitalisation for professional historical research—but we will come back to politics.

My example will deal with the possibilities opened by the transformation of analogue sources into digital data and how this changes historiography: At this very moment we run a research project in the Darmstadt summer courses, dealing mainly with the large amount of sound recordings (performances as well as discussions and lectures) surviving from the late 1960s on.[2] The main goal of this project is to attempt to understand how the historiography of Darmstadt will change, if we change the basis of sources from written (and mainly published) ones to sound sources, i.e., sources that put the emphasis on the communicational setting of the event itself. This interests us especially in respect to what one could call "doing theory" as a specific practice of the courses. To analyze this is only possible because these sound files recently were digitised for scholarly use by the International Music Institute in Darmstadt. Here the digitised files not only allow us access unrestricted by place and time, but the new media format also changes our mode of access in an analytical respect.

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[1] http://zenmem.de.
[2] http://www.udk-berlin.de/sites/musikwissenschaft/content/e345/e150657/index_ger.html.

The Program EXMARraLDA, an XML-based tool for transcription, annotation, analysis and management (search, etc.) of spoken corpora,[3] links the transformed analog sound file with its transcription and in doing so forms a new, multidimensional digital object for analysis. The sound file can be linked to the transcription in score mode with a separate staff for each speaker which also offers the possibility to annotate each staff. In such transformations of sources to the digital sphere *media and analytical method get into a close conjunction*—a discussion of sound sources and musical notations will cause a parallel situation. So research does not only deal with, but it *produces* digital data—not only in terms of documentation, publication, or edition, but even in respect to research processes. This puts an emphasis on the problem of long term archiving and accessibility for research institutions and shows us also the need for collaboration in this respect.

The digital age changes and in doing so focuses the materiality of information. This also shifts our attention to the various interests behind and the modes of this materiality. They obviously are echoing strategies or—if you will—politics of documentation. The materiality itself is not neutral. This was one of the most important results for our Darmstadt research. In analyzing the communicational strategies and their documentation by the institution itself we began to be aware of the strategies and aims of documentation and publication behind the given sources in the archives of the International Music Institute and their relationship to their mediality—up to the recent interests in digitalisation.

From recent research on specific digital material, e.g., composition with algorithms, digital sound sources or "mixed music" (with compositional processes in real time interacting with musicians on stage),[4] we understand that the described conjunction between method and media also shifts to the creative process itself. This affects the performance of the pieces *and* the scholarly discussion on the basis of these sources in a specific way. Software as well as hardware is becoming obsolete with increasing speed, there is already a sort of historical performance practice for works of the 1990s and 2000s. Therefore the philology of these sources will have to include not only the mediality of the tradition or documentation of a

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[3] http://www.exmaralda.org.
[4] See e.g. the research of Miriam Akkermann, who recently finished her dissertation in this field: http://www.udk-berlin.de/sites/musikwissenschaft/content/personen/miriam_akkermann/index_ger.html.

certain source, but also the mediality of its creation. For analytical undertakings dealing with these cases, the philological clarification of the source material is essential. The question whether this is a qualitative or a gradual step from dealing with analogue sources transformed to digital files will not be answerable as clear as the ideology of the digital age tends to suggest.

Facing the broad and increasing accessibility of digital resources transforming various kinds of analogue media, as they are provided by libraries and archives nowadays, we also will have to develop academic structures that include a specific education not only in improved search strategies but most important in source critique including the digital dimension. We will have to deal with a new culturally, historically, and politically informed concept of philology and analysis especially in music history reflecting and including the original mediality and materiality of the sources themselves, as much as of their digital transformations. And from this we should ask if and how such new, and historically informed concepts would have to go after questions of transcription of analogue sources into the digital world—as in literary and media studies (e.g., tracked by Friedrich Balke at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum)[5] also in musicology we will have to discuss a specific philology of media.

The philological analysis of the source basis of historical research brings us to discussing the medial consequences of the politics of documentation linked to these sources and their documentation history. Moreover it shows us, that our dealing with the digital world and the politics of documentation has also to be flanked by a glance at the politics of research, now forming new forms of collaboration between research projects, archives, libraries and computer centers—and this at least has institutional and technological aspects. Stimulated by Hans-Jörg Rheinberger's observations on experimental systems and epistemic things, I would like to propose a discussion instructed by the history of science: this finally will allow us to reflect on the interaction between the scientific, institutional, and technological environments, and their specific politics and the various objects of discovery—i.e., the objects that form our discipline.

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[5] http://www.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/medienphilologie/.