

## Das arbeitende Konzert | The Working Concert

Revision VI–VII

Christopher Dell (D):

Vibraphone, Concept, Composition, Conduction

Pierre Borel (F): Saxophone

Elisabeth Coudoux (D): Cello

Robert Landfermann (D): Bass

Christian Lillinger (D): Drums

Jonas Westergaard (DK): Bass

Das Arbeitende Konzert/The Working Concert is a discursive format by the composer Christopher Dell. During the concert, internationally acclaimed musicians work together with Dell to determine and demonstrate the organisation of the piece as open form. The format invites the audience to experience and discuss the process of music-making in real time. As performative and discursive installation, the work addresses and contextualises fundamental questions of cooperation in the fields of contemporary art, music and urban theory.

The composer, theoretician of architecture and urban design and artist Christopher Dell explores the organisational processes of the contemporary city, its presentation and representation.

Recorded, mixed and mastered by Klaus Scheuermann  
at Emil Berliner Studios, Berlin  
Dubplates by Dubplates & Mastering, Berlin

Funded by Senatsverwaltung für Kultur und Europa  
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Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung  
für Kultur und Medien

Senatsverwaltung  
für Kultur und Europa

be  Berlin

edition niehler werft

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Emil Berliner Studios, Berlin

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Monday 18th & Tuesday 19th June 2018

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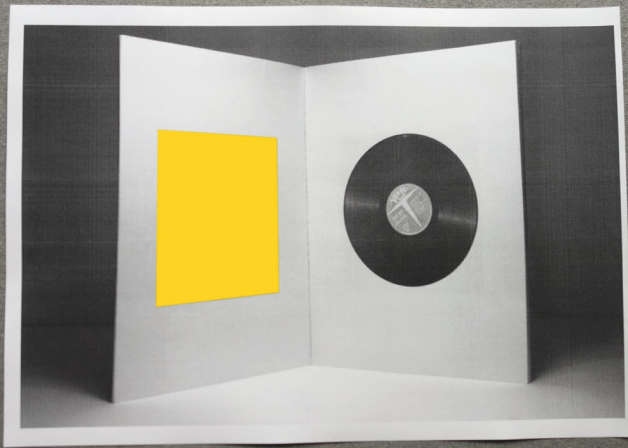
**Das Arbeitende Konzert |**  
**The Working Concert** (Revision VI–VII)

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**Christopher Dell** feat.  
Pierre Borel, Elisabeth Coudoux,  
Robert Landfermann, Christian Lillinger,  
Jonas Westergaard

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**Christopher Dell** (born in Darmstadt on 17 Sept. 1965) works in Berlin as a musician, composer, theoretician in urban design and architecture and as artist. He studied music performance and composition at the conservatories Hilversum and Rotterdam, then continued his studies at the Berklee School of Music, Boston. As post-graduate he took composition classes with Hans-Ulrich Engelmann. In 1996 he received a scholarship from the Internationale Ferienkurse, Darmstadt to study with Earle Brown and Karl Heinz Stockhausen, which led him to expand the concept of improvisation with strategies of experimental composed music. Since 2000, Dell has been head of the Institute for Improvisationstechnology in Berlin. He held visiting professorships in Urban Design Theory at the HafenCity Universität Hamburg and the Technical University Munich. At the moment he teaches Urban Design and Urban Renewal at the University of Fine Arts, Berlin. For his research on the fringe of composed and improvised music Dell received a number of awards such as „Deutscher Schallplattenpreis“, „JazzArt Award- Musik des 21. Jahrhunderts“, Musicprize of the City of Darmstadt and Golden Jazz Award. He received composition awards, fundings and commissions from, among others, Goethe Institute, Deutscher Musikrat, Musikfonds, Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien, Senatsverwaltung für Kultur und Europa, Berlin and WDR Cologne. He has published numerous cds, articles, and books.

[www.christopher-dell.com](http://www.christopher-dell.com)

### Recording Action: The Work of the Concert in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproducibility

On 18 and 19 July 2018, the *Das Arbeitende Konzert/The Working Concert (Revision VI–VII)* was performed and recorded at Emil Berliner Studios, Berlin. *Das Arbeitende Konzert/The Working Concert* is a discursive and reflexive format that I have developed in bringing together my diverse disciplinary roles as artist, conductor, composer, curator, and theoretician of architecture and urban design. Made for a variable ensemble, the composition consists of flexible form modules and time frames. Against this background, I conceptualise and realise the composition as a situative, sociomaterial assemblage. This assemblage operates as a frame in which invited musicians and I explore the structural processes of a composition as concert, its presentation as performative installation and representation as score. This particular score system is a serial structure of small notational metaforms that I call Formblocks. The Formblocks instigate the situative mediation of knowledge and the steering of curiosity among the performers according to specific musical strategies.

On a larger formal scale, I understand *Das Arbeitende Konzert/The Working Concert* as an accumulation of related musical events. The way the recurring title of the series of events begins with 'The Working' indicates a research attitude towards the notion of work and of reproduction. Respectively, as index, the added subtitle 'Revision' indicates that each new performance is a new research undertaking in a series. The title was introduced at Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien, Berlin, in 2014 as part of the exhibition *We-Traders*. The latter was a European research and exhibition programme on communal practices in the contemporary city, funded and initiated by the Goethe-Institut. Later that year, also by invitation of the Goethe-Institut, Revision II–III took place in Palermo, Sicily. Being part of the Curva Minore cultural programme, the performances of Revision II–III were located at Teatro Garibaldi, a site which in 2018 would become the headquarters for Manifesta 12, curated by the Dutch architects Rem Koolhaas/OMA. In 2018, Revision IV–V proceeded at ANCB The Aedes Metropolitan Laboratory, Berlin, as part of the MakeCity Festival Berlin and the Architecture Exhibitions Weekend Berlin.

The serial revisions of *Das Arbeitende Konzert/The Working Concert* reflect an act of working through the observations and understandings of the functioning of conventional art institutions – like concert halls, museums, galleries, theatres, or recording studios – and the way they



instrumentalise and build on reproduction. Therefore, the project can be described as an artwork that is about the frame of art, including display systems, labels, scenography and iconography, administration and dissemination – all of which organise meaning, interest, and power of the institution. In the case of music, the institution is generally the concert hall, the music magazine, or the record label. *Das Arbeitende Konzert/The Working Concert* calls to attention the staging of such institutions as supposedly neutral containers of culture and questions their means of installing and sustaining neutrality. Criticising the tendency of music institutions and industries to arrest attention only on objects or performances and not on the related frame and context or the site where they are shown, my work investigates the ideological apparatus through which the artist and his or her art is threaded. By installing a modular form and a specific score system in the performance, the way in which *Das Arbeitende Konzert/The Working Concert* conquers new ground is based on its mode of thematising and organising production.

The present recordings *Das Arbeitende Konzert/The Working Concert (Revision VI–VII)* mark a particular interrogation of the concert as critical form. They expand the foregoing revisions in that they display the modes of reproduction. As such, the revisions not only insert themselves in medial dissemination but also continue to insist on exposing the context from within in the process of their own making.

In order to achieve this, I had to change the context of the concert again. Transposing it from the gallery space into the recording studio, *Revision VI–VII* interrogate the concert not only as a display and institution but also as a commodity, thereby replacing the audience with microphones, cables, a mixing board, and a sound engineer. In the studio, the musical performance was recorded as a live concert – no cuts or retouches – to digital. Subsequently, I decided to divide the mixing process into two different means of post-production. CD 1 of this volume is presented the first way, showing the material as found, as played. Conversely, CD 2 offers a constellation of 'as played' solo works against heavy overdubs. Named Modular Forms, these overdubs are post-produced – one might even say post-composed – by superimposing 'as played' material. While CD 2 contrasts the pure solo work with the overlaying clash of strategic musical vectors, CD 1 allows the clear strategy that each Formblock consists of to be heard. However, instead of forwarding the master directly to a compact disc press factory, as is usually the case today in music production, the mix and master engineer Klaus Scheuermann and I chose to have the

under the title Work Archive, it accumulates the interdisciplinary artistic research and publication of my works. It constitutes the visible storage of the non-linear and complex processes and collaborations through which my work has come into being – that 'original' and auratic institution-worthy format par excellence.

Playing music live has been under pressure by the mediatic reproduction of sound for several years now. This pressure has led to the decontextualisation of the performative work, the refunctionalising of the medium as object, and the shifting of the experience of the musical artwork. By producing both concerts and media, I reflect on aspects of that process. The serial reproduction I put forward stands for an attempt to test the critical concerns regarding the artwork as once stated by Walter Benjamin. In his famous essay *'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility'*, Benjamin theorises on (photographic) reproducibility as a recasting of the form and meaning of the artwork. According to him, emancipated from its dependency on performative ritual, the work enters the category of a commodity that is 'produced for reproduction'. Such a shift renders any quest for originality – that is, auratic authenticity – obsolete.

However, the material I primarily choose for reproduction is the unique 'handmade' performance. So while I continue my explorations of reproduction as modus operandi of my art practice, I also short-circuit this operation by promoting a kind of aura: the aura of the improvised interpretation of a score – a single copy (underscored by the scores I write for the pieces to be improvised) – and also the aura of a kind of idiosyncratic strangeness that I display by publicly circulating the relics of a musician's rehearsal and production process. Against this background, the present recordings can be understood within the larger frame of a reiteration project. It interrogates the experience – in a living room, a car, or a restaurant – of a performance that once took place elsewhere. Such experience is, as Benjamin states, always a mediated one, an experience of the mediated that is one offered specifically by a medium of mechanical reproduction. Yet the media formats I choose do not only foreground the material and conceptual role of reproducibility in the questioning of the artwork's aura; they also expose – especially in the context of *Das Arbeitende Konzert/The Working Concert* – the 'exhibition value', by which Benjamin implies a sort of exchange value that transforms both the work of art and its ideological and institutional framing.

Christopher Dell



However, it might seem an incongruity that – while the working procedure of *Das Arbeitende Konzert/The Working Concert*, as all of my work, consciously promotes the improvisatory live performance and its ephemeral character – the dissemination of the CD medium through the label ENW places emphasis on materiality and commodity. The apparent contradiction does not end here: while the notion of the author and composer is questioned in the performance of *Das Arbeitende Konzert/The Working Concert*, the primary role of the concert's scores reinstates the author. Yet, in making the CDs and promoting the compositional role of reproduction that it entails, I appear to be putting the author in question again. The copied CDs and the seemingly original vinyl dubplates (of which only one copy exists) become a related gesture, ostensibly at odds with, but in fact conceptually allied with, the ephemeral performances and their institutional reframing (transferring them from the concert hall to exhibition contexts). The former are, in their specific materiality, singular examples of potentially limitless industrial objects, while the latter are multiple examples of the most singular of events. In the context of my work, the two are the outcome and the testimony of a similar probing. Both strategies query the foundational premises of what an artwork or an author – or, respectively, a work of music and a composer – is and does, what defines and determines it, but also how that most contemporary of phenomena, mechanical reproduction, might make or unmake this category from within.

If musical improvisation stays singular and unique, then it probably will never exceed the aleatoric realm, being forever excluded from the status of a work. Improvisations would be merely interpreted as signs of something else: experiments for a composition yet to come, but not artworks in themselves. It is precisely in their reproduction that I construct improvisations as more than an ephemeral entity, indeed as something worthy of the effort of my curating – that is, selection, collection, and replication – and thus meriting the attention of others in a larger institutional and material framing. This explains why I, while making the effort to recontextualise the ephemeral performances of *Das Arbeitende Konzert/The Working Concert* as exhibitions, also engage in collecting, multiplying, mediating, and distributing them in CD or book formats as artworks in their own right. The CDs holding the recordings of the performances of the scores are part of a larger archival practice that combines system and structure with repetitive return, serial iteration, and tentative processes. In addition to the physical realm, such an archival practice has also found its place of dissemination, exhibition, and continuous rewriting on my website. Here,

digital master pressed on vinyl dubplates. As a next step, the mix was then transferred from the material analogue back to digital. This meticulously calculated procedure leads to the second aspect that *Revision VI–VII* call into question: the aspect of reproduction and originality.

For me it is a paradox, on the one hand, to record a musical performance to digital and, on the other hand, to manifest analogue recording traces (to which the pressing on vinyl dubplates – which stay in my archive and will probably last longer than the CD – subscribes). But there nevertheless seems to be a latent logic in this paradox that questions the ideas of multiple reproduction and unique originality. Both the CD and the vinyl are bearers of material traces of the playing. They are ambiguous perpetuators of originality, producing both iconic and sonic reliquaries, containing within them different grains of the performed music itself. This is another story told by *Das Arbeitende Konzert/The Working Concert*, for here I speak not only about the organisation of tasks, the representation as score, and the concert as institutional form, but also about the centrality of the recording to the entire work. It informs the listener that all along in my work I have used the recording as a structural medium. Being an original and simultaneously a copy, the recording is used by me as a destabilising agent. It is a tool that, in its mobilisation, ambivalently renders the conditions of its own constitution. Articulated and framed in this manner, the recording emphasises the temporality of improvisation as an ephemeral yet material art form. If the copy in this sense emerges as a central transformative force of the deliberately auratic, unique performances of *Das Arbeitende Konzert/The Working Concert*, then one can also retroactively detect a similar concern in the founding of my artist label Edition Niehler Werft (ENW). The series of works I have released on this label are all, besides being works in their own right, reflections on questions of the copy. By founding and maintaining my own record label and the dissemination process that accompanies it, a considerable part of my work has involved laying bare the power of the forces outside the artwork, including the discourses that historicise it and the markets that determine its accessibility and distribution. The recording in the way it is presented – whether digital or analogue – is the operative model in much of this. As such, the procedure of *Das Arbeitende Konzert/The Working Concert (Revision VI–VII)* reaffirms the editorial, archival, and curatorial practices evident throughout my work and reveals my unrelenting interrogation of presentation and dissemination sites for the music as a work of art.





