

Social Composing

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Contemporary composition, in the artistic creative process, calls for contemporary communication models. The digital revolution that has taken place since the 1990s through knowledge-sharing and networking via social media platforms or digital reality enhancement is constantly changing our habits of communication. These rhizome-like, allusive communication structures fundamentally impact our perception and our society in the reality-virtuality continuum.

Affect through participation, communicate through sharing in mixed, permeable realities—these are the social platforms of the now real-digital spaces and their communication models within which interaction processes between information and social resonance are explored, discarded, lived, perceived as controlling or liberating, and used or abused. Out of these models important social and artistic questions have to be re-imagined such as the construction of identities and communities, or the definition of presence and attendance, the private and the public, and the possibilities of sensual experiences within digital artificiality.

Contemporary Communication Models

Social composing¹ is located precisely in this mindset. It is a thinking and perceptive unit that searches for strategies of articulation in order to reflect on phenomena existing at the interface of real-digital communication models, to continue them, possibly to oppose them. Social composing is based on the intention of mediating through music and intermediacy—that is, radically placing the communicative ability of music in the center, to be *able* to trigger resonances in all those living in the virtuality-reality continuum.

The consequence of the creative process in social composing is acting with and within real-digital communication models which also means, for example, that the interplay between artist and user, between art and social resonance, is a constant subject of controversy. So far, composers have been asked if they write for or against an audience, for themselves or for others. Social composing eludes these categories. It requires a confrontation with the newly developed forms of communication in social media: the principle tweet/re-tweet and the idea of sharing and commenting, the principle of live chat, interactions in online com-

munities or virtual reality in the presentation forms on Youtube, Youporn, & Co.

As a social composer, I designate composition strategies that deal with social media or social media-immanent communication models and, from them, generate their material. Does this mean I compose in a social environment rather than an “asocial” desk? More or less. There are two basic approaches to social composing as well as social media art. Both approaches are similar in that they can only arise with the internet and online platforms but differ in their work processes. Both forms also share the idea that this organism of work in or with such communication models is intermedial.

One approach involves compositions that use social media as compositional material where the composition process takes place separately from the source, the digital platforms. What is important, however, is that the composition strategy incorporates social media into intrinsic communication models.² If this approach brings a social media phenomenon into a coherent musical form, for example, audio distortions from live streams that are mapped musically, the phenomenon of reproduction transmitted audio-visually as

a context-detached element, *etc.*, then these are works *about* social media. Neither operate *with* communication models so, therefore, do not count as social composing.

In the second approach to social composing, the composition process takes place directly on the social platforms so that dialogue becomes part of the work. Extreme forms culminate in user-generated content such as *Bicycle Built For 2000*, an audio collage initiated by the new media artists Aaron Koblin (co-founder and president of Within, a virtual and augmented reality company) and Daniel Massey who called on *Amazons Mechanical Turk Webservice* workers from seventy-one countries to re-enact the computer-simulated song *Daisy Bell*.³ Also, the collaborative project *Crowd-sound* by the Australian programmer Brendon Ferris is to be located here as a prototype,⁴ in which users determine the course of a song or text by voting. The most prominent representative of social composing in the digital space is the virtual pop diva Hatsune Miku who is kept alive with her fans’ songs and has conquered both social media and real concert halls.

Are we ready for social composing?

It is not surprising that the most prominent examples of the second form of social composing are to be found in the commercial realm. For new music, this way of working—regardless of the public idea of these examples—means new profiles of performers, new work methods, and “sideshow exhibits” to create performances. Unless the long-awaited change toward open, mobile, transformation-capable and genre-connecting performance venues begins, or the composition itself opens the place to the outside, concert halls, as they exist now, are closed spaces, the worst possible venue for social composing concepts. At least through their structure, festivals offer the possibility of exchange, but here, too, the new communication models quickly come up against spatial boundaries. The most suitable place is the net itself, preferably with a projection screen in the real world. Links to new music are where this becomes an artistic confrontation and a fragile corpus: the most important instrument of new music

in connection with social composing is not the performative object (trumpet, violin, synthesizer, video, electronics, *etc.*)—the most important instrument, simultaneously also the most historically and socially influenced, is the performer. While visual artists can freely choose their instruments and, thus, also choose existing connotations of a cultural or social kind, composers are confronted with professional musicians or ensembles, whose meaning in most cases is the presentation of trained perfection, virtuosity in the game, in short: history has shaped this perfection into profession. In order to be able to use these skills in social composing, however, the inherent performance of real-digital communication models has to be added. This is reflected, for example, in the shift of complexity and virtuosity from a purely musical game toward a complexity and virtuosity of meanings, from processes and spaces to the use of musicians as part of a mechanism, as triggers of time-controlled processes. Consequences of this—as in social networks or extended realities—are the disappearance of man behind the instrument for the purpose of its functionality and the maintenance of the “human” in corporeal form, the obscuration and amplification of an experience through identification and, consequently, multiplication of one’s own circle of perception.

“If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” reads the famous theorem of the American sociologists W. I. and D. S. Thomas⁵ from 1928 with regard to the investigation of paranoid behavior, which today also applies to digital communication models. In the complexity of such an uncontrollable and inconsistent present, countless spaces are created for subjective realities, whether from a need of the individual or from the given possibilities. The attempt to preserve real objectivity, if at all possible, is not entirely abandoned but it seems to be always less interesting, its reality with the “Yes Network” (the network does not contradict, it only reproduces one’s own perceptual horizon) to create itself. Social composing as a strategy can set impulses for the visualization and concentration of perceptions—and make a contribution to the fact

that, through its communication model, new music finds its way into society.

¹ See B. MUNTENDORF, "Anleitung zur künstlerischen Arbeit mit der Gegenwart", *Zurück zu Gegenwart? Weltbezüge in Neuer Musik* 55, 62.

² Examples: the first pieces of my series *Public Privacy* (#flute cover, #piano cover, #trumpet cover, #trombone cover), which started in 2013; Sergej Maingardt, *It's Britney Bitch* (2013); Richmond & Chladil, *Overheard* (2008-2010). Example of a social media performance: Keiner, Brandrup, Seeman, *Public is the new Private* (2012), Info: <http://www.publicistheneprivate.com>

³ The song composed by Harry Dacre in 1892 only became known sixty years later. John Kelly, Max Matthews, Carol Lockbaum sourced it in 1962 for the use of musical speech synthesis. <http://www.bicyclebuiltfortwothousand.com>

⁴ Ferris pursues the non-artistic intention of using this kind of composition to meet the palate of the masses—the result is an interchangeable musical "fabric softener." The concept could be highly interesting by choosing other musical parameters.

⁵ W. I. THOMAS & D. S. THOMAS, *The Child in America: Behavior Problems and Programs*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf 1928.

la « *nostalgie énorme* [qu'il éprouvait pour] ces sons et [estimait presque] avoir eu [de] la chance de grandir pendant la guerre¹ ».

Lors de bombardements nocturnes sur Beyrouth en 2006, Kerbaj s'est enregistré en train de jouer de la trompette, transposant ainsi le fracas des armes et des engins sur son instrument. « *C'est presque une différence culturelle d'être né sous les bombes, les réflexes reviennent au bout du deuxième jour.* » Kerbaj dit avoir construit une relation affective avec ces bruits et leurs échos qui se répercutaient

dans la ville : « *quand l'immeuble bouge, quand il y a ce souffle que l'on ressent.* »

Pour lui, la caractéristique musicale, avec ses camarades « souffleurs » produisant le même type de matériaux sonores, correspond au fait de puiser l'essence de ces sons dans sa propre mémoire sémantique musicale, corrélée à la mémoire involontaire proustienne. « *Le souvenir "involontaire" inaugure la reconstruction du passé et aboutit à ce qu'on appelle le temps retrouvé².* »

Un bruit, avant de devenir un son, est avant tout un son non identifiable. L'ouïe est l'un de

Mirage des ondes eRikm

Dans l'improvisation, les diverses formes et objets sonores que je déploie à travers mes compositions émanent de problématiques liées au langage. Je suis dyslexique, à l'oral comme à l'écrit, et les représentations phonologiques, dans leurs transpositions à l'écrit, me sont particulièrement abstraites. Ce trouble cognitif m'a amené à développer inconsciemment des tactiques de mémorisation complexes. Ainsi, à l'écrit, trouver le bon élément entre deux ou trois choix hypothétiques, lors de la résolution d'un problème basique connu et traversé à de multiples reprises, me plonge dans un doute perpétuel. Cela induit des stratégies qui se traduisent par exemple par l'analyse d'un nombre plus important de données dans un temps égal à celui utilisé par les personnes non dyslexiques. De cette organisation sans cesse chaotique, s'élaborant à partir de l'accident, une économie du compromis plus ou moins stable s'est répandue dans mon travail, jusqu'à le structurer.

En pratique, l'improvisation libre et mes processus de compositions dynamiques ont en commun l'agencement aléatoire et empirique via des sons mémorisés ou des flux. Les objets sonores prélevés, conjoints à une vitesse, sont sélectionnés et ré-agencés pour créer une forme. La dimension intuitive joue ici un rôle fondamental.

Dans le cadre d'une commande ouverte pour *LINKS*, il me semble que le partage de textes liés à des projets de créations en devenir est plus profitable pour saisir mon travail et mes recherches de manière pertinente et concrète. Les sujets que je développe ci-dessous s'inscrivent dans divers champs artistiques liés aux arts sonores : la composition dynamique pour un ensemble mixte, l'installation sonore et la composition instantanée à travers des flux résultant du web.

Fata Morgana

CŒuvre mixte d'eRikm, création en mai 2020 au gmem-CNCM (Centre National de Création Musicale)-marseille pour le festival des Musiques. Avec Mazen Kerbaj, Erikm, l'Ensemble Dédalus.

Une Fata Morgana est un phénomène optique issu d'une combinaison de mirages chauds et froids. Cette combinaison est pour moi le point de départ d'une sorte de métaphore : la transposition synesthésique de ce phénomène optique aux mondes sonores.

Berlin, mai 2018. Suite à une petite série de concerts au cours desquels j'ai écouté le trompettiste libanais Mazen Kerbaj, ma curiosité m'a conduit à mener quelques recherches sur sa musique. J'ai découvert ainsi avec stupéfaction que sa pensée s'inscrivait dans un rapport au son de la guerre : il avait du mal à accepter



Borne, code sacré. Festival Gamerz à la Fondation Vasarely, Aix-en-Provence 2018 © Erikm 2018