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Becoming Animal

Artistic PhD

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Documentation

All pictures are taken by Simon Løffler unless otherwise stated.

Video documentation as well as scores, which are referred to continuously throughout the text, can be found through the links below.

Videos:

<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1787404/1799746>

Scores:

<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1787404/1798453>

General chronology

2019

September-December: Creation of Animalia I (ver. 1) with Jennifer Torrence.

2020

January 15th: Performance of Animalia I (ver. 1) in Berlin with Jennifer Torrence.

February: Creation of Animalia I (ver. 2). Never performed.

March – June: Creation of Animalia II (ver. 1).

August 29th: Performance of Animalia II (ver. 1) with Julie Moviken in Oslo.

September: Creation of Animalia II (ver. 2) with Ellen Ugelvik and Jennifer Torrence.

September-November: Creation of Animalia IIIa (ver. 1) with Ane Marthe Sørlien Holen.

November 5th: Performance of Animalia IIIa (ver. 1) by Ane Marthe Sørlien Holen.

2021

January – April: Work on Frog solo, Pigeon duo, and other ideas. None finished.

April 28th: Performance of Animalia IIIa (ver. 1) by Ane Marthe Sørlien Holen in Aarhus.

June 7th: Mid-term evaluation with Xavier Le Roy.

July -August: Creation of Animalia IIIa (ver. 2).

September: Residency at the island of Bornholm. Composition of eleven children songs. Work on Animalia IVa (ver. 1).

November – January: Work on sideways blinking eyelids. Unfinished.

2022

- January – mid February:* Creation of Animalia IVa (ver. 1) with Håkon Stene. Dress made in collaboration with Elisabeth Holager Lund.
- End of February – March:* Work on merging several ideas of insect movement, expanding vocal sac and sideways blinking eyelids. Abandoned.
- April:* Creation of Animalia IIIb (ver. 1), for Ane Marthe Sørlien Holen and one fox puppet made by Polina Borisova and Manon Dublanc.
- April 30th:* Performance of Animalia IVa (ver. 1) by Håkon Stene at Only Connect festival.
- April – May:* Creation of Animalia I (ver. 3) with Inga Aas and Jennifer Torrence.
- May 14th:* Performance of Animalia IIIa (ver. 2) and Animalia IIIb (ver. 1) by Ane Marthe Sørlien Holen at the Norwegian Academy of Music
- May:* Creation of Animalia IVb (duo).
- June-July:* Creation of Animalia IIIa (ver. 3), Animalia IIIb (ver. 2) and Animalia IIIc (ver. 1) with Ane Marthe Sørlien Holen.
- March (end) – July:* Creation of Animalia II.a+b (ver. 3) with Ellen Ugelvik and Jennifer Torrence.
- Late July – 16th September:* Creation of Animalia IVb (ver. 2) for myself.
- 17th of September:* Final concert at MUNCH museum, Ultima Festival.

Part I

Prologue

From 2018

What is a musical body?

Can it transform through other types of bodies?

How does one approach a zone of physical proximity between the non-human and human musician?

Is there an ethics in this encounter?

In 2022

The title of this project, *Becoming Animal*, is marred by contradictions. I have made music inventively but I have primarily been informed by animal bodies in some pre-musical state. I have sought to build a practice of composition while seeking to reduce the composed component of music. I have tried to make a bodily music but my body parts have turned into instruments.

In the following three chapters, I aim to expose a number of paths I followed through the past three years, and I intend to exhibit contradictions openly without resolving them. The initial questions from 2018 that sparked this process, followed me in all aspects of experimentation. I responded to them in such a way that they kept themselves alive across my activities, re-addressing my basic connotations with ritual consistency and prompting me to revise, erase, and to continuously start over again.

From 2019-2020

Where does an appendage to the body stop and instrument begin?

How to construct a body part that balances between mimetic resemblance and musical-motoric impulse?

How to squeeze myself into a posture from which a butterfly music is imaginable?

In 2022

It is revealing to ask how I have spent my time in the last three years. By far, the majority was spent building things. To a lesser, but not insubstantial, extent, I researched into topics such as zoomusicology, zoosemiotics, ethnomusicology, and I read a lot of poetry, novels and philosophy as I normally would. To an even lesser, but still not insubstantial, extent, I conducted workshop sessions with the musicians who have been my close collaborators throughout.¹

It follows that the spirit of the animal I wished to invigorate through music was not one that I could simply embody; I felt the need to construct it, to build my own version of it. It follows further that my creation processes have been in constant flux between testing and re-thinking,

¹ Namely Ane Marthe Sørlien Holen, Jennifer Torrence, Ellen Ugelvik, Inga Margrete Aas and Håkon Stene.

producing several versions of the same strains of material and findings ways to override thought as a way of thinking.

From 2021

How to make music as a ‘becoming musical’, rather than a ‘making music’?

How to reduce, reduce, reduce, until music becomes porous and inclusive?

How to be physically constricted and confined, to let movement and music co-exist in a gesture?

In 2022

In this text, I am attempting to write in a language that is subversive, regardless of the fact that this might not be entirely possible; a language that tries to resist an ontologizing of its topic. It is not my agenda to show where sound ends and music begins nor is it my agenda to understand how humanity is different from non-humanities.

My point of departure is the parallel, the real or imaginary parallels between a number of creatures, a number of aesthetic signs, a number of modes of expressions; I am trying to write in a way that exhibits life-worlds as singularly unique yet able to affect one another. It is primarily I who was affected by the voices of various animal traces, and it is primarily that change which I find relevant to show.

From (early) 2022

How to be affectionate as music, rather than in music?

How to move along a musical vanishing point?

How to be anonymous, veiled, unrefined? How to be reduced in order to be more?

In 2022

I performed many versions of the ideas that I developed in the period of research and I would not claim that any of them reached definite form. Therefore, it seems appropriate to shed light on my thought processes primarily through the lens of making and I intend to do so from three separate angles.

The first chapter, “beginnings”, outlines two parallel paths: the making of butterfly music seen through the lens of my diary notes, and the general trajectory of the three years.

The second chapter, “building”, addresses the inspirations and philosophical problems of making body appendages as well as what building came to be for me in a larger context of music technology and musical instrumentalization.

The third chapter, “composing”, addresses a number of themes in a somewhat intertwined kaleidoscopic fashion, themes that conjoined to constitute what composing came to be for me. These include ruminations on musical memory, movement and sound, tentative investigations and tributes, parallels between other life-worlds and my own, figures of form and speculative thoughts on self-erasure. I attempt to sum up in an epilogue directed towards the future.

Beginnings

Diary notes from the process of making butterfly music

Early 2020

Look at butterflies; read about them; be attentive in the moment they appear. First and foremost; imagine them, and re-produce the imagined. Imitate imitate imitate, until total boredom sets in; what remains after everything has become mundane? Also: what kind listening emerge in the process?

Early 2020

Read that the Parnassius family makes a rasping sound by rubbing their front wings against their hindwings; can't find any examples. Generally, a great deal of sound signals among the different families, mostly categorized as alarm calls.

Wonderful courtship rituals in the families that has scent scales on their wings! Both Fabriciana Adippe and Aglais Urticae fly in a figure eight formations as an act of intensification. One author called the dance synchronous; can't find any examples of that. It's a very nice image.

The male Aglais Urticae spirals around the female as they both ascend upwards. He also strokes his proboscis against her hindwings (sometimes it's called drumming). It feels as if intensification is crucial; a heightened sensitivity to smell, touch and movement.

The thought of synchronous figure eight patterns, and physically touching each other with the wings, opens up vague contours of some music - exactly what is not clear.

March 2020

Very attracted to the proboscis, specifically its circular unfolding movement, but how to translate it into something that is different from a party horn?

It feels like the musicality of butterflies extends mainly through its wings, but maybe that's because their motor-impulses remind me of movement patterns that I know (back-forth, up-down, etc.). Still, they touch each other with their wings and their sexuality arises from the olfactory capacity of the wings - why not just make a "winged" music? Too simple?

March 2020

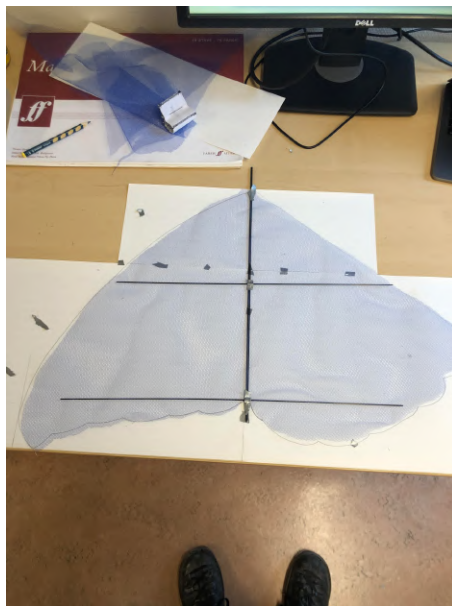
Wings are tricky. First attempt at construction proved to have too much air resistance; have to find a fabric with holes, and make the skeleton simpler. Crossing my arms behind my back or across my, chest to allow the wings to stick out from the body, feels like a possibility.



March 2020

Found a body position: kneeling with head down to the floor. Or, more precisely!: made a set of wings that found a body position in which they feel they make sense. Wings still need some work; the carbon stick skeleton should not be vertical, it's too unstable.

Worried that there is no way to move out of this posture without undermining its credibility. The distinction between stationary movement and moving in space seems important; performers in a classical musical setting are often stationary, like sculptures on a platform; they do not inhabit a territory. Territory feels important; how to be 'in' a territory, rather than 'on' a stage (re-read the passage where Deleuze writes about a bird who builds a territory²). How to be 'amongst', in the way I behave musically? (But it feels wrong to move out of position without a musical impetus).



April 2020

It's as if my body is not compatible with what I'm searching for. Perhaps the butterfly can be thought of as an extension of a smaller part of me, my fingers or my eyelids? But will the focus in that case turn towards the dissociation of individual limbs from the rest of the body? Can I conceal some of my appearance so that the audience only see singular body parts (remember to look up that dance piece by Brice Leroux with the arms³)?

I am inclined towards a "whole" body, a total restriction of my defining features in order to liberate an anonymous (porous) wholeness. Futile probably; people see a human musician on the floor regardless (no: work with the details, not with an overall impression beyond your control, not with what people see but what they sense in addition to the seen (try not to lose track: the musical gesture entails more beyond mere appearance (but: only if I work with it as music, not as only gesture (try not to think in oppositions; think through connections)))).

² Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *What is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 184.

³ The piece referred to is "Quantum-Quintet", created by Choreographer Brice Leroux in 2006. I have never seen the piece live. It was often discussed, along with a piece entitled "Gravitations", during my time in A.PASS (a research program in Brussels I attended in 2011-2012).



May 2020

Workshop with Jennifer and Ellen, prepared a lot of small movement sketches beforehand. They move very differently; not sure whether to embrace the difference or push towards resemblance. Are there “right” bodies and “wrong” bodies in this project? Clearly it is my own body that I compare them to; I project my body onto theirs as I look at them. What if their physicality inscribed themselves onto me? Is that not what the animal spirit asks of me: how to work with the singularly unique rather than the uniformly similar?

6/6 2020

What is the overall idea at present? To make a silent music that constantly strives to elevate and fly away. But silence is a problem to solve; should probably be created with sound, as in moving closer to the soundless by pulling sound out of the sounding, rather than to leave the non-sounding as is. Every listeners ear will fill the void with something. Encircle the non-present, don't enter. From a kneeling body position, attempting to elevate seems straightforward; a movement gesture that can be used as a connector of left-right-center positions and other stuff. Perhaps also as something in itself – a suspension of sorts.

19/6 2020

Workshop with Ane Marthe. Made a few one-minute sketches beforehand. The nylon fabric does not allow for wing against wing touch, they get entangled in each other too easily. A pity. Tried to incorporate touch differently; player 2 rubs the back of player 1 with her head. Didn't really work, but why not? What kind of touch is right? The gesture seems too loaded (schizophrenic?); it's kind of affectionate while also musical (barely), it reminds me of calming someone down by placing an ear to their body, but the up-down movement is instrumental. The

abdomen has to work hard to stay in the position; the neck movement is awkward; the strained effort contradicts the softness of touch that I had hoped to find (not sure about any of this).

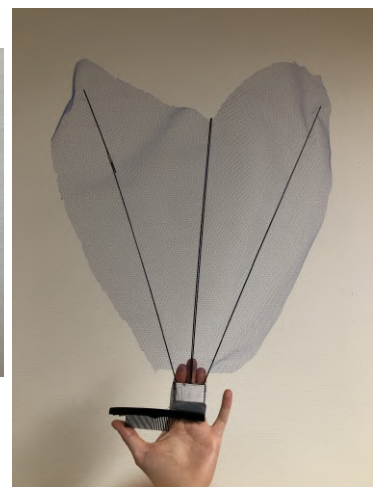


July 2020

I need sound. The wings can't carry everything; they are more visual and motoric than affectionate or sounding. The only limb on the body that has room to play is the thumb. The feet maybe also, but it seems logical that sound comes from the wings. It is always the hand that offers a solution when I need one; can't separate myself from it when I conceive of instruments.

July 2020

Experimented with hair combs. Cutting some teeth off in two different places produces two kinds of downward glissandi. They are easy to place on the base of the wing with double-sided tape; still have to find a comb that doesn't break constantly.



27/7 2020

Agreed to perform a try-out version of the piece in August. Need to be finished so we can rehearse; performing it with a dancer: Julie Moviken.

Develop notation - list all the material you have now - find form - make piece.

Simon Løffler

♩ = 55

A1

Right player.

Left player

A2

right

left

(See [video example 10](#) and [score example 4](#))

Present

Three years ago, I embarked upon this research project with one personal aim: to become a different composer from the one that I was. The non-human animal was my guide because of an intuition that it would lead me into a dark forest and strip me of ingrained entanglements with the contemporary European/Scandinavian music cultural sphere; a sphere where music is but a complement to existence, where art is a surplus. I wanted to create music as a way to heighten sensitivity towards living creatures beyond the human as a way to entangle myself deeper into the world. But it was not clear to me exactly how to proceed, and neither was it very clear to me what pre-ingrained methodologies I would bring into the project.

What initially caused me to experience a strong sense of resonance with specific animals was not their explicit musical behavior but the subtle implications of musicality inherent in the small details of their appearance. The silent blinking of long elephant eyelashes, the intensity of the

swelling of the vocal sac of frogs and toads, the affectionate way a penguin touches the beak of its partner, the deep breathing of a horse, the serene stillness of a swan in water, the flurry of the wings of butterflies. Seen in isolation, there is, in these gestures, a very basic physical-motoric reality that produces an abundance of associations with our own body and with other types of bodies.

I made three pieces of music very quickly within the first year (*Animalia I-III*, first versions). All three arose from a process of mimetic assimilation. Studying, imagining, and imitating various aspects of the life-world of birds (specifically albatrosses), butterflies and elephants, and approaching their physicality mainly by building extension mechanisms of my own. I never travelled into habitats specifically to encounter an animal creature. I sat at my desk and hoped for the animal spirit to come to me somehow.

Eventually, traces of the animal's appearance, such as a body part, ways of moving, ways to interact, ways of sounding, would become the basis of what I would call a pre-instrumental music; music on the borderline between mimetic gesture and instrumental impulse but primarily through, and on, the body. In hindsight, it is clear that the developmental phases in which I tried to move closer to some small part of an animal's existence were periods of great excitement, as if embarking on a discovery expedition. The composition phase however was quite similar to what I had been doing in the previous 10-12 years; finding a way to notate music in order to work with precise rhythm, and composing with these notational figures in a constantly unfolding form consisting of variation and repetition, combinations, sudden shifts and progressive processes. Basically, the procedures one will often find in much Western music.

Much of my second year was a wasteland. I produced a number of fragments based loosely on real and imaginary encounters with frogs, pigeons, cicadas and swans, but nothing was completed and all attempts felt like hollow reiteration.

During the last quarter of 2021, I began assembling material to teach a course entitled "animal music" at the Norwegian Academy of Music. It gave me an opportunity to bring all my sources of inspiration together up until that point, and present these in a pedagogical format. It was mainly my intention to discuss ways of seeing, ways of hearing, not my own practice. We had six sessions, and it was immensely productive for me to receive an uncompromising response to my presentation of a number of topics, along with my attempts (which sometimes failed miserably) to illustrate their interconnectedness. I provide a short overview of session 1-5 below, the sixth was used to prepare for a final concert showing.

Session 1. Introduction to aesthetic expression among different non-human creatures

We began by discussing the paleolithic context of the first known instrument (at present), the Djive Babe flute fragment, and different ways of seeing its relation to a modern conception of the human. We moved on to Francois Bernard Mâche, the modern founder of Zoomusicology, and perused some of his examples that show parallels between the cries and calls of different

species and the music of various indigenous communities. Our discussions then centered on an essay from 1969 by Thomas A. Sebeok entitled “Prefigurations of Art”, and we went through a number of his examples of kinesthetic, pictorial, architectural and musical signs. In relation to music, we listened to the songs, sounds and signals of insects (cicadas, crickets and butterflies), spiders, frogs and toads, whales, bats and apes (titi and gibbon).

Session 2. Darwinism and Umwelt Theory

We turned to two main theoretical frameworks through which modern man has attempted to approach aspects of the non-human, and we tried to understand, on a basic level, what words do to our relations with other life-forms. I had prepared an introduction which I cite part of below (the unabashed political dimension is unusual for me, but I wanted to spark a debate and see how politically inclined the group was):

One example, for instance, is the word cow. I wonder what kind of image you create in your minds when I utter this word? Do you see a lone animal, a stable, or a herd? Before a young adult female cow has given birth to a calf for the first time, she is called a Heifer (“Kvie” in Norwegian). After her first birth, she is called a cow. Is it implicit, therefore, in the name cow, that she is a mother, yet to most of us not directly involved with dairy production, we don’t perceive that dimension. A cow produces milk after she has given birth, like a human female, and therefore a cow living within a modern dairy production facility is kept pregnant constantly, to produce a calf each year. Three months after birth, she is made pregnant again. Usually, 2 months before giving birth, the milking is stopped to allow the udders to rest. In other words, she is milked 10 months a year. A cow can live up to twenty years, but is usually not allowed to live more than six. What I mean to highlight here, is that the word cow has lost its connection to the actual life that the animal lives. The words we choose facilitate images of the world, paints the world as we see it. Can we find another word that describes the existence of a cow, one word that we can relate to in our own lives as city people? It is well known that cows have strong maternal instincts, and some show signs of distress when their calf is taken away immediately after birth. Since cows are kept in constant pregnancy, a Danish anthropologist named Sofie Isager Ahl, has suggested the word “cow-mother”, to denote a living being that is, in some contexts, enslaved to motherhood. What do you think of this word?⁴

With this in mind, we went on to discuss Darwinian notions of evolution, and the idea of gradualism in general, as a continuum of natural selection that brings forth ever higher forms of sophistication. A specific passage from “The descent of man, and selection in relation to sex” from 1871, where Darwin reflects on birdsong and instrumental sounds, carefully amassing a number of examples, was read out loud together to illustrate the language of Darwin (which I

⁴ The PhD thesis of Sofie Isager Ahl from 2021, entitled “Regeneration, gensidigt helende praksisser i en ny jordbrugsbevægelse”, is not translated into english at present. It has been an inspiring encounter for me, in its discussion of language, regenerative agricultural practices, ghosts and much more.

do find poetic, in spite of the fact that I do not appreciate his anthropocentrism, and his use of words such as “savages” and the like).⁵

We went on to discuss Jakob Von Uexküll, the founder of biosemiotics. We attempted to grasp his concepts of *Merwelt* (our unique subjective world, composed of our sensorial perceptions), *Wirkwelt* (the physical actions we can perform) and the functional cycle. We concluded by reading his famous description of the life-cycle of a tick, and the deeply philosophical implications he reveals in relation to time.⁶

Session 3. Mimesis

In our third meeting, we addressed the interlocking concepts of mimesis, music, animals and ghosts (or spirits) throughout history. This was a particularly difficult session to prepare, but it felt important. I began noting that it seemed impossible (for me at least) to discuss ghosts, animals and music as interconnected in a Western context, but in some non-western cultures it would seem appropriate.

We commenced to briefly discuss Jacques Derrida’s famous notion of “the absent present”, in his book “Specters of Marx”. I attempted to find examples of an absent presence in Western music, and came up with two rather tentative instances in Schumann (the *Humoreske* op. 20 has a section where an “innere Stimme” is notated, but not played) and Brahms (whose music is often described as haunted because of his use of polyphonic voices in a middle register⁷). From this, we went on a cursory journey through mimetic theories in ancient Greece (Aristotle), Walter Benjamin, Roger Caillois and Theodor W. Adorno.

I then attempted to exemplify a musical culture where specific animals, ghosts, mimetic embodiment and music appear inseparable (I must stress that I put forth many examples of indigenous music without any expert knowledge, and I feel it is important to relate to music from other cultures in a Western institution, in so far as it is clear that the aim is not to exploit, but to be inspired). We watched a short movie exhibiting the bear cult festival of the Ainu tribe in northern Japan, and saw how cries, groans and bodily movement that imitate animals empowered with spirits, fixed melodic phrases and text with onomatopoeic expressions all

⁵ “The diversity of the sounds, both vocal and instrumental, made by the males of many species during the breeding-season, and the diversity of the means for producing such sounds, are highly remarkable. We thus gain a high idea of their importance for sexual purposes, and are reminded of the same conclusion with respect to insects. It is not difficult to imagine the steps by which the notes of a bird, primarily used as a mere call or for some other purpose, might have been improved into a melodious love song”.

- Charles Darwin, *The descent of man*. (Ware, England: Wordsworth Editions, 2013), Chapter 13, page 372.

⁶ “What have we gained by realizing this? Something extremely significant. Time, which frames all happening, seems to us to be the only objectively stable thing in contrast to the colorful change of its contents, and now we see that the subject sways the time of his own world. Instead of saying, as heretofore, that without time, there can be no living subject, we shall now have to say that without a living subject, there can be no time”.

- Jakob Von Uexküll, *A Foray Into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), introduction.

⁷ See for instance Diego Cubero, *Inwardness and Inner Melodies in Brahms’s Piano Music* on Music Theory Online: <https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.17.23.1/mto.17.23.1.cubero.html>

come together in Ainu music and life. We listened specifically to the two musical song forms associated with the bear cult – the Upopo and the Rimse – in which a polyphonic singing repeats the same melody one beat apart (essentially a canon), resulting in a kind of de-phrased texture “haunted” by several voices.⁸ We listened to a further aspect of Ainu musical culture called Rekukkara, which is a branch of throat singing. Games of throat singing can be found in many parts of the sub-arctic, including the Inuits of Canada, and the Chucki people in Siberia.⁹ We ended the session talking about the notion of anthropomorphism, our tendency to attribute human qualities to non-humans. The group were given the choice to read and relate to an article about imitation of animal sound patterns in Serbian folk music.¹⁰

4. Memory, place, path

Our fourth session was a mixed muffin. From listening to the wonderful Pied Butcherbird, we delved into Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the refrain, the small melodic and rhythmical fragment that encircle a territory. In the pedagogically lucid words of Elizabeth Grosz:

Every refrain, for Deleuze and Guattari, has three basic components: first, a point of order or inside—a home, nest, or space of safety that filters out or keeps the forces of chaos temporarily at bay (“A child hums to summon the strength for the schoolwork she has to hand in” [311]); second, a circle of control that defines not only a safe inside but also a malleable or containable outside, a terrain to be marked, a field to be guarded (a cat sprays strategic objects at the boundary of its territory, a bird marks the field below its nest as the space of its sonorous and rhythmic performance); and, third, a line of flight to the outside, a movement of migration, transformation, or deformation (the long march of lobsters across the ocean floor, the path of migratory ducks or monarch butterflies flying north or south each year; Every refrain is marked by all three aspects or movements, a home, a yard, and a way out, which nevertheless vary in their incantatory force, in their combination, in their emphasis.¹¹

I attempted to exemplify a sense of territory in the music of the Kaluli, a subgroup of four tribal communities living by Mt. Bosavi in Papua New Guinea, as I have encountered it in the writings of Steven Feld. Feld shows in his article “Flow like a waterfall; the metaphores of Kaluli musical theory”, how the Kaluli describes their music through metaphors of waterfall, and how certain songs are synonymous with weeping. We listened to examples from his compilation of

⁸ See *Japan - Ainu songs*. UNESCO Collection of Traditional Music of the World. 2015 Smithsonian Folkways Recordings / 1980 Auvidis - UNESCO

⁹ A haunting example of throat singing, one out of so many, can be found on an album displaying the musical culture of the Chucki people of Siberia: *Kolyma: chants de nature et d'animaux*. Musique de Monde. Track 26-28. Listen also to track 29 for an imitation of the cries of different species.

¹⁰ The article can be read online here:

http://musicstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Petrovic_JIMS_11050201.pdf

The sound examples are here: <http://musicstudies.org/?s=petrovic>

¹¹ Elisabeth Grosz. *Chaos, Territory, Art*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

field recordings.¹² The rest of the session was spend discussing musical memory, and how metaphors of space are an integral part of our listening.

5. Joint reading session, the voice of other species in three texts of Ursula K. Le Guin

I decided to end the course by reading out loud two short stories and one essay by the Ursula K. Le Guin, to get a different perspective from a writing practice involved with inventing voices in non-human life-worlds.

We started with “The Author of the Acacia Seeds”, a short story that opens up a creative door to the secret language (poetry?) of ants, after which we read “Mazes”, which is a mysterious text that can be read from different perspectives (that of a human captive, forced to run around in mazes, or from the perspective of a rat in a laboratory having tests performed on it, for instance). Both texts were discussed with immense enthusiasm. They approach the unapproachable through creation, rather than theory. They make connections, rather than presume them. They show, they do not claim.

We ended our final session with the essay “The carrier bag theory of fiction”. This essay embodied some of my trajectory up until that point. I had collected a bunch of ideas, thoughts and attempts, and I had been greatly confused in the process about how to situate myself in relation to this mass of gathered material. None of my *Animalia* works felt finished, nor did they feel original such as would fit the idiom of a heroic composer who reinvents music history. Their musical-technical language did not extend any musical-theoretical aspect of music heretofore unseen in the world. The tension, as I see it now, resided between two different conceptions of musical composition: one that attempts to modernize by invention and extension, and one that attempts to “ecologize” by inclusion.¹³ I was without question a composer of the first kind when I entered my research period, which meant that I sought to make new music primarily through structural, technical and notational procedures. But it felt like a betrayal of all the voices I was listening to. They were erased in my ambition to be a broader version of me. The looming question then, one that I did not grasp very clearly until well into 2020, became: how to conceive composition differently, rather than to extend its repertoire of means with new types of material?

¹² *Bosavi: Rainforest Music From Papua New Guinea*. Smithsonian Folkways 40487, 2001.

¹³ I am borrowing the question of how to ecologize, rather than modernize, from Bruno Latour. I have come across it in both *An Inquiry Into Modes of Existence*, trans. Catherine Porter (England: Harvard University Press, 2018) and “To modernize or to ecologize? That is the question”, in *Remaking Reality: Nature at the Millenium* (London, England: Routledge, 2005).

Diary notes from the process of making butterfly music (continued)

03.02 2022

Performance of butterfly piece in Stuttgart yesterday (version 2 slightly revised). They played it very well. Can't escape the feeling that something is wrong. Too controlled, too schematic, like running through a catalogue of techniques.

(See performance 25:01 minutes into the concert:

<https://vimeo.com/671326741/79071bc487>

and [score example 5](#))

1.4 2022

Remember Polydorus in the beginning of Hecuba (Euripides): "...I am unborn, unsaid".¹⁴ How to re-imagine the butterflies as creatures with no beginning or end, as nameless and intangible. How to move along a borderline of non-music, a threshold of music? How to let music be present through its near absence?

9/4 2022

Recall the lines by Paul Celan:

"...cocooned
as everything rocked by night"¹⁵

In one single image I see the butterflies re-connecting with their past cocooned state by rocking side to side, initiated by a darkness that takes away sight, but intensifies an inner sound. How to work from just rocking!? The tiny details of speed, the angle of the wings, the moment of suspense just before recoil. The rocking of a cradle comes to mind, and rhythm as a fluctuation between flow and division. (Charisius (400 AD): "rhythm is flowing meter, and meter is bonded rhythm".¹⁶) How to be musical like a cradle? And what is sound in this scenario; a momentary suspension of "cocooning"?

10/4 2022

Recall the album where the entire A-side consists only of field recordings from the rainforest.¹⁷ Imagine the musical presence of near-silent butterflies within a cacophony of sound; rocking side to side as a way to encircle an imaginary communication?

¹⁴ I recollected the opening monologue of Polydorus incorrectly. He states "My lifeless body washes ashore and washes back to sea with the waves' endless ebb and flow, and remains unmourned, unburied." Unmourned, unburied, transformed into unborn and unsaid in my mind.

¹⁵ Paul Celan. *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle*. 1955. From the poem *Ich Weiss*, which I have translated from Danish.

¹⁶ Flavius Sospater Charisius (born ca. 400 AD). *Institutiones Grammaticae*. P. 289. The passage is quoted by Curt Sachs in *Rhythm and Tempo*.

¹⁷ *Indiens et Animaux auwages d'amerique de sud*. Unidisc, 1977. At the time of writing this album can be found here (under *Brazil* in the right-hand column): <https://music-republic-world-traditional.blogspot.com/>

13/4 2022

Remember the sound of millions of migrating Monarch butterflies. Like snow. Move away from controlling durations and time precisely. Find a language in which the performative moment is an urge to remain in one place for a brief moment.

April 2022

Recall the voice duet from Burundi with the two girls singing.¹⁸ How to be so pristinely precise in relation to each other but not necessarily in relation to an overlapping metric grid? How to be formal but not structural?

Early July 2022

Simplify simplify simplify. We don't need so many different gestures; we need a subtleness of movement.

Early July 2022

Dividing the first version into two. Go deep into two tiny spaces rather than to develop one single expanding space. Focus on "flying" in the first part, focus on rocking side to side in the second. Attempt a narrative scoring language as opposed to precise notation.

Butterfly improvisation I.

Duration: 2-3 minutes.

Key words: Fast, intense, silent.

Playing techniques: Fast wingbeats, turning side to side, fast flying jumps, half and full figure 8's.

Note: The performers decide how to give cues for moving on from one section to the next.

The score is written on two staves, labeled 1 and 2. Above the staves, a tempo marking shows a quarter note followed by '=66'. A duration of 'ca. 20 sec.' is written between the staves. The score is divided into two main sections. The first section, on the left, features a series of 'x' marks on the staves, with arrows above them indicating movement (left, right, left, right). The second section, on the right, features a series of 'x' marks on the staves, with arrows above them indicating movement (left, right, left, right). The score is written in a narrative style, with instructions in the center of the staves.

ca. 20 sec.

Fast wingbeats of different durations, quickly slowing down to slow motion. Wingbeats gradually increase in intensity towards the next section, slowing down becomes less.

The performers are not coordinated, but can listen and react to each other.

(See [score example 6](#))

¹⁸ *Burundi – Musique Traditionnelle*, 1984, Ocora, Radio France. The song referred to is entitled "Akazéhé Par Deux Jeunes Filles" (track 10). Can be streamed on various platforms (spotify and youtube).

Present

During my final year, I began to revisit all the material that I had made with the aim of creating with it differently. The inspirational impetus was informed less by the singular animal creature and more by the various human indigenous cultures for whom the living organisms of their surroundings are intertwined with ritualized musical practices. These are cultures that I have never travelled to or experienced with my own ears and eyes but only read about and imagined from a distance.

In the spring of 2022, the realization came to me that I was searching for ways in which musical bodies can be affectionate in performance and that such a vision had to be approached by allowing the creation process to be affectionate to some extent. Somewhat gradually, I moved away from strict notation and towards creation that demanded a more personal participation from performers. Affection became less a matter of directly touching one another and oneself - less a matter of exhibiting affectionate gesture and more a way of being. I wanted to establish states of “being musical” as music, rather than make closed and definite pieces. Perhaps it is more precise to say: I wanted to establish a “becoming musical”, rather than a “playing music”.

What I conceived as mimetic gestures in my first year became ways to mask and anonymize the performer. And it was not only the performers that I masked; I sought to subdue, constrain and restrict the musical material in such a way that a void opened up. To strain a musical discourse, seemingly moving towards its vanishing point, and further to mask its origin by changing voice quality or appearance, potentially opens up a space of inclusion. Bernd Brabec di Mori describes something similar in the function of voice masking in ritual contexts among indigenous cultures of Lowland South America thus:

Non-humans may be approached by moving from ordinary fugitive speech to recitations, chants, and songs, especially those utterances with a masked voice – that is, in a state of transformation. At the point where formalization starts, the involvement of non-humans begins.¹⁹

Needless to say, the circumstances of the musical/ritual traditions of communities living in other parts of the world is different from my own. Nevertheless, their reality as I imagined it caused me to re-conceptualize the elements I was working with. The components of performance - such as beaks, wings, eyelids, bells, movement, masks, dresses, sound, etc. - were treated less instrumentally, and more as signs pointing towards an alterity beyond the sonic. The translation process, through which traces of animal resemblance were brought into a sphere of masking, sound and movement, became a process that I hoped to maintain within the musical space, rather than to define them prior to the music.

¹⁹ Bernd brabec di mori, “Musical spirits and Powerfull voices: On the origins of song”, *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 29 (2017): 114-28.

In my first attempt to make a swan solo (*Animalia IVa*), I found a short upward gliding gesture played on a siren whistle, and found it natural to couple it with a slight upward nod of the head (wearing a head mask emulating an extended neck). The sound was akin to a sort of moaning. I notated the gesture and repeated it a number of times in varied forms, shorting and lengthening the duration, adding a tail to it, etc. After the first performance, I decided to play the piece myself. I wanted to start from scratch, I wanted to develop everything without notation and I wanted the process to be an inquiry into myself in some way. I did a few inner child meditations online²⁰, the kind that has horrible music in the background and a guiding voice that sounds too calm to be true. During one of these, I was looking down at myself as a three-year old playing behind an armchair and the three-year old looked up and said “I don’t know where to be”.²¹ The upward moaning nod figure in the swan piece became a re-enactment of the moment when my younger self looked up, and essentially became the moment that the whole work revolves around. During every performance, I was able to enter into that image and stay there for a couple of seconds before re-focusing my attention on the performative moment. The difference between a notated gesture and a re-enacted one was, for me, that between repetition and re-visitation. Notated repetition is replicative in nature; re-visitation changes over time, much like the aura of a place that one returns to periodically. The moaning nod transformed from being a figure I developed additively, to a figure that enabled a translative dialogue within me. I believe it was the swan of my imagination that lent counsel in this process, and there is nothing magical about this. As my thoughts constantly circulated around the life-world of another creature and as I strived to maintain an ongoing imaginary connection, that creature became a mental agent able to affect and enhance my sensitivity in subtle ways. The more one attempts to listen to a silent external agent, the more that agent turns listening inwards.

Diary notes from the process of making butterfly music (end)

5/7 2022

My text score creates confusion. Randomness. Ellen and Jennifer have no way to communicate through visual contact or sound. Being “together” becomes impossible without a clear framework of reference. The texted score encourages them to build that framework together, but there is no time now. Worried that if I take control and propose solutions, I essentially “score” them once again. But it needs something.

6/7 2022

Two rehearsals left. Be pragmatic. Simplify even further, decide on behalf of the performers and let them react and change in rehearsal. Dialogue, but affirm intention.

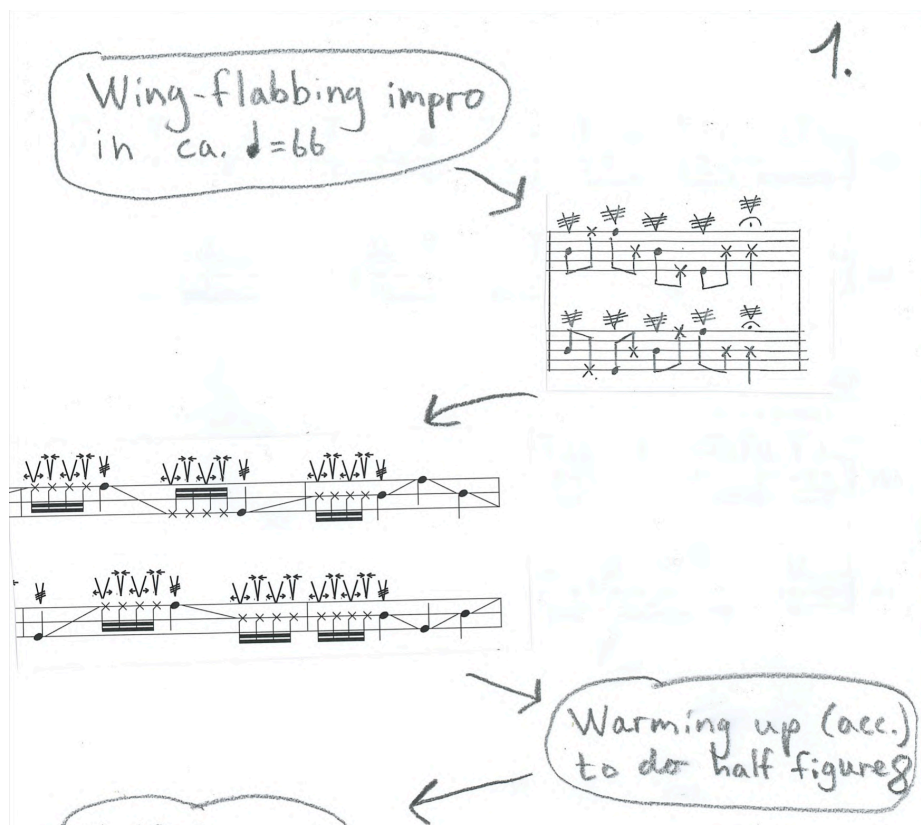
²⁰ A popularized meditation form where one is guided by a voice to connect with one’s inner child.

²¹ The three-year old spoke Danish: “Jeg ved ikke hvor jeg skal være”.

7/7 2022

Notation is now a simple path, moving from recollection to recollection of the material that we've built. A few places are fixed so as to be completely in sync, most places are just a state, like "flying in figure 8's" or "rocking". We have worked out how to cue one another for moving on. The details change for every run-through, "score" is now a place to work from, not towards.

How to let go of this piece now? It does not feel finished but I don't know if it should either. It becomes what it becomes through Ellen and Jennifer.



(See [video examples 2 & 4](#) and [score example 7](#))

Present

As a title that sums up my intentions over the last three years, "Becoming Animal" is inadequate. Nobody became anything in this project. As a trace of a starting point three years ago, it makes sense for me personally. It brought about a number of contradictions along with a great deal of confusion and the amount of experimentation that I undertook was a direct response to this. Why not retain this title then, to honor what it initiated, despite its apparent detachment from the content of my explorations?

To become, is not to attain a form (identification, imitation, mimesis) but to find the zone of proximity, indiscernibility, or indifferentiation where one can no longer be distinguished from a woman, an animal, or a molecule – neither imprecise nor general, but unforeseen and non-preexistent, singularized out of a population rather than determined in a form.²²

In a spontaneous way, such passages in Deleuze resonate with me strongly, but they have posed a recurring question to my relation with mimesis. Three years ago, resemblances were mainly a starting point from which to think about pre-instrumental music and its pre-human nature. As my project evolved, I cared less for an actual resemblance and more for the process of re-creation as a way to get “closer to”. Most of my body part constructions do look familiar in some sense (I think) but they are not representational; they are musical in their own way. Deleuze sets in motion the word proximity “...to find a zone of proximity...”, and it is indeed a movement that the mimetic enabled for me: moving closer to in order to move into a foreign musical terrain.

²² Gilles Deleuze. *Essays critical and clinical* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

Building (body parts)

Elephant eyelids

A question to the elephant eyelids: I want to put myself in your place and experience myself as musical, as performing an extremely subtle, even implicit, music. Can this resonate with you?

Elephant eyelids: When the wind blows, we shield the eyes from sand and dust. When there is a remembrance of a lost family member, we close and open the eyes slowly to allow them to see memory and present in adjacent waves.²³ We can open and close somewhat quickly, to strike the skin under the eyes. Call it sound or call it vibration. We can suspend in the air. When we open, something inside is closed, when we close, something inside is opened; we can be a stream of openings and closings.



(Photo: Scientific American. Permission pending)

I searched for ways to make extended musical eyelids for a long time, several years before arriving in a research program. I was fascinated with the thinnest parts of our skin - the lips, eyelids and lower throat region - and I searched for ways to build a musical dimension into their movement. I had a ruminating vision, a vague and foggy one without any stringent reasoning, that our eyes are gateways through which memory and present pass back and forth, and that blinking stands in between these as a door that opens both ways. During my first year in Oslo, I read “Technics and Time 1” by Bernard Stiegler²⁴, and out of his writing on technology and the origin of the human, inseparable as they are for Stiegler, there arose in my imagination a conception that the technics of the parts of the human body that can open and close, such as the

²³ Barbara J. King, “When Animals Mourn”, *Scientific American* 309, no. 1 (2013): 62–67.

²⁴ Bernard Stiegler. *Technics and Time 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998)

eye and the mouth, contain in their mechanics an encapsulation of birth and death (“To ask the question of the birth of the human is to pose the question of the “birth of death” or of its relation to death”²⁵). Consequently, I wanted to work with the opening and closing of the eyes as a way to re-connect their element back to some pre-human form that opens outwards and closes inwards.²⁶

The skin of my own eyelids is loose; nothing can fit onto them and I did give up the idea to work with this most delicate skin segment on my own eyes several times. Then I met percussionist Ane Marthe Sørlien Holen, whose eyeballs are somewhat curved out of the eye sockets, stretching the eyelid skin slightly more than usual. Her eyelids urged me to search more dedicatedly for ways to re-create another type of eyelids from hers. From a pragmatic perspective, the challenge boiled down to weight and air resistance. I bought a precision weight and concluded that an extension could not be heavier than 0.1 grams, preferably a few milligrams below that. I searched for the absolute lightest of materials that can sustain a certain degree of stiffness. Carbon fiber was too stiff, paper strips too loose. I spent a great deal of time working with small feathers but I could not circumvent their air resistance, even a very small number of feathers on the base induced an imbalance of movement. Eventually, and quite spontaneously, I bought a pampas grass plant. I removed all the tiny leaves, and glued them onto a commercial artificial eyelash base after removing the lashes.



²⁵ Ibid. p. 135.

²⁶ Within the 1000scores.com project, I made a score that attempted to portray, somewhat poetically, a connection between blinking and its speculative pre-human origins:
<https://1000scores.com/portfolio-items/simon-loeffler-the-origin-of-blinking/>

The rest of the process was a matter of refinement. The number of pampas grass straws was reduced to five for each eyelid to minimize weight and they were painted black to be a bit stiffer. The eyelash bases had to be shortened down to 1.5 centimeters to be better fitted to the eyelid. I then commenced to make sound audible - perhaps more conventionally musical - by placing resonating materials on the cheeks. This decision was taken with a slight feeling of remorse; I chose not to musicalize the eyelids as they were, fascinating to me in their fragility and dissociation, but felt it necessary to marry a conventional instrumental medium with their nature in order to achieve a sound figure which was stable, rhythmical and, admittedly, familiar. What seemed most ideal was a pair of very light finger cymbals, the kind made for children. They were sewn onto a stiff base on the back to prevent the softness of the skin to dampen their resonance.



Building 1

In 2011 I went to Brussels to study in a one-year research program called A.PASS. The methodology of the program was very specific: one had to produce research - methodologies, strategies, try-outs - but one could not produce finished work. One had to work in a collaborative, negotiable space but every research project was singular and individual. Every participant was placed in a limbo of emerging ideas and loose ends, and the result was an intense engagement with each other and with oneself. Experimentation became existential. Contemporary dance was the artform that everything revolved around; the majority of participants were dancers and the city itself was bursting with it. The body was at the center of

every discourse. I experienced a great number of dance performances; I don't recall attending a single concert.

During this time, I began to envision ways to work away from traditional Western instruments, towards a bare and simple musical body. In a sense, I wanted to make an exposed kind of music, one that did not have an instrumental buffer zone in front of the performer. How to achieve that however was not clear to me at the time, and instruments remained integral in the way I conceived music. Thinking through an instrument of some kind, in fact thinking through any kind of medium, lends the composer an indispensable hand, similar to how, I suspect, a carpenter conceives of how to shape wood through the lens of her tools. I replaced classical instruments with self-made ones, and I tried to enhance the elements inherent in the instrumental act (movement, visual components of sound, modes of listening), rather than to focus upon the object played on. As a consequence, I spent the majority of my creative life building instrumental concepts of various kinds, that facilitated novel ways of playing.

During the past three years of research in Oslo, the building process has moved closer to the body. In my attempts to make body part extensions which simulate animal body parts, the function of building has shifted. I found myself preferring the simplest of methods. I used everyday materials such as string, paper, wood, cardboard, nylon and Worbla. I worked only with hand tools like a saw, a hammer, a drill, and I chose spontaneously not to design anything beforehand. Building became a mental space intertwined with making music and doing research (reading, discussing, trying out, dreaming); they all happened on top of each other within the same office.

Beak

A question to a beak: How does it feel to touch another beak?

Beak: It's not a feeling; it's a gifting of trust. Everything I can do – preening, feeding, hitting, probing, killing – I offer to the other beak. The actual touch is not important, the manner of caressing is. Caring for the other beak, by caressing it, means to hold on to “everything” within one single display.

I began to think about ways to extend my mouth cavity into a beak in 2018, at a time when I first became keen on exploring animal body parts as an extension of my own. The idea only materialized two years later in *Animalia I*. As is often the case, the first challenges were technical: how should I extend my mouth region into a fairly stable beak formation? Extending the lips? Hereby avoiding the interiority of the mouth, which leaves the tongue free to participate vocally if desired. But having to extend from the soft flesh of the lips meant to work within a minimal weight margin without much resonance.



I tried to extend from the entire jaw but its skin is loose and needs a great deal of support, reducing a free movement of the head both vertically and horizontally.



I then thought to utilize the stability of the teeth, risking protests from musicians who would not find it hygienically feasible (an ever-flowing stream of spit results if one cannot close the mouth properly to swallow). My first attempt was somewhat painful due to the stiffness of the ice-cream sticks that I used.



It occurred to me only very late that I had not properly understood the problem. The beak that I was making should not be seen as two separate parts but as a single artefact, extending in two directions from the same joint. Furthermore, opening the mouth (lowering the lower jaw) and closing it (raising the lower jaw), are two distinct actions. Rather than utilizing force to move both ways, the opening of the mouth is a relaxing of the muscles; only closing the mouth should use force. Therefore, the beak should be able to open on its own, following the lowering of the jaw automatically, which was achieved with a simple spring mechanism. The solution to the problem of fixation followed naturally; the beak had to be fixed to the teeth of the upper jaw since the lower jaw region must be completely free to move. A boxing mouthguard adjusted individually to the teeth of the performer was sewn on top of the upper part of the beak, at which point the basic functionality had reached its settled form.



During this development phase my awareness of the subtleties of beaks amongst bird species grew. An important encounter was with the courtship rituals of the Laysan Albatross (*Phoebastria Immutabilis*). The refined and rich choreography of this bird species is well studied, with over 25 distinct choreographical figures according to some writers.²⁷

I directly tried to incorporate the virtuosic albatross beak and found that the lower part of my beak should be flexible so that I might achieve a rapid clapping together, like castanets only even more rapid.

At this point, the lure of instrumental resonance showed its face. For if the idea of beaks fencing with each other had performative potential, the sounding result felt dull, which was difficult for me to accept at the time. Without being entirely conscious about it at the time, I perceived gesture as an element that had to follow sound; sound justified movement.

Placing a finger cymbal on top of the beak gave way to possibilities that I could not resist; now the beak would resonate, and touching would become an instrumental act.



Once this path was opened, I followed it blindly: bells were placed on each side of the beak, on the ears, and cardboard was placed on the shoulder; the performers could now play on each other in various ways. Further down, on the thighs, I placed a few signal whistles. The whole body was equipped with sound producing artefacts; I had squeezed instrumentality from the beaks existence as far as I could. This was exactly what felt wrong to me after the first performance.

²⁷ Earl M. Meseth, "The Dance of the Laysan Albatross, *Diomedea immutabilis*", *Behavior*, Vol. 54 No. 3/4 (1975). Many different video examples can be found online. See for instance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YvpHBALOCAl>



Building 2

There is a way to approach the basic aspects of musical creation that boils down to the question “what is music”? I dislike the question. It attempts to strip down, narrow in and ontologize. I am interested in the question “what is it to musicalize”? Making musical. That does not rule out an involvement with fundamental aspects of music - quite the contrary - but it starts from a point of transition: the moment, for instance, when the blinking of eyelids becomes a musical gesture. They need to blink by necessity, eyeballs need moisture, and that necessity can be aestheticized by formalizing the minute qualities of the blinking gesture, whereby a musical presence opens up.

There is an inherent ambivalence in all my *Animalia* pieces between musicalizing and instrumentalizing. All the body parts that I have made attempt to balance on a tight-rope between a “becoming musical” – which means to be an eyelid that extends its eyelid nature into a musical domain without transforming into something else – and “being instrumental” – which is to be as much a tiny drum stick that strikes a bell as a body part. The performing animal does

instrumentalize its surroundings to some degree; spiders, for instance, are known to be sensitive to the different frequencies of their web²⁸, and the male Wolf Spider specifically utilizes dead leaves as a drumming instrument to play for, and seduce, a female.²⁹ Some insects display organs that are so virtuosic in their motor capacity that a sense of an instrumentality is very close, one example being the tymbal membrane of Cicadas.³⁰ I have sought to arrive at a state of being in between in performance. A very tiny balancing point that fluctuates between a musical eyelid and an eyelid instrument.

Swan

A question to a swan: Do you sing in the way you are mute? Is elevation always with you, even when floating?

Swan: The wings stretch out when I am frightened or when I am becoming happy - they warm the feathers, they align them, they show that I might chase after another swan in play. I desire to move ever closer, ever into more unison, with another. The wings stretch out to display a desire towards embracing. They make vibrations in the air that pulsate, to display a desire to elevate. In that moment I might sing as if I'm soaring. Singing extends from a potential to soar, and should ascend and descend as if I were. Floating is neither still nor horizontal, it is also ascending and descending, only slower, and it is also singing.

Animalia IV was based loosely on certain attributes of a Swan. It was the last animal iteration that I finished and I wanted to work with the entire body, rather than parts of it. I brought some strong impressions of elongated African head masks I had read about into the process, as well as a fascination with the fact that a creature can be mute (which the mute swan is) and still inspire a great deal of music.³¹ I commenced to work towards an interplay of several elements; a floating movement across the floor that could evoke a distant kind of floaty music, wings that were musical in the way they initiated everything – setting in motion the body, sound and posture displays – and an expressive kind of singing.

First, I made a dress to hide my legs in order to appear as if I was floating. I had conceived of a way to pull a set of strings inside the dress that would vibrate four high-pitched metal bars, enabling me to play a “floaty” kind of music. I had no experience with costume making so I collaborated with scenographer Elisabeth Holager Lund and we re-worked two pre-fabricated crinoline dresses over several stages.

²⁸ <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/researchers-turn-spider-webs-music-180977506/>

²⁹ Kotiaho, Janne, Rauno V. Alatalo, Johanna Mappes, and Silja Parri. “Sexual Selection in a Wolf Spider: Male Drumming Activity, Body Size, and Viability.” *Evolution* 50, no. 5 (1996): 1977–81.

A more popularized presentation of the phenomenon:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7qMqAgCqME&t=120s>

³⁰ Henry C. Bennet-Clark. “How Cicadas Make Their Noise.” *Scientific American* 278, no. 5 (1998): 58–61.

³¹ Iris Hahner, *Spirits Speak: A Celebration of African Masks*, (Munich: Prestel, 2005).



(Photo: Signe Fuglesteg Luksengard)

Because the strings in the dress had to be pulled, I needed my fingers to be free. The wings therefore had to be placed on the outside of the hand, which felt less controllable.

For an extension of the arm to be audible when it moves through the air, it needs to be moved at a considerable speed. One can choose to build a light extension that the arm can move quickly, or one can elongate at length, extending the short movement of the arm into a long one at the tip of the wing. The first version of wings was focused on sound. I sew four carbon rods into a hand shaped glove made of bicycle hose. I attached an odd shaped piece of plastic at the end of the rods to increase air resistance, which produced a low-pitched sound. I then added small strips of string to the ends, in a similar manner to a whip, which added a high-pitched quality. The construction was very light, and had to be swung fast to be heard.



I was not happy with this set of wings. I wanted them to be more than sounding; I wanted them to have an imposing presence one that could unfold and be immense. I wanted sound to be physical and implicit rather than clear. I wanted them to be more akin to the arm extensions of Rebecca Horn, such as in her study “Mit beiden Händen gleichzeitig die Wände berühren”, from her cycle “Berlin – Übungen in neun Stücken, 1974/1975”.

Making them longer meant making them heavier. Making them heavier meant to build with a more stable material and to attach them more thoroughly to the arm and hand. I used square wooden sticks, extended them with as many square carbon tubes as could fit and added knots of string to the ends. The result was a set of wings that had less sound volume than the previous version, but were more physical to play with as well as visually present.



I proceeded to make a head mask of paper and cardboard together with the composer Guoste Tamulynaite who had more experience with mask making. We added layers of paper and tape until the contours of a swan shape had appeared. We attached the mask to a cap with steel wire and some elastic bands and hoped that it would, over time, find its way to fitting my head.



The singing was produced on a modified siren whistle. I took it apart and loosened a nut inside to make it more immediately responsive. I attached it to a bicycle hose and strapped it around my neck.



Building 3

It is a beautiful fact that the amount of energy on this planet is fixed, as formulated by the first law of thermodynamics. Energy transfers through different states and changes form; it does not arise from nothing nor does it disappear into nothing. Technology does not enable energy, it enables a translation of energy.

Building body parts became for me a prolonged ritual of imagining intertwined translations. It was as much a waiting activity as an enforcing one. Within one circular chain, I conceived of a sustained exchange of traces between animal life-worlds, my own physicality, movement, sound and musical instrumentality. In order to continuously work with mimetic parallels in the flow of work, in order to constantly seek a translative movement from real body parts to constructed ones, it seemed crucial not to bring pre-produced, ready-made, products into the workflow but rather to establish slowly and gradually. Dissociating elements from their origin, in order to re-organize them onto myself in some way, became more potent for me when they originated out of my hands. If this had not been important, a production designer could have made all my instruments in days. It took me months.

I don't know if I can demarcate a clear borderline between utilizing technology and creating technically but I believe first and foremost in the potential of the latter. Utilization of music technology, not the least in the form of electronic media including laptops, midi devices, etc., carries with them a tendency to reduce me to a user if I do not ascertain some mode of resistance. As a user, I potentially lose the possibility to be affected by the materiality in my hands and the transformation it may undertake. The great technical feats of modern instruments do allow for a precision of control that is in many ways spectacular, but they narrow the framework within which one can work on a fundamental level with the transformative power that energy becomes when it travels from one state to another. Organs and pianos, for instance, perform intricate mechanical manipulation of airflow and weight balance but a sense of breath and gravity is lost in the way sound appears.³²

Creating technically in a rudimentary (pre-modern) manner imposes restrictions to the maker that prompts negotiation.³³ A vision of music that constantly runs into problems of realization must necessarily be open and flexible; it stumbles along the way and finds dead ends as well as novelty, much like a child that continuously falls and gets up. Further, a constructed body part that reveals how it is constructed alongside its actual usage as an instrumental body part carries a plurality of communication that is not always present in representations which seem real. To expose openly that a wing is made up of 5 pieces of wood with knots of string at their end and to achieve a fluidity of movement in the wing that supersedes its material voice in favor of a musical one, is like a performer who becomes un-naked in the way that she reveals her nakedness.

Eyes

A question to any eye: Are there ways to hear in the way you see? Is there an inherent musicality in looking, in the figure of looking, as opposed to seeing? Is there a way to listen outwards when looking inwards?

Any eye: ...

The eyes of most bird species have continuously fascinated me, seemingly frozen in the eye sockets, unable to move on their own and unable to anticipate where the head, or the body, will be moving to, as is the tendency of human eyes.³⁴ The intensity of the direct stare of a bird, not

³² There is certainly a fluctuating difference of degree rather than kind, between established instruments and self-made instruments, and there are many ways to open a classical instrument up to re-formulate a relationship with it; modification and novel playing techniques for instance.

³³ Exactly how rudimentary is open to interpretation. I did use a drill and a hot-glue gun. I did not go into makerspaces to employ 3-d printers and CNC cutters. The main question here is how thinking manifests itself in methodology.

³⁴ Through the lens of science, we know that certain species can in fact focus their eyes. Pigeons for instance. This is nevertheless not readily perceivable to humans.

moving one millimeter once it has settled, this intensity became a state which I desired to assimilate. Human eyes are nervous in nature, ceaselessly ahead of the present. Tiny fluctuations to all sides constantly anticipate a possible change of attention, possible actions to be carried out, possible sentiments lurking beneath our realm of consciousness. It is the single most revealing detail in performance that a human mind is at work. The eyes of a bird are moved by the entire head and therefore more connected with more than themselves. The stare of the bird is infinitely present, always settled, even penetrative.

I tried in several ways to re-create a frozen set of eyes but never managed to get close to anything satisfactory. In the first version of *Animalia I*, Jennifer Torrence and I tried to imagine an object roughly 20 centimeters in front of us and maintain a direct stare. It did not really work. Perhaps it could have with more practice.

We tried black contact lenses but the reflections in the lenses still revealed that the eyes were moving and the learning curve in simply getting them on was, for me, infinitely steep. In the very last version of *Animalia I*, the performers (Inga Margrete Aas and Jennifer), simply play with eyes closed, opening them only fleetingly.

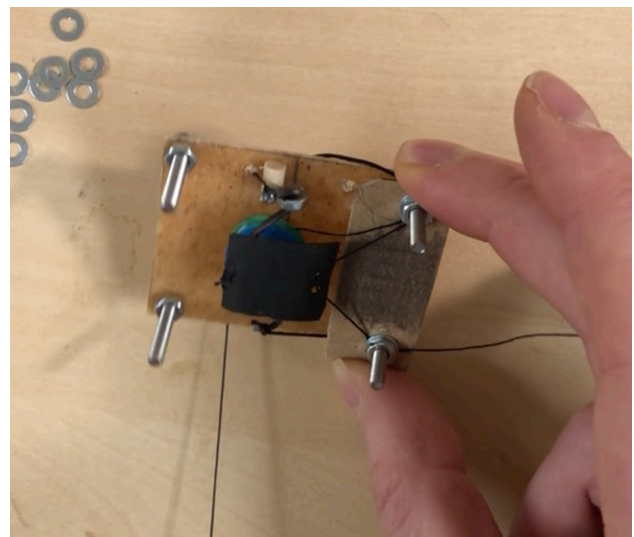
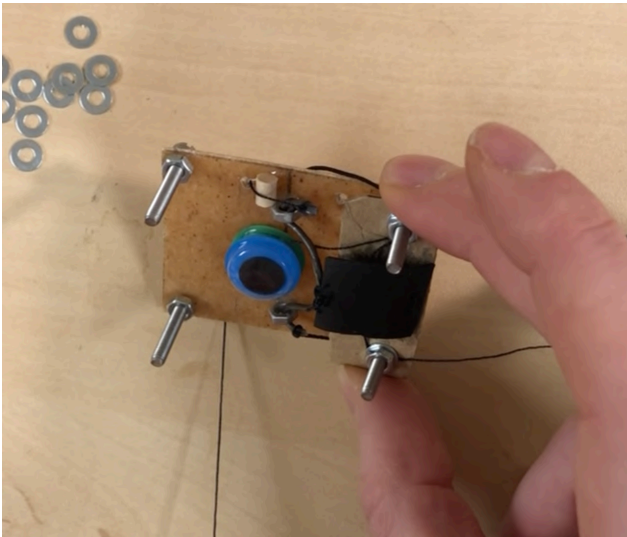
During 2021, I made a few different masks to emulate the eyes and head movements of Pigeons. These elements were combined with my growing interest in bodies that shiver and tremble (which I will elaborate further on below). My pigeon endeavors remained unfinished.

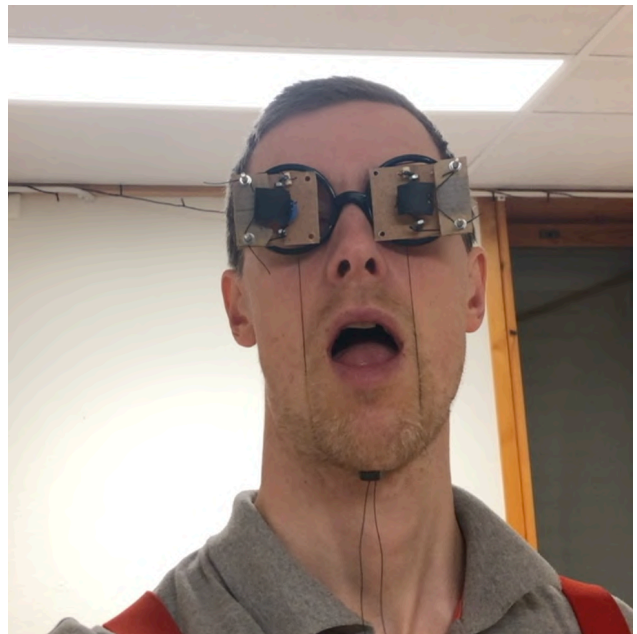


A different kind of eyes were attempted in early 2022. I wanted to make a set of lizard eyes that blinked sideways to explore what kind of musical vision that might arise from such a gesture. I

had a vague idea that the horizontal movement might give rise to a “horizontal music” of sorts, as I felt my previous work was entirely based on gravitational verticality; music that moves up and down in the way it soars into a phrase and descends out of it. Perhaps there was a way to make phrases that were either present or absent but never appearing or disappearing, like the occasional quick and abrupt movement of spiders.

Gradually I found a mechanical solution that was somewhat promising based on a string mechanism by which the eyelids were opened and closed by the movement of my jaw. As a wearable artefact on my face it seemed regrettably more comical than anything else. I also attempted to make a pigeon mask with movable eyes instead of the eyelids but it made me feel like a clown. After several months of endless construction there arose no musical impetus to guide me further and the whole idea seemed like a wormhole that drew me into an ever-deepening gap of nothingness. I abandoned the non-human eye and moved on.





Building 4

The artistic potential of technology lies not in what it offers me but what it takes away from me. Building on my own is a mode of resistance. I am resisting the production processes that accelerate my ideas towards realization because the nature of dreams changes when technology dictates how to proceed. Dreaming becomes small and short-lived when the path is clear and linear, like the empty thoughts one has driving a car 120 kilometers an hour on the highway.³⁵ Making technically in such a way as to sustain an unconfined sort of dreaming is, in my opinion, the challenge of technically inclined composers today. This entails a methodology in which traces can be nurtured without reaching definite, unified, instrumental form; they can die out or lighten up, but they take part in a circuit of discontinuities. They are singularly unique but allow inhabitation of one another. The components of my butterfly wing are not continuous elements that can be squeezed through a machine into a sausage; they are in themselves small worlds that can form alliances, which I attempt to mediate.³⁶

Expandable vocal sac (frogs)

A question (in hindsight) to the vocal sac of a frog: Why was I not able to find a mediating space between you and me?

Vocal sac of a frog: Because you did not appreciate all the music that I was already.

I initially became curious about investigating the musicality of frogs through the poetry of Mei Mei Berssenbrugge. In her poem “DJ Frogs” there are images that intertwine pulse - both absent and present - high-frequency animal sounds, the presence of night and modes of listening.

Spaces fuse; skin takes on crickets, treefrogs; owls take on
poly-rhythms, magic and its overlaps.

I like listening to night creatures and trying to bring elements
into a composition in which any sound can be used by
the breakbeat for any thing.³⁷

³⁵ “Whites only treat us as ignorant because we are different. But their thought is short and obscure; it cannot go far and elevate itself, because they want to ignore death (...) Whites do not dream far like we do. They sleep a lot, but they only dream about themselves.”

In David Kopenawa & Bruce Albert. *Falling sky*. (Belknap Press, 2013). Page. 411-412.

³⁶ I recognize in these lines of thought certain echoes that I feel obliged to mention: firstly the first fragment, “clearing”, from the book *Claros del bosque* of Marina Zambrano, which I have read an excerpt of in Danish but not found in English translation, and secondly Phillipe Descola’s description of animism in *Beyond Nature and Culture*, according to which exterior qualities (bodies) are discontinuous but their interior (mind, soul) is similar or continuous. This applies in particular to different species, but I’m applying the idea to in-organic materials in this case.

³⁷ Mei Mei Berssenbrugge. *Hello, the Roses*. (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 2013)

Frogs and toads are exceptionally musical and have been researched extensively.³⁸ Chorusing frogs can achieve synchronicity - a rhythmic repetition of signals that adhere to a common beat - that is otherwise rare in nature.³⁹ Their signal calls are endlessly varied between species and their antiphony of calling and responding is texturally rich and musical.⁴⁰

I became interested in the expanding vocal sac. I was fascinated with the fact that the frog inflates a part of itself in order to be heard (the vocal sac act as a resonance chamber that makes the call louder) and that the whole body vibrates with expanding potential. I was fascinated with the visible enhancement of breath, and the state of the body when the sound call is produced, which seems to be in complete motoric ecstasy.

I recreated a vocal sac in the most rudimentary manner using a plastic bag and a tube. An elastic band made the bag contract again.



(See [video example 15](#))

³⁸ "The striking vocalizations of frogs and toads have also been termed 'songs' (Frings and Frings 1977: 179), often in reference to the existence of duetting throughout some nineteen genera, or more complex chorusing behavior, the biological function of which has hitherto eluded all investigators".

Thomas A. Sebeok, "Prefigurations of Art" in *Readings in Zoosemantics*, ed. Timo Maran, Dario Martinelli, Aleksei Turovski (Berlin, Germany: Mouton de Gruyter, 2012)

³⁹ Björn Merker, "Synchronous Chorusing and Human Origins" in *The Origins of Music*, ed. Nils L. Wallin, Björn Merker and Steven Brown (London, England: MIT Press, 2014).

⁴⁰ There are many websites and recordings dedicated to frog calls. See for instance: <https://folkways.si.edu/sounds-of-north-american-frogs/science-nature/album/smithsonian>

It's not a good idea to re-inhale the carbon dioxide the lungs have exhaled so an additional tube was needed to output air. But one tube leads to another, at least at that point in March 2021, and the contours of an instrumental paradigm showed itself already at this early stage, one similar to a bagpipe system. I made an expanding vocal-sac-plastic-bag-thing with one inlet to breathe in through, and two outlets that could let out air as well as direct the air pressure further on into a sounding object. In the picture below, I have attached a whistle to one tube. I controlled the air current by closing the holes with my fingers.



From this moment, I went through experiment after experiment without arriving anywhere. The expanding plastic bag had potential I felt but every extension turned into something too obvious or mundane. Perhaps the problem resided in the fact that the frog was already a complete musician. I had nothing to add, nothing to open up, no ambiguous space to infiltrate. I produced a number of dissociations and additions, but could not escape the feeling that I was desperately trying to hide my own desperation. I tried to work from a precise mimetic modeling of the frog's performative posture, when it calls out for a mate. Nothing really emerged that could lift the situation away from parody.



(See [video example 16](#))

I attempted a hybrid version, where the expanding vocal sac was connected to a flute mechanism that I had built from slide whistles. The slides of the whistles were sewn onto a small piece of bicycle hose, which allowed me to control them without holding the flute. In the end, this was bird territory, not frog territory. And while the margins of species were not necessarily important to delineate, I could not find any adequate justification for the plastic bag as an intermediary between my breath and the slide whistles. It had a certain visual aspect but very much subdued to a container of air through which one sees the mechanism of air flow. Not a breathing thing in itself, not a connection that enabled connectivity; just a waiting station. Why substitute my own lungs for a plastic bag in that case?



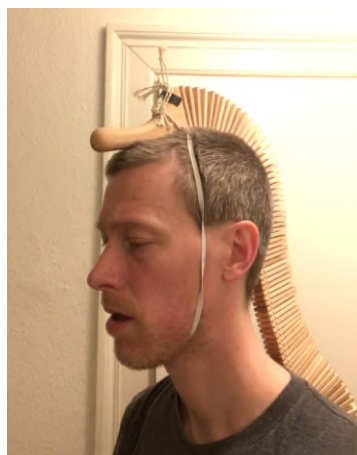
(See [video examples 17 & 18](#))

I tried to add more elements to the body. I attached a Kokiriko to my head, a Japanese percussion instrument, to be able to play with a short shivering gesture. I added Gaffer tape under my feet, and a rattle (of shells) to my thigh to achieve variants of the same effect. But the mechanics of every part spoke a poor language, isolated in themselves, and unable to form a bond. Perhaps this was because of my increasing lack of patience, my insistence that they had to perform a function. I began to loathe the fact that I was sitting on a chair, this indication of rest, tranquility and pure mental concentration. It made me into a stiff shape, an h, I wanted to be an O, a bubble, a balloon!

I considered adding more performers, more interaction, more interplay, but the frog was a static state for me more than anything else: an intensity that suddenly, instantaneously, burst into a suspended calling, audible across a vast distance but unanswered. The absence of the other, the

one called for, seemed crucial to me. The frog was still, it was stationary, but it was shaking on the inside with anticipation. Its only exterior element was its vocal sac; everything had to be externalized through the vocal sac. The frog was pulsation, it was a pulsating state, not explicit rhythm but entirely rhythmic. I wanted the frog to be a mode of resistance, a resistance to the idea that rhythm is only rhythm when dominated by strict regulation, which Curt Sachs explicitly writes: “All higher creatures express emotion by motion. But man alone, apparently, is able to regulate and co-ordinate his emotional movements; man alone is gifted with conscious rhythm”.⁴¹ I wanted the frog to encircle a rhythm, not to play rhythmically. I wanted rhythm to become “a space around an expected beat”, as the fifth verse in DJ Frogs of Berssenbrugge portrays:

Where rhythm should be, there's space around an expected beat I
don't hear; my pulse falls through subtracted space.
It's not a communication breakdown or break in feeling, it's
abstract.



These were the days of Covid-19 lockdown. I was working in the bedroom, working and sleeping with this plastic bag I so wanted to breathe music into. It was not meant to be.

⁴¹ Curt Sachs, *The history of musical instruments*. (Dover Publications, 2012) P. 25.

Shaking, shivering, shuddering, tremoring, clicking

During 2020-2021, a shivering of the body infiltrated all my thoughts. It is a body state familiar to most warm-blooded animals in relation to cold, fever, fear and excitement. It is tremendously expressive as a form of communication; a display of an internal intensity, of uncontrollability, of longing, of a machine inside that starts up to keep alive. None of my attempts to incorporate such a state materialized, which is likely the single most radical shortcoming of my attempts.

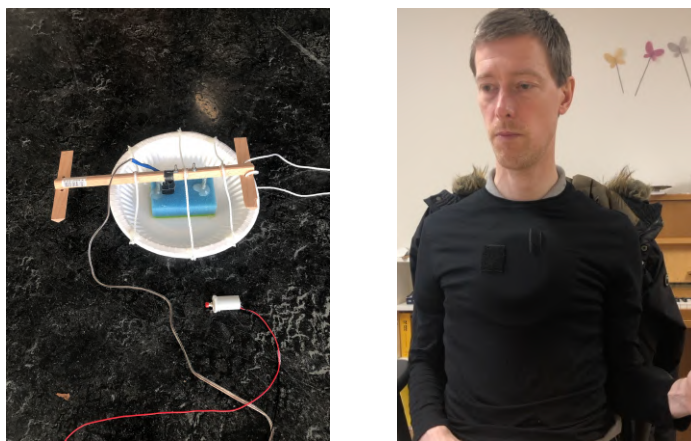
In *Animalia I*, we pulled a string that shook a signal whistle placed on our chest. It was not ideal, we knew that, but I could not give up on the idea so we performed an inadequate compromise.

(See [video example 19](#))

My pigeon endeavors were partly a response to reading a short story by Carol Emshwiller entitled “Coo people”, in which a person (non-binary?) is part of a secret group of people who coo and start to elevate from the ground when they get aroused. This image reminded me of pigeons. In order to coo we simply put our hand under our shirts and pounded our chest lightly. The simplicity was appealing, but perhaps also too normalized in a “body percussion” sense.

(See [video example 20](#) and [score example 16](#))

On various occasions I tried to make a clicking kind of body, inspired by crickets and cicadas. I worked primarily with a solenoid, a linear actuator, placing it in my mouth and on my chest. Towards the end of 2021 I made a “chest clicker” to try it out in workshop with Inga and Jennifer. It was meant to be placed under a tight shirt and when one retracted the shoulders the shirt would push on the membrane and alter the sound of the solenoid. Again, this did not materialize. I felt that technology involving electric circuitry (I utilized a 555 timer to make the solenoid click very fast) was not in accord with my intentions. I was interested in appendages to the body, but not in independently moving ones. I was interested in making visible how movement originated. The tiny solenoid machine was in a world of its one.



(See [video example 21](#))

Building 5

“Music, Myth and Nature, or The Dolphins of Arion”⁴² by Francois Bernard Mâche greatly contributed to the founding of zoomusicology as a research field. It proposed that the origin of music was embedded in the interconnectedness of the cries and calls that many animal species, human and non-human, heard from one other and imitated to various ends. Hunters, for instance, would have imitated the voice of an animal either as a means to attract prey or to scare away predators. Mâche speculated that magical imitation eventually diverged into the directions of play and rite, thereby becoming self-contained styles and genres of their own. At a certain point the resonant properties of tools made of stone, string and wood must have grown into the life-world of pre-historic man as a means of replicating sonic properties.

Mâche cites many examples from the growing number of ethnomusicological field recordings that show imitations of animal calls alongside music played on rudimentary instruments, if any instrument can be called such. I very much like the idea that there has been a prolonged meeting point in history between the voices of a multitude of living voices, a meeting point which extends into our own era, and furthermore that musical instruments grew out of this entanglement. In a sense, my instrumental conceptions are attempts at working from this entanglement.

In “Prefigurations of art”, Thomas Sebeok writes:

It is, in fact, highly productive to compare biological constructs with cultural ones if only to ascertain whether seemingly similar signifiers trigger comparable interpretants, in the sense that the wing of an insect (developed from an epidermal fold), the wing of a bird (developed from a vertebrate extremity), and the wing of an airplane (manufactured, say, of metal) are all shaped in response to the universal laws of aerodynamics.⁴³

If musical instruments are treated primarily as cultural constructs, as references to themselves in history, I believe that they are reduced. I find it inspiring to attempt to reconnect them with living organisms as well as dead ones, with the bones of dead animals as well as the living, with the expressive movement of the primal scream of all creatures.⁴⁴

⁴² Francois-Bernard Mâche, *Music, Myth and Nature, or The Dolphins of Arion* (Chur, Switzerland: Harwood-Academic, 1993)

⁴³ Thomas A. Sebeok, “Prefigurations of Art” in *Readings in Zoosemiotics*, ed. Timo Maran, Dario Martinelli, Aleksei Turovski (Berlin, Germany: Mouton de Gruyter, 2012)

⁴⁴ The earliest known instrument is the Djive Babe flute fragment, found in Slovakia in 1995. It is, at present, believed to be 50.000-60.0000 years old, which means that its makers were probably Neanderthals. There has been considerable debate as to whether it is in fact a flute, or just a bone that was chewed on and miraculously pierced at exactly the places that would enable parts of a diatonic scale. I find its ambiguity to be its most interesting trait. See Ivan Turk. “New evidence on the Beginnings of Music” in *The Origins of Music*.

It is a poetics of the primitive that I have attempted to live out in my building processes. The convergence of instrument and body was one that I had to exhibit by constructing it in order to make the traces of both visible. I call a musical body primitive, when it needs to make a great effort to produce a musical gesture, an effort that requires the involvement of most of, if not the entire body, as opposed to a modern musician who controls an instrument with the tips of her fingers. The primitive body, my musical body, is greatly constrained; it cannot produce an abundance of melodies and harmonies, it cannot move at liberty and it has no option of following a score on a music stand. Its proximity to the artefacts it utilizes is therefore very close. It wears its instrument, it does not hold it. It follows the capacity of its instrument, and does not control it. A poetics of the primitive tries to not extend man but to make man worldlier. The primitive instrument attempts to reduce the musician through its entanglement with her - strapped onto her eyes, her mouth, her arms - to invoke a music that is connected to the rudiments of existence. An existence that is shared by all the other creatures.



Hieronimus Bosch, detail from A garden of earthly delights (between 1490-1510).

Composing

In this chapter I attempt to gather all of the elements that made up my compositional process in the past three years and write about them as if they move closer and closer to one other, like concentric circles that are compressed inwards. These elements include reflections on memory, figures of form, self-erasure and anonymity, movement and sound, micro investigations, and the subtle parallels between myself and the life-world of specific animals.⁴⁵ In attempting to draw these elements in toward each other, I am pursuing a kaleidoscopic way of writing through three circles of reflections, one for each year of research. It is not my intention to perplex the reader; I am writing as perplexed. This state has persisted ever since non-human creatures has entered my musical discourse. I am furthermore consciously replacing an *I* with a *we* towards the end. What began as solitary composing in 2019, became more collaborative and inclusive in 2022.

Circle one (2020)

Memory

Researchers of animal communication often divide vocal repertoire into two categories: innate and learned. Since there are said to only be a few examples of learned vocal repertoire, most animal species are portrayed to lack the one ingredient argued as essential for musical creation: the ability to invent acoustic novelty.⁴⁶

My inspiration however, stems mainly from thinking about the innate, regardless of the anachronistic fact that I create to make novelty. The innate as that which is inside of us that we do automatically, and cannot override; the machinic within, to evoke a Cartesian image. I'm interested in musical memory, in the sense that there are ways of hearing beyond our control because it follows that there are figures in our musical imagery beyond our control. Perhaps there is a way to study our own innateness in a way that overcomes the division between learned and un-learned music.

⁴⁵ All my reflections on musical memory has been informed by one single book: "Music and Memory: An Introduction" by Bob Snyder. I will therefore not be paraphrasing it as I write.

⁴⁶ "Note that the only animal taxa for which we know for sure that vocal learning shapes the development of naturally occurring vocal behavior are birds and cetaceans. With the possible exception of bats (Boughman 1998), other animals, including nonhuman primates, have vocal repertoires that are innate", in Peter Marler, "Origins of Music and Speech: Insights from the animals" in *The Origins of Music*.

I personally find the distinction between innate and learned behavior meaningless. One would not ask of a human infant that it is conscious of all its actions, and the signs that it utters will resonate as meaningful on some level, including its melodious babbling. I do not see why non-humans would be scrutinized differently.

Micro investigation – Laysan Albatrosses

I see the mating dance of the Laysan Albatross as being circular in nature and based on a wonderful play with gravity. The two albatrosses, one by one or together, stretch their neck intensely into the air, as if elevated for a short instant in suspense, after which an outburst of beak actions ensues that seem to release the energy that has built up, only to repeat the cycle in varied forms. And the interrelated actions of clamping the beaks together, like swordsmen, does not seem to be enough to release all of the energy built up during elevation; a rapid tremolo of each albatross beak is sometimes needed to release the remaining energy at different points, much like an intense shivering of warm-blooded animals after experiencing fear - an expending of energy in order to maintain homeostasis.

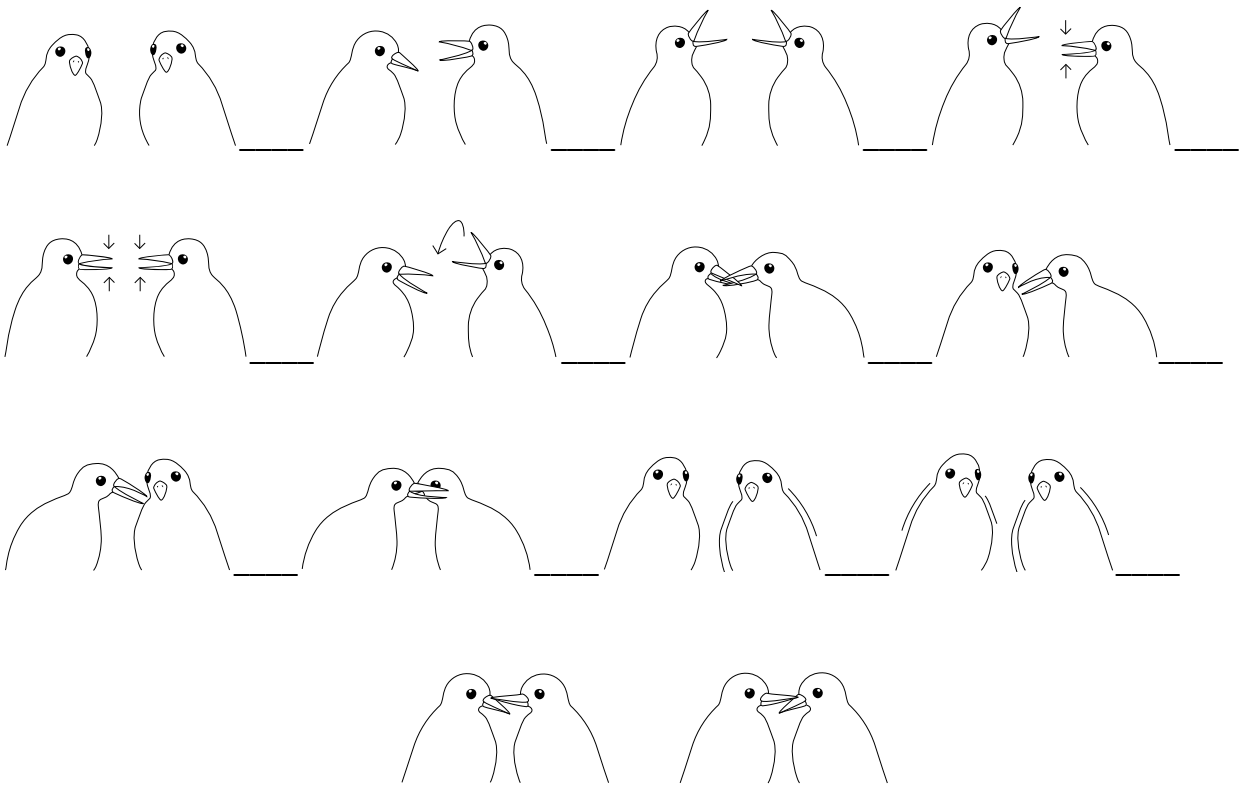
Form – Animalia I (ver. 1)

There were many elements in the first version of *Animalia I*: virtuosic multifaceted beaks - resonant objects (bells, carboard) - signal whistles - circular head movements stemming from the Laysan Albatross - shivering/pulsating bird hearts - a stiff, blank stare. After building these components from different sources of inspiration, I realized that I had not spent much time imagining them together, as moving parts of a single body. At that time in late 2019, it was symptomatic that I would carve out instrumental elements from an overall vision, almost as in an archeologic excavation, and at the very end compose in great haste. It's difficult to alleviate oneself from such work routines once they become habit; they feel natural because they are familiar, they feel productive because one produces.

I tend to look back on *Animalia I* (ver. 1) as an attempt to grapple with a catalogue of ideas. I formulated one question that tried to mediate between them all: How to make a music that shifts between different states of intensity in an instant without any transition? This question seemed to endorse a defining characteristic of my fascination with birds: they move from stillness to flight to courtship and back to stillness at a heart rate four times faster than our own; imperceptibly, it would seem.

I drew the different states and arranged them in progressing order as a narrative: from purely gestural towards ever more intense interaction, moving ever closer to the body of the other (see below). I wanted the piece to end with a frozen shivering state and a beak against beak caressing, but I did not manage to work out the shivering to a satisfactory degree, as mentioned in the previous chapter.

(See [video example 9](#) and [score example 1](#))



Movement and sound (instruments)

Man instrumentalizes; I see no point in refuting that fact in my work. But I'm trying to find its point of departure and to stay in the moment when the instrument grows out of a limb. The degree to which it reaches a level of nuance, and the amount of control a musician has over its resonant properties are the essential aspects of negotiation. Some control is needed, some nuance is desirable, but technological beings, as I have tried to describe in the previous chapter, take on different forms: they can be a means to an end, and their production arrangements can reflect that in the way they are built, or they can be beings in themselves. As mentioned in chapter 1, Bruno Latour uses the word "ecologize" as an alternative to "modernize" and that resonates with me.⁴⁷ I am attempting to seek a particular zone where no actors are in service of a distinct purpose, even though they negotiate the results of their interactions and joint movements.

The instrument represents the greatest contradiction of this research. It is at once its problem and its only solution. The more that I refine body part artefacts, the more they point towards their own instrumental refinement. The more virtuosity they enable, the less animalistic they appear to me. The more they are external appendages, the less they appear to be outgrowths

⁴⁷ Bruno Latour, "To modernize or to ecologize? That's the question".

from within. The more sounding variety they can make, the more I am pulled towards classical instrumental composition. But if I am unable to make any kind of rhythmic gesture, if there is no sense of an instrumental resonance in the way that two bodies touch one other, I lose sight of divisional time, of antiphonal intentionality, of an energy that points towards the musical domain.

The modes of touching in *Animalia I* (ver. 1) is telling; at (almost) no point did we touch one another without the intention of augmenting sound. At no point did I attempt to investigate touch as such, the moment of connection, or the way towards and back from that moment. At no point did I allow for reactions to being touched; the only mode of response was a repetition of gesture.

The whole point of listening to the music in an animal body is to achieve a distancing from some the norms I have had as a composer; to put myself in exactly the place where music cannot be conceived the way it used to, where I am forced to follow my models of inspiration into uncharted territory rather than to extract a select essence from them. The instrument has been my tool of domination, composition has been synonymous with an extension of instrumentalization; I have made everything from fluorescent lights to ballpoint pens into sounding objects. Take the instrumentalized object out of my creative process and I am crippled. Furthermore, I refuse to work solely with vocal expression, there is no greater signifier of the human performer than the sound of her voice.

If somebody were to ask me; “are you attempting to make music with animalistic body appendages, or are you attempting to make animalistic bodies (or parts of bodies) with musical references?”, I would answer “neither”. The potential of the animal body, for me, is its innate musicality that does not become music in any strict definition of the term; it only points towards a musical domain, it does not necessarily inhabit it. As soon as there is a sense of an instrumental gesture it is as if the musical territory vanishes and objectified music takes its place. There has to be a way to turn these notions on their head, and achieve some kind of co-existence. Can I reduce the instrument to its most rudimentary mode while avoiding the simplistic and mundane?

Memory

We encode sound mnemonically in ways that are pre-learned and pre-musical. Our sounding impressions are formed by an automatic interpretation of electrochemical impulses reaching 30,000 auditory hair cells in each ear. It is through metaphors of space that we attempt to move closer to these impressions in language, often in ways that are unrelated to the nature of sound itself.

On the echo level of memory (our “here and now”), we address tones (pitch) as physical positions: high and low.

On the level of short-term memory, we address sequences of events through movement allegory: rising or falling, faster or slower.

On the long-term formal level, we address spans of time in ways reminiscent of locations in a landscape; beginnings, endings, bridges and climaxes.

Sound events are mental images of our surroundings that are not directly visual but akin to a form of visuality that we do not see but rather “perceive” innately. Sensing sound as images exists before language. “Musical sense” is virtually impossible to fully capture in language.

Along with our wholly new and wholly distinct system of true language, the verbal code, we retain an older system that, for want of a better name is frequently, contrastively, and hence negatively designated as a human manifestation of a cross-specific a verbal code.⁴⁸

Form - *Animalia I* (ver. 2)

The premiere of *Animalia I* (ver. 1) turned out to be a chaotic affair. Several bells fell off during performance, which caused us at times to improvise. To my surprise, this gave the performance a sympathetic charm. In spite of several fixing operations, where Jennifer Torrence excelled in maintaining the performative presence, the insistence on carrying the work through to its ends no matter what was essentially what came to define it.

In the ensuing months, I made a revision where moments of unpredictability were written into the score, with text instructions to guide the performers in their momentary decision-making. We never performed this version however. It felt, to me, as if I used the excitement of instability as a way to hide the fundamental shortcomings of the piece.

(See [score example 2](#))

Micro investigation - beaver moaning⁴⁹

Moaning is wonderful. The structure of the sound has three components: A short pre-sounding hesitant guttural vibration from deep down in the throat region, a short-lived *ooo - aaa - uuuu* sound with a singing quality, and a breaking off on a *mmm* or *www* syllable. It's a pre-singing, a pre-lingual, a post-groan, a pre-roar, a post-grunt; it sounds familiar no matter which non-human creature is uttering it.

Beaver vocal communication sounds like a vocabulary made up of grunting, grumbling and other moaning type of sounds. It has a distinct calling-out gesture and reminds me of the sound

⁴⁸ Thomas A. Sebeok, “Precognitions of Art” in “Readings in Zoosemiotics”.

⁴⁹ Many examples of beaver moaning can be found online, I cite a few that was important to me:

<https://musicofnature.com/beaver-moanings/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r8SSsG9bl38>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mIFVUDOrYbk>

of human infants (when they are calm). I felt it was interesting to work with something akin to the moaning of beavers as a way to circumvent song in vocal expression. It did become part of the investigations that I undertook together with Jennifer and Inga. We tried to find tiny nuances within moans of roughly half a second. Then I abandoned it. Probably because of the same thing that attracted me: its familiarity.

(See [video example 22](#))

Micro tribute:

I have come across two instances of music with human moaning that have made a lasting impression on me. The first was at a funeral ceremony in South Korea where a shaman was crying-singing with the family members. The second are two field recordings from Papua New Guinea, recorded in 1977, which can be found in the accompanying audio CD of the 9th volume of Garlands Encyclopedia of World Music (track 25-26).

Movement & sound (movement)

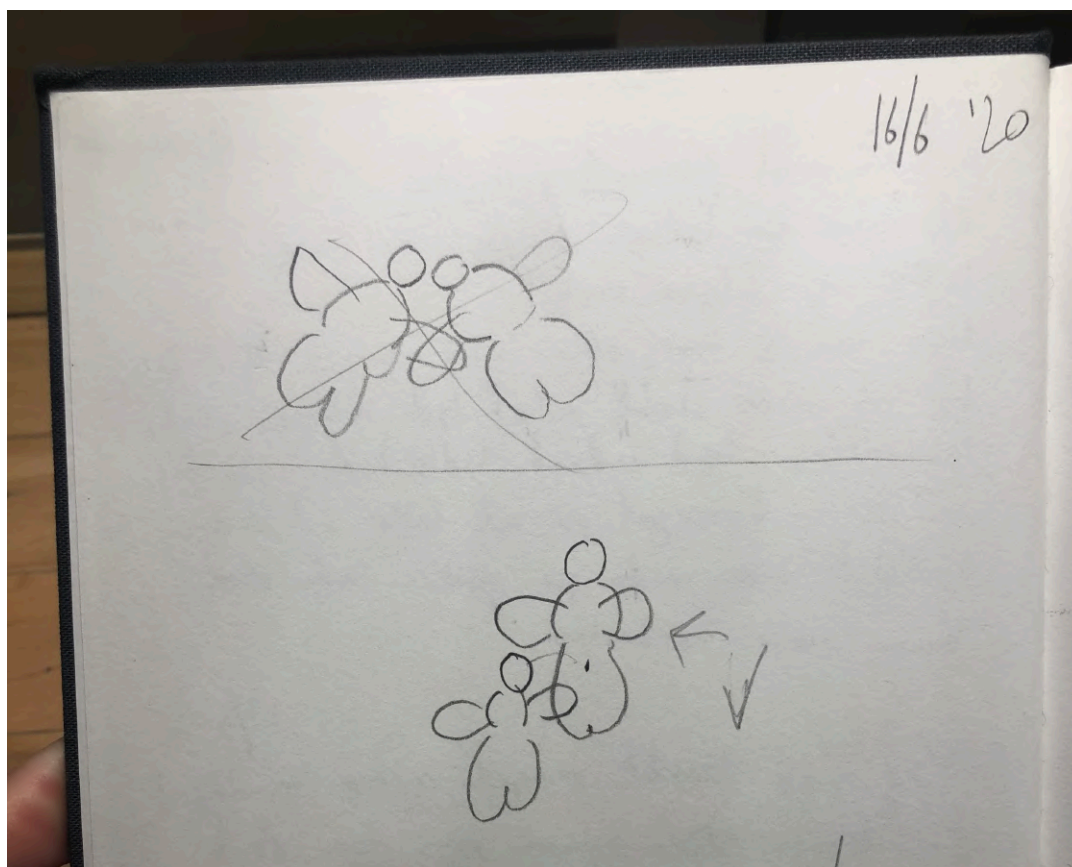
In fishes, for instance, a very good indication of its internal condition is given by the way the fish moves about in the tank. Madly brushing along the sides of the tank and swimming up and down in a corner are unmistakable signs of discomfort. A fish that is used to swimming around its tank, just as a bird knows its aviary, never touches the boundaries of its living space but shows by its elegant sweeping movements its awareness of those limits.⁵⁰

My performing body seem to be restricted and confined. It never initiates movement beyond a fixed borderline, which is demarcated primarily by the posture it is placed in, and/or the limited nature of its motions. I would not describe the butterflies in *Animalia II* as choreographed, neither would I describe them as strictly musical; movement and sound are thought in relation to their vanishing points, the boundaries of their living spaces, and the way they complement, even enable, one another. Sound without physical movement is unthinkable in this project but very tiny movements are also problematic if they don't enable sound to some extent; they become poor and un-relational. There has to be a balancing act at work where movement constantly needs to be potentially sounding, and sound constantly needs to potentially disappear into the body.

The gestures that I have developed seem, to a large extent, simple and separate from each other. By simple, I mean that the trajectory of a single movement is only two-fold; it moves outward from a starting point and it moves back to that starting point, almost without any enriching developmental procedures. There are of course other details; a butterfly wing in

⁵⁰ Heini Hediger, "The Animal's Expression" in *The Origins of Music*.

Animalia II moves out and pulls back in, but it also it scrapes the floor when the butterflies lie on their side and it also speeds up to make the whole upper body lift as if flying. But compound motion at large, where several things happen at once, would seem to be something I try to avoid. Within a single posture, movements stand alongside each other as points on a line. It is almost melodic in that sense; a chain of sounding and visual elements that form sentences. The way a human body touches itself in everyday life is very close to gestures that are instrumental. How the hand touches the face or the upper body, how it strokes the arm or scratches the neck, how the mouth opens and closes, how the upper eyelid hits the lower eyelid. I am trying to write preinstrumental gestures where bodies touch themselves and each other, and sound is only one possible by-product. I'm trying to reduce the forcing audible components one often sees in genres such as "body percussion", those for example of hitting the body or stamping the floor, in order to open up an affectionate alternative; touching as an articulation of the rhythm and movement of reaching out, as much as an articulation of the potential instrumental sound quality. Furthermore, I'm trying to work with the physical limits of the preinstrumental gesture, to see how long a sustained breath can hold, how long performers can move in figure eight's in a kneeling position, how long one can blink rapidly, in order to make rhythm depend not on confined metric patterns but on a "sensing oneself". In other words, I'm trying to use muscular exhaustion to build phrases, letting local muscles run out of steam and having to recuperate in rest, as curves of tension-release that are not specified in exact duration but in what the body can do at a particular moment.



Memory

Close proximities within our daily perceptions are generalized into image-schemes, which enable us to remember specificities in a generalized framework. We are likely to most vividly remember what fails to fit into our generalization schemes but only until novelty has been assimilated into our schemes of reference. Among the rudimentary sensations that are grouped into mental image-schemes are: up and down, centrality/spaciousness, one event being causally connected to another, movement towards or away from something (linearity). These basic categories of movement and spaciousness are those that connect my (performative) body to an imagined sound.

Up & down: Gravity is ingrained in our listening, many parameters are conceived as moving up and down, such as pitch and melodic contour, rhythmic density, dynamic intensity, etc. The tone of somebody's voice is said to raise or lower, the sudden disappearance of a music is like a fall over a cliff. A sense of initializing an upwards or downwards impulse and finding ways to suspend it, slow it down or speed it up, is what connects my image of a whole animalistic body to how that body is musical.

Centrality/Spaciousness: Central locations are pitches that are repeated or recognizably returned to, such as the down-beat of a bar, a climax or a sudden shift. All of these become central through repetition, or in the way that they stand out from the norm. Repetition in *Animalia I-IV* is my strategy for achieving centrality.

Movement: In music, a unified sense of 'it' arises when we have the sensation that 'it' moves, which technically comes about when small musical events that look alike (from beat to beat within a bar for instance) are conjoined in our mind as a metaphorical idea of 'a thing that moves'. The memory of a voice belonging to a person whom we know well, or knew well, is only to a small extent recollected from its actual sound quality. Rather, we recognize a voice firstly in the way that it moves, its curves of intonation, its prolongations and pauses, etc., and secondly through a visualization of the one that possesses it in a particular context.⁵¹ When I recall the voice of my grandad, the person introducing me to modern music, I invariably see him in his armchair, placing his right hand over his eyebrows while listening to a gramophone. There is no voice of my grandad in my mind without the imagined action of his hand moving from his eyebrow to motions in the air, almost as a caressing appraisal of what he has just heard.⁵²

Image schematics are the metaphors through which we hear music and they are at the same time a space of common movement attributes among all living creatures. That is why the wings

⁵¹ For instance, it's nearly impossible to hear the sound of an instrument in one's inner ear without forming some visual image of it.

⁵² See Rolf Inge Godøy and Harald Jørgensen, *Musical Imagery* (Routledge, 2012), in particular chapter 7 by Mark Reybrouck; "Musical Imagery between Processing and Ideomotor Simulation".

of butterflies and the nervous flickering of human eyelids form an alliance in my mind in such a way that an emphatic kinship arises: when the butterfly soars, it activates a resonance in my eyelids; they are extended out from themselves into something more alive and present. The presence of the butterfly imprints itself in my physicality and conversely the butterfly wings seem to become eyes in themselves that blink through the air.

Micro investigation - Cicadas and me

How does the receiving animal successively decode and interpret the incoming message? What is its sensory capacity like, what are its limitations? Cicadas are interesting in this respect. While calling to the female, the male abruptly turns deaf to its own raucous song; the female, however, perceives pulses (which, to us, sound like a mere rattle) from the time pattern of which she is able to sort out her species and fly to the correct type of male.⁵³

Cicadas sing. Their song is at the intersection between rapid pulsation and sound; their phrases can be long and suspended, or short and rhythmic. Sometimes, one would think one hears a bird singing⁵⁴, sometimes the sound would seem like a very hoarse toad⁵⁵, sometimes it's as if somebody is playing a distant flute⁵⁶. I am fascinated with animals that insistently call out over a distance with tremendous intensity; the musical cry comes to represent everything; calling for each other, connection, life. I am particularly fascinated with the intense body state in the moment of calling; the vibrational shaking seems ecstatic to me. At the same time, there is something closed and private about the song of the cicada, it feels wrong to me to disturb them in their tremendous urgency, and to include myself in their search for each other. It is my intuition that the "calling out" is a moment I would seek to create over a musical span of time as a climactic moment, but I don't know if I dare to let such calling be the music in its entirety. It is as if I still need to build up a sense of music, before my actual musical vision can step onto the scene; a vision which has more to do with a state of the body than with sound.

Many animals feel rhythm quite differently than humans do. Songbirds can hear extremely fast rhythms that are indistinguishable to us. Fin whales can sing one subsonic whoop every few minutes in exact regularity and feel that as a steady beat. But 17-year cicadas can feel 17 years of silence with astounding accuracy and manage to know just when to come in and start making sound. On the day when the soil reaches 64

⁵³ Sebeok, Thomas A.. "Talking with Animals: Zoosemiotics Explained. From "Reading in Zoosemiotics".

⁵⁴ Listen for instance, to the Meimuna Opalifera species, recorded in Japan:
<https://freesound.org/people/kabit/sounds/80081/>

⁵⁵ As heard among the Psaltoda Moerens species from eastern Australia, roughly 10 second into this recording:
http://www.insectsingers.com/world_examples/11.AU.NS.BUG.T08.Psaltoda_moerens_whole_song_phrase.mp3

⁵⁶ As in the singing of the Quesada Gigas species:
http://www.insectsingers.com/world_examples/1049_mixed_gigas_new.mp3

degrees about a foot below ground, it's as if a conductor is raising the baton to signal that the concert is about to begin. Then Cicadas step onto the stage and prepare to sing.⁵⁷

Form – *Animalia IIIa* (ver. 1)

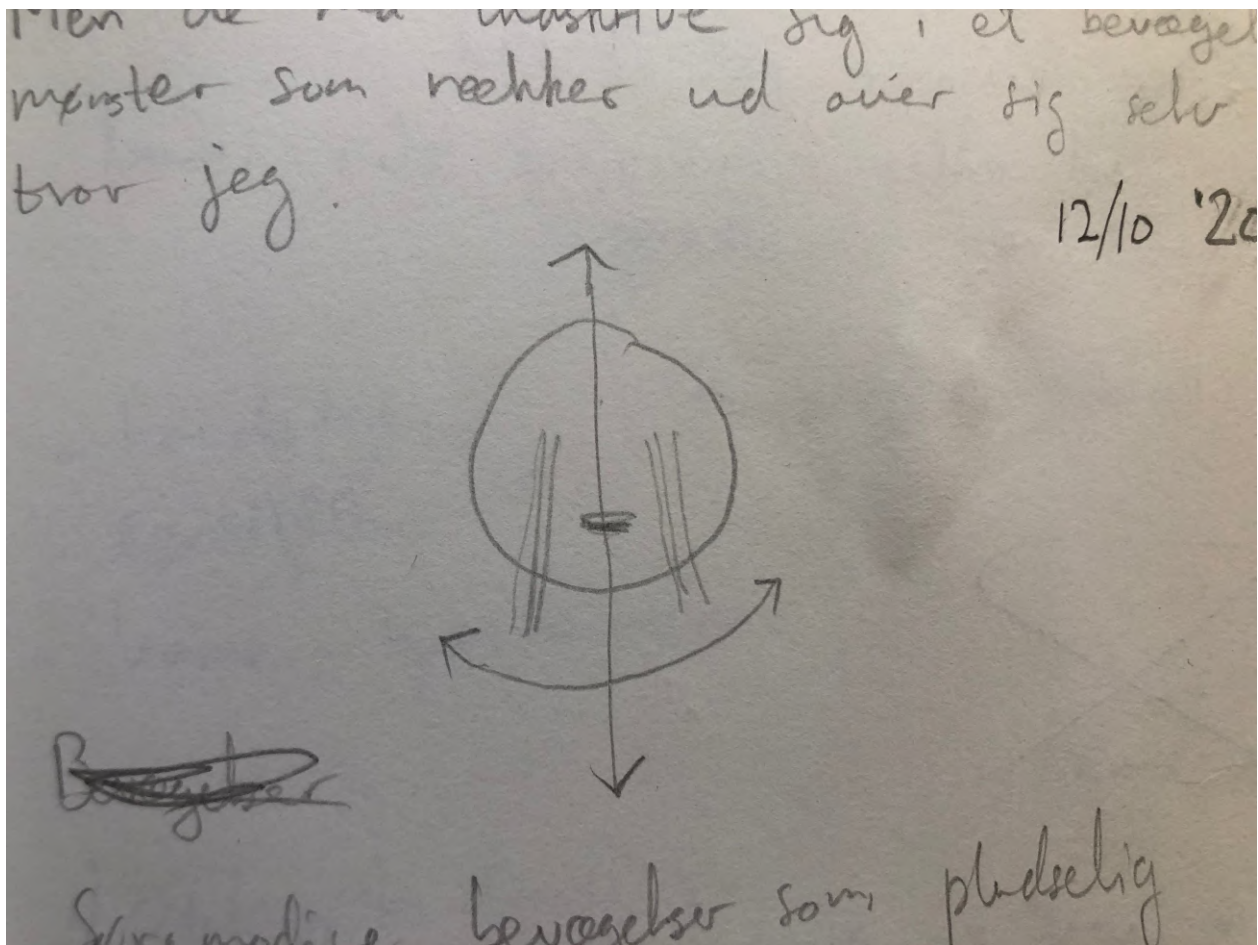
I wanted to bring more traces of an elephant into *Animalia III*, besides its eyelids: its ears, its way of walking, its trunk, its vocal calls of which there is a wide range, and its seismic communication in the sub-audible range of the human ear.⁵⁸ I began working with the trunk and the familiar image of its side-to-side movement, but then I read that elephants sometimes swing their trunk side to side in captivity, out of frustration, and I was disgusted with myself that I had considered working with such a sign of freedom deprivation. I abandoned all ideas relating to the elephant body, and worked solely with its eyelids.

In the first version of *Animalia IIIa*, I treated the blinking of the eyes primarily as a concrete sounding element. Blinking became a stable stream of rhythmic sounding figures, complemented by a humming of the same pitch as the bells on the cheeks, and contrasted with a vertical movement along the side of the bells, which was vocalized with a soft *sss*. The work is therefore largely combinatorial; the three elements shuffle around and they are varied but never transformed. The music is an atmosphere of three tiny voices that sing together but not on top of one another.

As with *Animalia I* and *II* in their first versions, I was unsatisfied with *Animalia III* (ver. 1). I had reduced a body part that genuinely spoke to me in its relation to the trace of an animal body, to an instrument that seemed enslaved to standardized musical connotations: stable rhythmic figures, stable pitch content, and variation of material for the sake of variety. I had employed variation not to indicate a shift in some interior state of the eyelids, I had not opened them up towards more than serving a musical functional purpose.

⁵⁷ David Rothenberg, "The sound of cicadas is music if you take the time to listen", New York times, May 8, 2021: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/05/08/opinion/cicada-2021-sound.html>

⁵⁸ See <https://www.elephantvoices.org/elephant-communication.html>.



(See [video example 11](#) and [score example 8](#))

Movement and Sound (rhythm)

Rhythm is the space in which sound and movement co-exist. Metric entrainment, to follow a common pulse in our surroundings, is a highly practiced craft among musicians and it is closely related to everyday motor behaviors such as walking. Being sensitive to rhythmic components however, such as duration, weight (accent) and speed is not necessarily related to metrical division, but certainly to movement. As Justin London writes: “... rhythm signifies movement, but musical tones do not move. Rather, we hear a kind of virtual motion in a virtual, acousmatic space”.⁵⁹ It is a challenge for me to write music that is, in some sense, rhythmic, without being overly impersonated with regular strong-weak beat patterns. I do love music that entrains the body. I have always been more rhythmically inclined than sonically. It provides, as I see it, a boundary one can move around, into or away from. But as metric music invokes a strong sense of the human body, or a mechanized body for that matter, rather than, say, the

⁵⁹ Justin London, *Hearing in Time* (New York: Oxford University Press. 2012).

flight of a butterfly, I feel a need to diverge from downbeats and upbeats and move towards a more fluid type of rhythm.

Modern innovations of rhythmic textures are manifold. Györgi Ligeti abandoned all sense of weight difference and accentual pattern in the 1970's (such as in the works *Atmosphere* and *Lontano*). Stravinsky wrote music in constant metric flux, upholding downbeats and upbeats but not appeasing them in regularity. Conlon Nancarrow took polytemporal layers to levels of complexity beyond the grasp of immediate perception.

What I am interested in is fragile rhythm: a sense of regularity with an unnerving unattainability. I am trying to situate myself, the performer, in a position where it becomes very difficult to be precise and therefore precision acts as an absent present. I am trying to make regularity in itself a utopic place, one that is approximated rather than entered, by asking the most delicate body parts to move strictly in time. In that way, rhythm becomes a matter of seeking out how a body can be rhythmic under certain conditions; it becomes a consequence of being situated in a novel posture, and relating to that posture through familiar notions of regular motor-impulsive properties.

The first version of *Animalia II* exhibits how I am struggling with this aspect (perhaps it is just a matter of refusing to abandon what I know well). It rests entirely on rhythmic figures in a metrical sense. Motion is strictly notated to adhere to a common pulse. Movement and sound intensify in speed and slow down into near stillness, but the basic pulse never leaves the body. I have asked myself, as was indicated in chapter one, how rhythm can be thought of as a way to interact precisely, rather than to coordinate strictly. It is as much a pragmatic question as an aesthetic one; synchronized beats enable coordination for both musicians and audience. Perhaps a way forward can be found in the way that two performers interlace their actions in such a way that they appeared glued to each other, without being glued to a common time.

Micro investigation – no more than two

There will likely not be any *Animalia* pieces for more than two performers. Three turns into a group, more than three turns into soundscape, environment, multilayered texture, everything that makes music into a purely sounding experience. The singular animal body is my fascination, its entirety and complete physical intensity.

Two is interesting for me when they seek to become one, conjoined in some way, connected, attached to one another, or at least moving closer towards such states.

Vocal duetting is rare amongst non-human creatures, but the ones that do occur are wonderful. The Pied Butcherbird is one example.⁶⁰ The duetting of bonding Gibbons is another.⁶¹ It is, in my opinion, a pity that the duet singing of primates is often researched in connection with the question of the origin of music. Origins are almost always concerned with how man became human, how we superseded our ancestors. In this way we listen to the gibbon duet in order to hear traces of ourselves first and foremost, and their song is treated as functional, which is understood as a lower level of artistic expression. In relation to human music, Thomas Geissmann speculates as follows on the gibbon duet:

Loud calls are believed to serve a variety of functions, including territorial advertisement; intergroup intimidation and spacing; announcing the precise locality of specific individuals, food sources, or danger; and strengthening intragroup cohesion. The most widely distributed (albeit not universal) function, and probably the most likely function or early homonid music, is to display and possibly reinforce the unity of a social group toward other groups.⁶²

Perhaps such descriptions are objectively accurate but there could be other types of discourses to pursue, to shed a more than one shade of light on the songs of gibbons. The way their singing sometimes sounds very caring for one another when their notes rise and fall in close proximity⁶³, or when the conjunction of different registers sound like a composed pan-flute trio, accelerating and de-accelerating seemingly with the most acute awareness of each other.⁶⁴

As it happened, I ended up making one piece with three creatures; *Animalia IIIc*. It is written in such a way, however, that no group is formed. The percussionist and two puppets perform a minimum of tones and blinking, always aside each other, to the extent that they form one single melodic contour between themselves while retaining their singular specificity.

Micro tribute:

On track 9 from a wonderful album exhibiting the music of the Hanunóo from the Philippines, one can hear a controlled type of screaming, reminiscent of the song of gibbons, while the Hanunóo are clearing a forest.⁶⁵ There is no apparent connection with gibbon apes, that resides

⁶⁰ The book that made me aware of the Pied Butcherbird is *The Book of Music and Nature*, edited by David Rothenberg and Marta Ulvaeus. The tracks from the accompanying CD are, I believe, somewhat edited in terms of foreground and background. Nevertheless, they can be found on youtube, and the Pied Butcherbird is here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1IEs2DrsD3c>

⁶¹ See the website of the "Gibbon Research Lab" by Thomas Geissmann: <http://www.gibbons.de/main/index.html>.

⁶² Thomas Geissmann, "Gibbon Songs and Human Music from an Evolutionary Perspective" in *The Origins of Music*.

⁶³ See: www.gibbons.de -> sound gallery -> white bearded gibbon -> Duet song, adult pair "183/1A" and "183/2A".

⁶⁴ See: www.gibbons.de -> sound gallery -> Siamang -> Duet song, adult pair "Suma" and "Siam", Berlin Zoo, Germany, 29 June 1988.

⁶⁵ *Hanunóo music from the Phillipines*. 1953. Simthsonian Folkways records.

in my mind. An obvious parallel however, to this recording, can be found on the great CDs compiled by Steven Feld during his years of field-work among the Kaluli people who live by mount Bosavi in Papua New Guinea.⁶⁶ The Track entitled “Men’s work group clears a new garden” shows the same type of screaming during a forest clearing interspersed with sung polyphony.

Life-worlds

The senses of animals are un-sensible to me. I translate an idea about them into formalized sound and gesture; I work with resemblances as they appear to me, not with an idea of sameness. I have encountered the Umwelt theory by Jakob Von Uëxkull largely with enthusiasm because it has led me to the field of biosemiotics at large, a field where life forms imply one another through the action of signs. As Timo Maran, Dario Martinelli and Aleksei Turovski writes in their introduction to “Reading in Zoosemiotics”:

As animals are the most integrated living creatures in the Biosphere, similarly there is no such thing as a completely singular animal: all are living in associations. Besides all and any other circumstances involved, that means that one of the ruling traits of behavior is the need for impressions: to make, to receive, to avoid and to use the impression is the semiotic basis of charismatic behavior.⁶⁷

Specifically, with regard to the Umwelt theory of Uexküll, they write:

To conceive animals in the light of Umwelt theory means at the same time to acknowledge common biological and evolutionary bases as well as species-specific traits and specific ontogenetic developments. It means, in other words, to take into account the biological foundations of certain behavioral patterns, and the autonomous and peculiar developments of others.⁶⁸

The pluralism of this theory (in the sense that there are many worlds (“umwelts”) within our world), is liberating for me as a way to explore commonality and peculiarity at the same time. While my constructed body parts might be based mainly on the similarity of limbs and appendages, their sounding and moving attributes are freer and more creative.

Statistically, very few organisms have a capacity for sensing and making sound. Those that do are found in the phyla of arthropods and chordates. Arthropods have exoskeletons and the bones of chordates are encased in skin. Chordates have backbone and arthropods do not. The

⁶⁶ *Bosavi: Rainforest Music From Papua New Guinea*. Smithsonian Folkways 40487, 2001.

⁶⁷ Timo Maran, Dario Martinelli and Aleksei Turovski (eds), *Readings in Zoosemiotics* Berlin, Germany: Mouton de Gruyter, 2012), introduction.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

arthropod body is said to carry a number of appendages such as antenna, wings and compound eyes, while the chordate body is said to have limbs (all my instrumental ideas are appendages to my limbs). The sensorial capacity of the human body is limited; we hear, smell and see poorly in comparison to the likes of bats, dogs and avian creatures. Horses see movement in the human face down to one-fifth of a millimeter. Bees communicate in the ultraviolet range. Nocturnal animals see in the dark. Regardless of the poverty of our senses, we emit signs in a verbal forms that run in parallel to the signs of other creatures. Darwin wrote that man “still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin”.⁶⁹ In an Uexküll’ian vein I perceive such indelible stamps on a vertical axis rather than on a horizontal, hierarchical, one. Kinesthetic, musical, pictorial and architectural signs bear parallel attributes in separately unique manifestations but they are mutually influenced by each other. Uexküll points out that embedded in a spider’s web is a clear idea about the physical attributes of a fly.⁷⁰ The musicality inherent in a spider web resides in the fact that vibrations can carry information across matter and life-worlds, and so the spider plucks its web to be in touch with its surroundings; it tunes and re-tunes it to achieve optimal sensitivity to certain frequencies. It is my question how an appendage to the body can carry an idea about another creature, and how the tuning of this appendage becomes a pre-musical music. The shape and size of the extended eyelids in *Animalia III* could have reached completion in many ways, but they had to embed an idea about the blinking eyes of an elephant, which gave them a certain character and musicality.

Within a musical context I am generally attempting to create signs that allude to the multi-sensorial impressions non-human beings emit and receive. That is why I have felt I could not circumvent the mimetic resemblance, because it adds a shadow of a foreign (non-human) emitter to the sign dimension of a musical action. Yet, within the institutional frameworks that I find myself in, the concert hall to name one, these signs are not received by any other species apart from my own which does imply a distance to the extra-musical life-worlds that are my inspiration. It is almost as if I romanticize about a biosphere inside a bubble of purely human constructions. And indeed, it would be entirely possible to work with tangible relations, with direct communication and with feelings, such as described in the work of Donna Haraway, or David Rothenberg. I have had tangible relations with animals, primarily domesticated, but a distance to the imagined animal is as important for my creative impulse as I presume it was for Kafka when he wrote *America*; I work from a vision of ‘moving closer’, not ‘being close’. In order to navigate artistically I need an ambiguous twilight zone.

⁶⁹ Charles Darwin, *The descent of man* (England: Wordsworth Editions, 2013), ch. XXI.

⁷⁰ Uexküll, “A Theory of Meaning”, ch. 4.

Circle two (2021)

Form – Animalia IIIa (ver. 2)

I wanted to revise *Animalia III*, and find ways for the movement of the eyes to be more in themselves, more than tiny drumsticks. I had in the back of my mind certain works and practices where movement seemed to me to be explorative and (sometimes) self-caring, rather than skilled. They included some works by Yvonne Rainer, Trio A (1966) and the Hand Movie (1966) and several Feldenkrais lessons for the hands and eyes.⁷¹

We, percussionist Ane Marthe and I, began to explore eye movement patterns extensively as a way to make the eyelid extensions “dance” in the air. We established a small number of geometrical patterns that seemed clear and recognizable and I admittedly pushed towards very short linear movements, rather than fluid and circular ones, because they reminded me of the discernable rhythmic quality of percussive gestures.

Furthermore, I started looking for a supplement, an element that could insinuate sound, and perhaps make more musical what I (at that time) feared to be a material below the threshold of music. We tried to raise the right hand, held upright by the upper arm and loosely bended in its wrist, to crudely mimic the head of the fox. This element grew in scope; we added sand paper to the finger tips to have fine gradations of sound between the fingers and the thump, and we developed movement patterns that mimicked those of the eyelids. The hand now “vocalized” all of the silent geometrical patterns of the eyes.

A **Animalia III (v2)** S. Løffler

♩ = 46-48

Eyes

Hand

Voice

eyes

hand

⁷¹ I have practiced Feldenkrais since 2011, an awareness-through-movement system developed by Moshe Feldenkrais. The lessons that explore eye and hand movement are among my greatest sources of inspiration.

The idea that the hand could gradually replace the eyelids now informed the formal scheme. The piece is roughly an A-A' form. Little by little, the hand mimics more of the gestures that the eyelids play until the same musical content has put on a different face. Only at one point does one hear the voice of the performer singing the same note as the bells; a transition point that is at the same time a vanishing point. The eyelids disappear and a shadowy trace of them continues on.

After the first performance on 14/5 2022 choreographer Rosalind Goldberg said that she felt the performer was trying to perform movements that they were not really part of her own body. I agreed. In the pursuit to make more out of the eyelids, I had placed rigid movement structures onto the eyes that the performer could only learn, not personalize. Once again, I had spotted a way to arrive in a familiar musical terrain by making a piece from fixated figures that were rhythmically recognizable, and structuring them combinatorically. Was it possible, I asked myself, to collaborate towards a music that was innate to the specific eyelids of Ane Marthe and be informed by them rather than my own acquired musical connotations? We proceeded to start over again for the third time.

(See [video example 12](#) and [score example 9](#))

Self-erasure

On the mimetic abilities of various insects and how they are able to blend in with their surroundings, Roger Caillois writes in 1934:

...alongside the instinct of self-preservation, which in some way orients the creature toward life, there is generally speaking a sort of instinct of renunciation that orients it toward a model of reduced existence...".⁷²

Musical sounds are mimetic in nature, most sounds remind us of something, yet very often composers aspire to extend sounds artistically so that they release themselves from any references and become something in their own, as music. When we listen to a pianist playing a work from Olivier Messiaen's "Catalogue D'oiseaux", we hear a structured composition first and foremost, and we follow the patterns by which the sounds are formed. The composer has translated his direct encounters with birds from the provinces of France, and the translation process has been influenced by many technical procedures from his rhythmic, harmonic and melodic toolbox. The music is a fusion of sorts, between transcription and translation. What makes the music unmistakably Messiaen however, is the way he composes, not the way he has transcribed. My aesthetic until recently was to have a distinct voice as composer, one that affirmed itself through all the technical and formal choices I made. Now it is my question if I

⁷² Caillois, R., & Shepley, J. (1984). Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia. *October*, 31, 17–32.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/778354>

can reduce the technical aspects of compositional procedures, and reduce the imprint I have on the music. I am searching for a way to only barely make structured sounds so that they lose a definite character. What I hope to achieve is not a music that is free or improvisatory, but a stage presence that is musical without being distinctly composed.

To formalize is to build structure, and I am certainly interested in formalization; but is there a way to ‘handle’ a material, rather than to structure it? Is there a way to make patterns that are vague yet discernable? Is there a way to make all the elements that I’m working with – movement, masking, sounds and instruments – seem as if they exist in tiny zones very close to anonymity?

In her comprehensive introduction to the well-tempered clavier of J. S. Bach, Siglind Bruhn invites musicians to approach a prelude of Bach with the following questions:⁷³

- 1.1 Can you place your prelude in one of the following categories?
 - a) Harmonically determined
 - b) Motivically determined
 - c) Adhering to the principles of invention or fugue
 - d) Rhythmically determined
 - e) Metrically determined

Harmonic, motivic, polyphonic, rhythmic and metric elements are basic categories of compositional technique, and there are instances of all of these in my *Animalia* works. But I am attempting not to exploit or refine them in any way; they are necessities for entering a musical territory, but they are not developed in terms of their technical potential. If one were to approach, say, *Animalia II* analytically, I would find the following questions appropriate:

- 0.0 Can you place your butterfly music in one or several of the following domains?
 - a) Determined by movement
 - b) Determined by sound
 - c) Determined by silence
 - d) Determined by repetition
 - e) Determined by interaction

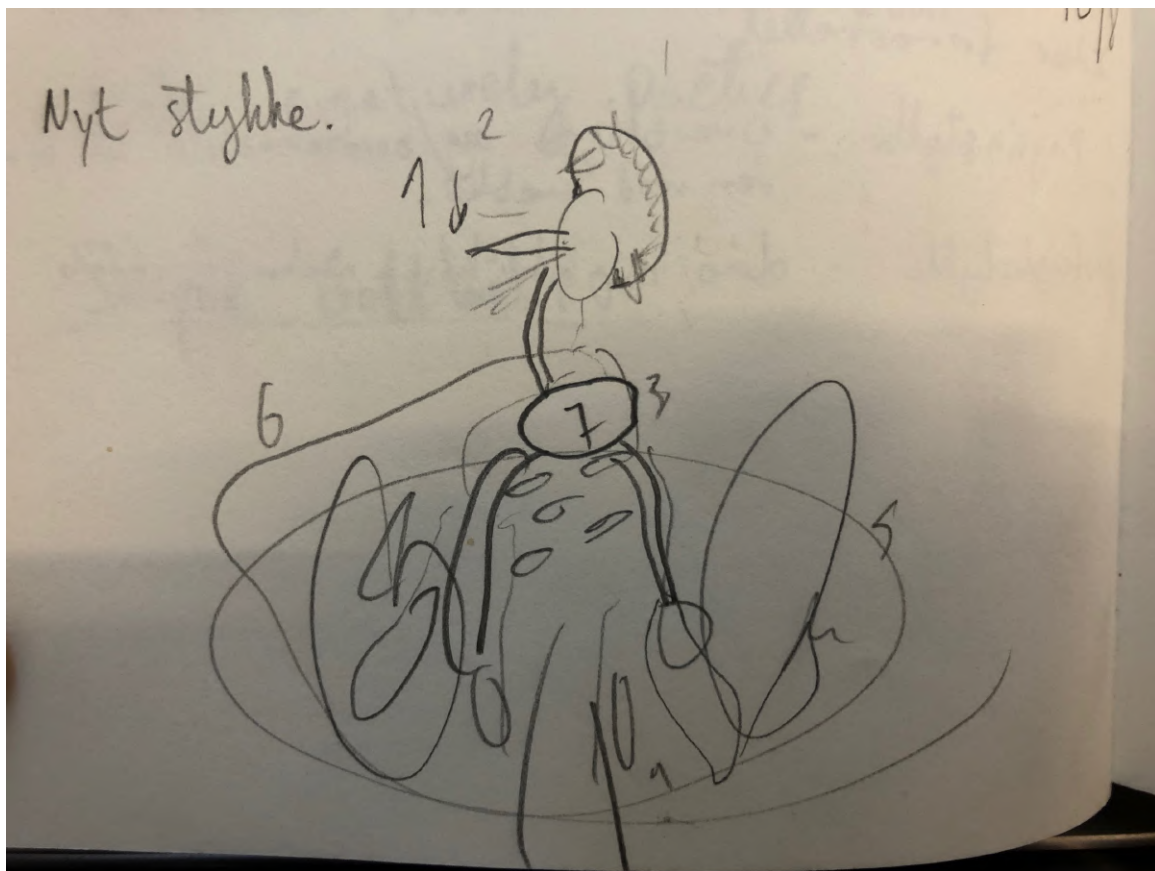
Movement, sound, silence, repetition and interaction are basic building blocks to the extent that they would seem self-evident. But the compositional task, as I see it in my context, lies in determining their tiny boundary spaces. Composition, in this sense, becomes a matter of reducing what classical composition usually has been, by making pre-compositional choices that

⁷³ Bruhn, Siglind. *J. S. Bach's Well-tempered clavier. In-depth Analysis and Interpretation*. 2014: Waldkirch: Edition Gorz.

greatly hinder what the composer can do. What is left is to negotiate what the performative body can do.

Form - Animalia IVa (ver. 1)

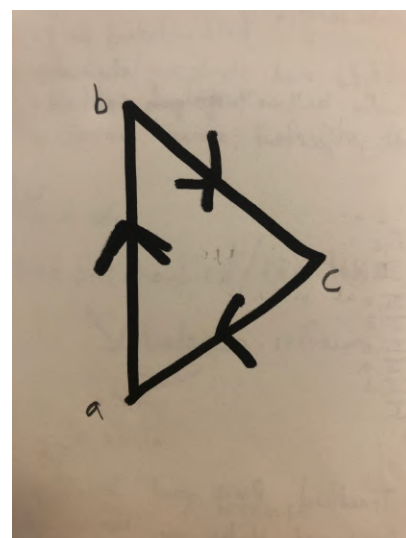
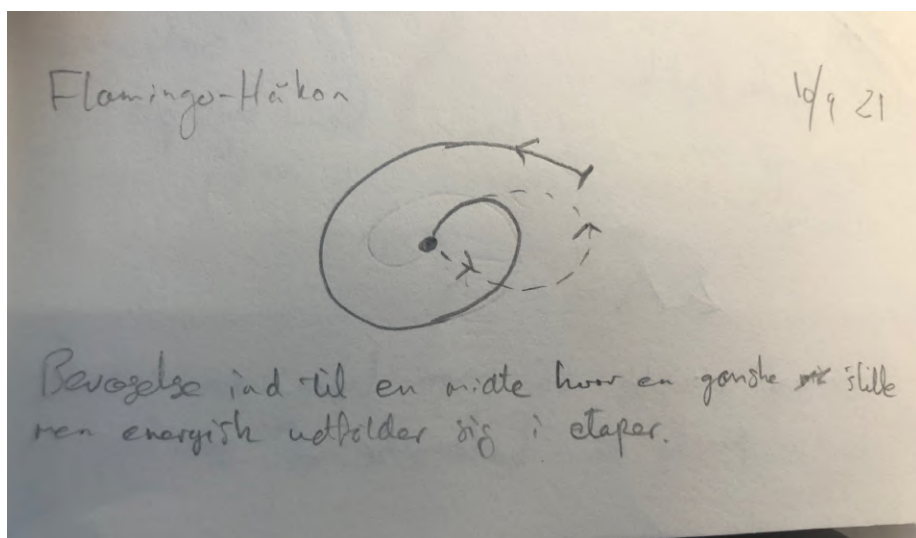
Animalia IV started from a whirlwind of ideas that were in constant flux during 2021. I drew a sketch of the body that I had in mind, which contained everything that I had worked with so far, from beak to expandable vocal sac to wings and various sound emitters:



I was eager to make a music in which the musical body would move in space, not sit in a chair in a fixed position. And I was interested in floor patterns as ways to musicalize movement in space, which was an interest that I had retained since my studies in Brussels. In those days, I had taken part in several walking meditations and had attempted to work with labyrinth structures such as that found in the cathedral of Chartres (France). Those interests materialized in a performance entitled “solo”, which I have performed only once in 2014.

I drew many simple floor pattern schemes to explore whether any musical impetus would evolve or not. The floating quality of a swan eventually became my focus. All of the artefacts that I

developed spawned from the idea that they would take part in a floating motion across the floor somehow.



Similar to the eye movement patterns of *Animalia IIIa* (ver. 2), I decided upon simple clear geometry, in the form of a triangular pattern, as pictured above. The wings would initiate turns of direction, and the movement from point a - b - c would be filled with an ever more elaborate melody from the bells in the dress. Overall, I imagined a three-part form akin to a process through which an animal marks its territory in aesthetic ways:

A – Intensifying

B – Swan Song

C – Expressive floating dance

A - The music would begin as an emerging state of intense gesticulation; raising onto the toes and from this suspension stretching out his wings, making loud signal calls and then lowering down to the ground and making reposing wingspans that slowed down, until another elevation took off. This type of phrasing is gravitational in nature, soaring up and falling down, which I had become more consciously aware of as a strategy in *Animalia II*.

B - The music would then soar into song as a way to release the preparatory kind of energy in the opening. I wanted to make a song that felt like a calling to someone, one that bordered on the melodic without becoming melody and one that bordered on tonality (without being tonal) by always returning to a central pitch (g).

C - The piece would end with a floating type of movement across the floor as if the swan were searching for someone, or wanted to encourage another swan to join. I spend a great deal of time trying to finding the best approach to walk in a floating manner.

The melody, indeed an actual melody, was to be the end of a process going from signal (in part A), to free song (in part B), to an actual formalized melody (in part C). It was circumstantially very simple in consisting of four notes - there were room for no more under the dress - and the melodic motion was influenced by the fact that when one pulled a string one had to let it be pulled back before the hand was free to move. Therefore, the melody had to move in pairs of the same note, which resulted in a “parlando” quality, a speaking quality.

I shall admit here that the composition process was influenced a great deal by my relation to Håkon Stene for whom this piece was initially conceived. Håkon is a great musician and percussionist and I had the unconfirmed conception that the music needed to be precise and virtuosic in order for him to resonate with it. I notated the music quite rigidly, and he brought a strong sense of discipline into the learning process, spending a great deal of time on it and suggesting a number of improvements. But in the subtle details of his playing something was dissonant in me. We changed a lot as we went along. We erased and we simplified and I continually made improvements to the body parts, although I admittedly never managed to make them fully stable, which added stress. But there remained in Håkon’s movements a performative mode of execution that I can only describe as “percussive”. This was for obvious reasons; that’s the way that I had composed the piece, that’s what the notation represented and during rehearsals that was what my language revolved around.

After Håkon performed this first version on 30/04 2022 I felt a strong desire to revise. I was attracted to the delicate and introvert creature, not a musically concise one, and I was unsure if I could communicate that clearly to Håkon. I decided to take over the piece myself to start from scratch.

It was suggested to me that the abandoning of a collaboration full of good intentions is a privileged choice to be able to make. Furthermore, if there is such a thing as a ‘wrong’ body in my work, or even wrong kinds of musicians, I needed to clarify wherein that wrong-ness lied. I can only respond by pointing out that the swan was an opportunity for me to make a personal journey of discovery that could not be done on my behalf. All of the *Animalia* works have been conceived of in experimentations on my own body and all musicians have gone to great lengths to assimilate what first and foremost fitted my physicality. This process involves a language that is not musical but personal and physical. In my collaboration with Håkon I found myself enforcing a past composer’s role that I was trying to abandon, a role where all components of the work revolve around a ‘scoring’ from my hand, a mastermind scheme. These reflections are done in hindsight. At the time I was not sure why the piece felt wrong. I overtook it to find out.

Part one - Intensifying (molto intenso)

Til Håkon Stene

Animalia IV

S. Løffler

A ♩ = 52

Sirene whistle

Wings

Feet/dress

9 *rit.* *Ad lib.* *accel.* **B** *a tempo*

sirene

wings

ft./drss

17

sirene

wings

ft./drss

24 *rit.* *a tempo* *Ad lib.* 5 5

sirene

wings

ft./drss

C **Part two - Swann song (aria espressivo)**

sirene

wings

ft./drss

39 *a tempo* *rit.* *a tempo* *rit.* **D** *a tempo*

sirene

wings

ft./drss

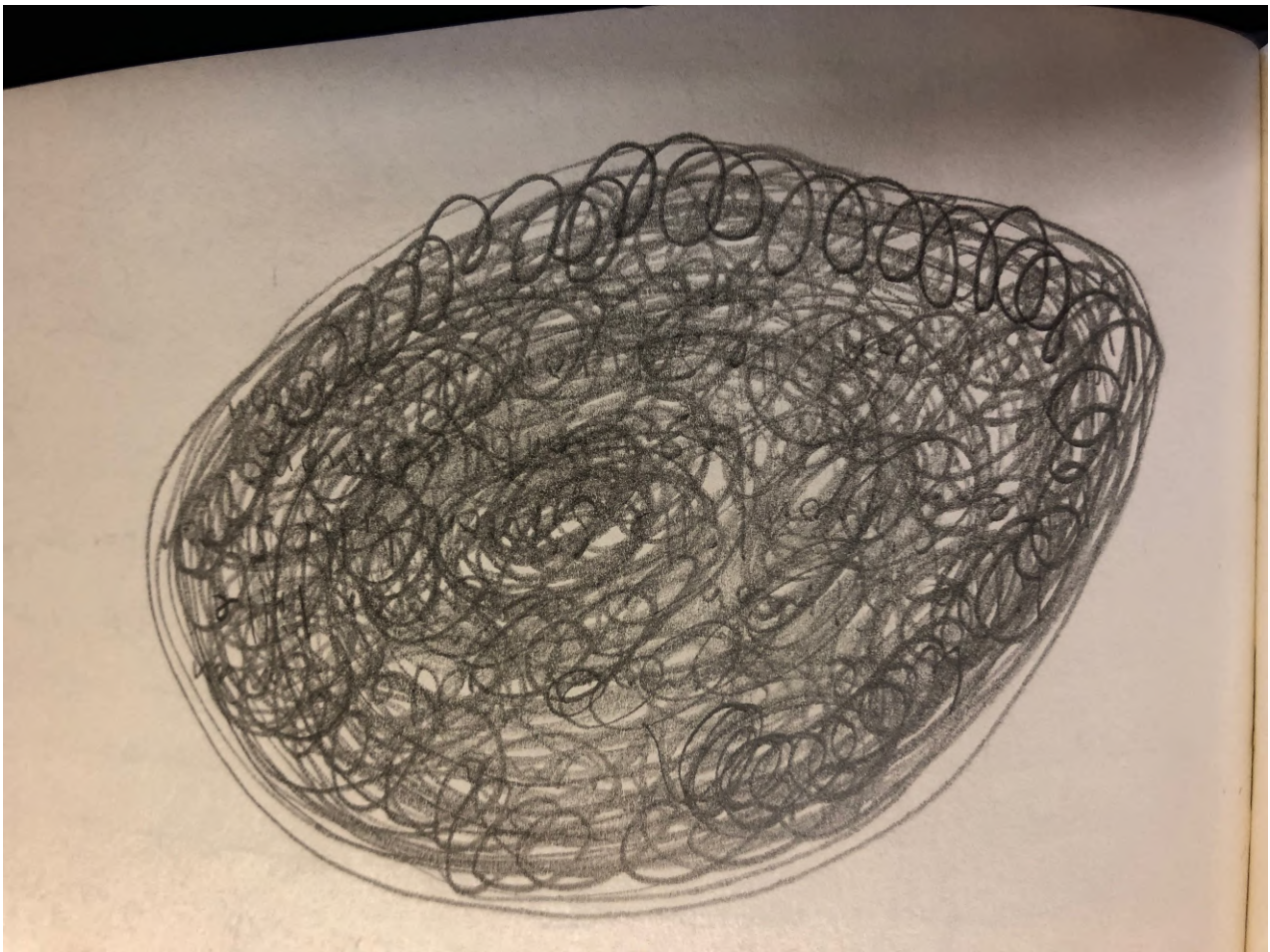
2

Breath quickly (if you need to!)

(See [video example 14](#) and [score example 14](#))

Self-erasure

Re-painting a favorite painting; *Panorama* by Cy Twombly (1955).



Form – Animalia IIIb (ver. 1)

As my collaboration with Ane Marthe developed, her involvement with puppet theatre became a meeting point of common interest. In 2015 I made a piece entitled “Marionette Piece” in which the wrists of four musicians were interconnected with strings, and the music was a result of moving with and against one another. I was influenced by the likes of Henrich Von Kleist’s “über das marionettentheater”, Ingmar Bergman’s “Fanny and Alexander” where marionettes play music towards the end, and a general vision of a world where everything is connected. Ane Marthe and I felt it prudent to try to establish several versions of blinking creatures, several iterations of Ane Marthe, to see if something interesting would result.

We worked with two puppet makers, Manon Dublanc and Polina Borisova, to create a creature that could blink with long eyelids. Trial and error led us to something akin to a fox and we had the opportunity to have two puppets rather than one. When the foxes arrived in Oslo it was very difficult for me however to find a musical entry point. These puppets were likely the most

concrete representations of animals that I had worked with. It looked real when they opened their mouths and it looked real when they blinked. I was not accustomed to working with the real, which I realized only now. And further, if the foxes were to have a vocal identity, Ane Marthe would have to be a ventriloquist – a huge tradition in its own right.

The first version attempted to intermesh bells and sung tones to achieve some kind of unity. I made a simple continuous melodic outline and arranged it to appear as a red thread between Ane Marthe and puppet. I placed a fox monologue in the middle only to return to the duo idiom towards the end. It was reminiscent of an A – B – A' form, with the distinct difference that A is not really repeated but rather continued.

The result was closer to a children's song than anything that I've made. I had accepted the fox as representational rather than to challenge or explore its appearance. I felt as naked as ever during performance (even if I wasn't the one performing), and I decided, as always, to erase, override, and revise. But not to delete. It was an interesting challenge to seek a way to make this piece work within the framework that I had set up. There had to be a way to ventriloquize without subscribing to that artform specifically. There had to be a way to make song without singing.

(See [video example 13](#) and [score example 11](#))

Self-erasure

Over the past three years, I have revised endlessly: I re-worked, re-incorporated, re-erased, re-distributed. The more that a work showed its face, the more I felt an urge to re-create it. Revision intensified into a form of ritualized self-therapy: starting over and over again as a way to be re-born.

There were qualities in all of my abandoned versions. I cannot claim with conviction that later versions significantly improved upon previous ones. They took rather different directions, focused on different aspects. It is liberating, however, to believe that one can improve, that there is some core which can be brought one step further out of the platonic cave, into the light. It is even more liberating to resist the idea of the finished work as brand new and original, which most festivals of contemporary music demand of composers today (usually in standard durational formats such as 8, 15 or 20 minutes). Music can emerge in ongoing processes, it does not have to reside only in finished products. The slowly evolving song of Humpback Whales attest to such a mode of continuous musical existence. But I felt too invested in the confined singular work from previous years to be in a position to truly supersede this norm. Every *Animalia* iteration has a beginning and an end. In my final presentation on 17/9 2022 I chose to stage all of the pieces as one continuous thread, woven into one another, to create but a glimpse of a continuous interconnectedness.

Self-erasure

Notation fixates unless both composer and musicians decide to attack the written page differently. The initial learning curve was steep in all the *Animalia* iterations, both the musicians and I needed time to adapt to a new performative set-up. If such a learning process is associated with a score that represents an ideal, like a depiction of a utopia where the music will finally make sense as soon as we arrive there, notation becomes restrictive in a process where I had intended to be explorative.

The more that I composed a work through notation, as was the case in 2019-2021, the more I felt a space of inclusion disappearing, the inclusion – at least potentially – of the ghost of something other than my voice as composer. If music is read, as from a book, it is as if we address its voice as singular. It is located on a page, and we point to that page when we discuss it. We do not invent vocabulary for the elements with which we work and we do not negotiate their relation in a narrative; we allude to them as figures in bar 9, page 3. They are repeated or varied more or less automatically unless one is conscious about establishing an alternative.

I have somewhat hesitantly attempted to notate more as a map with paths rather than one road to follow; a territory to work within and not a destination to work towards. But I have not fully managed to create a methodology of notation that I feel is in accordance with the kind of collaboration that I had with Ane Marthe, Jennifer, Ellen and Inga. We worked with and without notation because we knew each other and had time to be together. That is the privilege of being in a research environment. It should be noted in this regard that it would be strictly speaking inaccurate to call the processes of work in the last three years collaborative. They were firstly a gathering of traces that I assembled, secondly a physical assimilation of these in ways that were different from performer to performer, and finally a collective filtering of everything that we had assembled into forms that contained mostly that which was innate and immediate.

Self-erasure

I don't know if any compositional practice can be said to be anonymous; formal choices and patterns, even on the level of choosing which instrument to use, communicate some kind of agency.⁷⁴ But the agents that bring forth a music can appear to be a multiple, rather than singular, and patterns can appear vague and in flux. A multiple not in the sense of more performers, but as several sources that are not unified into a style. Increasingly, towards the end of my research period, I attempted to shroud both the performers and the hallmarks of structured composition. I was not drawn to an improvisation practice but to composition that is constantly flowing with different traces of input and is never entirely fixed, even though its general contours may appear stable.

⁷⁴ I distinguish between agency and intentionality. A student in our “animal music” course was outspoken about the belief that music can only be intentional. To me however, a musical sign is a sign regardless of whether the emitter is conscious about it.

The mimetic resemblance, such as a swan mask, is one part of a vision which I would call primitive composition.⁷⁵ It points to an external reference in its resemblance, but the credibility of that resemblance is challenged when the performer makes music instead of behaving as a swan in a strict sense; the mimetic is pulled from two sides without being unified.

Primitive composition, furthermore, is a mediation between spontaneous playing choices in the moment and a semi-closed formal layout. This is no different to most folk music traditions where the boundaries of a type of form are withheld, but embellishments and playful excursions are important. In the context of the *Animalia* cycle, this took on the color of instability, rather than controlled improvisation. With elongated eyelids, wings on the fingers or arms, with masks and unusual body postures, there is very little surplus of performative control. Every spontaneous choice that depart from the known becomes akin to a small panic attack the performer tries to get out of as quickly as possible.

Circle three (2022)

Animalia IIIa (ver. 3)

We worked extensively with eye movement during 2022 with the aim to develop the music together. There was all this material from the two prior versions but where was the core? Where was the music behind the specific eyelids of Ane Marthe? Many elements were singularly unique and meaningful, but we lacked a way to make them flow. We discovered a faint movement of the closed eyes, akin to a heartbeat. We discovered a tiny fluttering of the eyelids as a way to open them up, but we lacked a way to move on without repeating the phrase mechanically. It became a play with gravitation; how to move up and how to be pulled down and how to remain in between for a while. That was where I felt an actual listening begin to happen; in the silent directionless moments; up in the air, before gravity reinstated its pull, down to a position when the horizontally pendulant eyes hung almost motionless. We reduced the human voice to a faint mumble. We removed the vocal *sss* from version one and two and replaced it with a near-inaudible exhalation through the nose. We let the fluttering bell-strikes be free improvisatory phrases, instead of a fixed number of reiterations. We let go of controlling elements strictly. We focused on how elements sewed themselves into one another and we removed the hand as a co-musician. Only very slowly did a way to make form become apparent. It was as if we could row across a river from shore to shore but not move with the current.

I wonder how one describes the kind of listening that we were seeking. A hallucinatory sort where sound is seen but not heard? Or an actual sounding, deep below the threshold of the normal. When sitting close to Ane Marthe during rehearsals, everything was effectively

⁷⁵ The word primitive should not be read in a derogatory sense.

sounding; even the eyelids moving in circles in the air had a distinct circular sound pattern. As one looks closely at an elephant blinking and sees both the outer vertical eyelid, and the inner, moving horizontally, one inevitably articulates this gesture sonically. And it is sonic therefore.

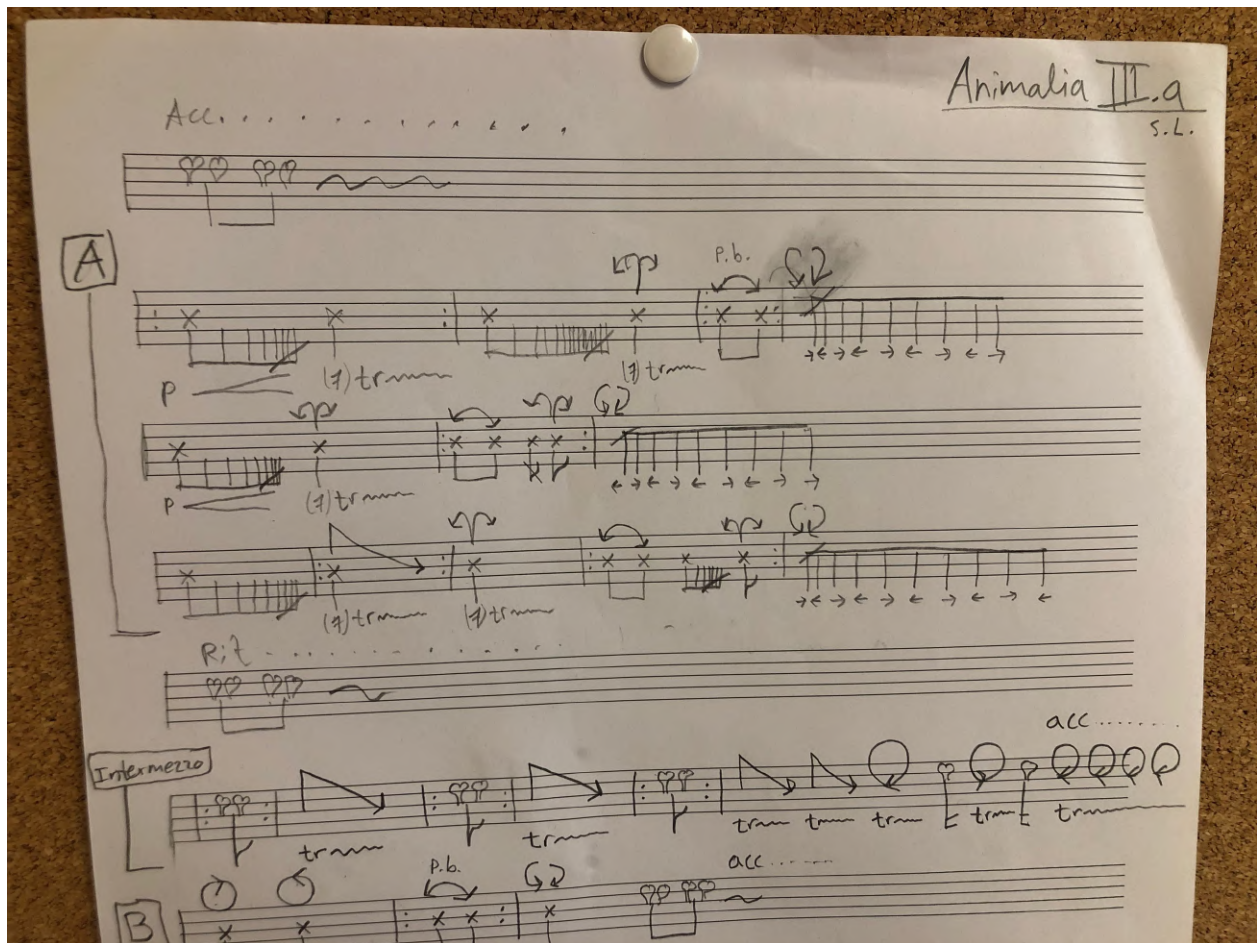
Eventually I wrote down a form in symbolic notation without any indication of time. We felt it was necessary to stop exploring and to start stabilizing a rough scheme in order to refine. All three main sections, A - B - Epilogue, work with ways to open and close one's eyes. Sound is a means to retain a state: to keep eyes open or closed. Sound is not developed compositionally, it is a byproduct. There are tiny formal prolongations of the same pattern within each section, but there is no real development, only a tentative unfolding. At the end of the piece we felt it made sense to give the exhalation through the nose a sounding quality, to point to what would ensue when the fox entered the stage.

Tribute:

We were returning from the swidden, crossing Ipavu Lake by canoe. We talked, rowing, under a beautiful sunset. Suddenly Eweka stopped speaking and rowing, fell silent and asked me to be quiet too, gesturing towards the bottom of the lake. Whispering he told me to listen to what was coming from down below. Despite my best efforts, I heard nothing from the watery depths. He said to me insistently: 'Can't you hear the fish singing? Listen, listen ...'. I heard nothing. This went on for several minutes. Later, back in the village, I concluded that Eweka had experienced some kind of hallucination, a fit of poetic inspiration or holy ecstasy, the whole event just a flight of imagination. I recall that some days later he simply told me that I needed to train my hearing. The episode took place in 1981 while I was conducting field research among both the Kamayurá1 and the Yawalapiti (who I had known since 1969) for around 11 months in preparation for my doctoral thesis (see Menezes Bastos 1990, 2013).

Some years after these events, I went to an exhibition on the 'acoustic behaviour' of animals, organised by postgraduate students from various areas of biology at the Federal University of Santa Catarina. There I was able to listen to recordings of bird songs and various other animals. But what most enchanted me and surprised me were the recordings of fish songs, with those of the dourados especially catching my attention. That was when I learnt that Eweka, in the episode narrated above, appeared more like a diligent ichthyologist than an inspired poet, a victim of hallucination or holy rapture.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ de Menezes Bastos, R. J. (2013). Apùap World Hearing Revisited: Talking with "Animals", "Spirits" and other Beings, and Listening to the Apparently Inaudible. *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 22(3), 287–305.



(See [video example 1](#) and [score example 10](#))

Animalia I (ver. 3)

We had an extended workshop period where I brought all sorts of ideas. But Inga and Jennifer exerted a different pull on my imagination, one that steered towards an intimate and affectionate kind of music. I shall admit that I even began to envision a music that stepped into their life and be part of it rather than to pull their performative personalities into my life.

We returned to the beginning of my research period, to the bird piece from 2019. It was stripped of all its artefacts so that only the beak remained. We tried many ways of formalizing how the two beaks could meet, how they could rub and hit and rest against each other. We closed the eyes quasi-permanently and a new world of sensitivity opened up. A great deal of attention was required in order to feel when the beaks were touching, a great deal of responsiveness was needed to feel when one's beak was being carefully pushed.

Reducing the degree of control in a touch opens up a field that is more than musical in the instrumental act. Inga has described the process to me as one of dissociation; moving the instrument usually placed at the tip of her fingers to the mouth region initiates the acquisition of

a novel set of abilities and techniques. As far as I can tell, it is not only the technique that changes in accordance with a new instrument, but there also ensues an altered notion of instrumentality when a mode of touching becomes a matter of transferring an impulse to a beak as opposed to a resonating object. The mode of response the initiator receives back is never entirely causal in nature, as it would be when striking a drum; it is minutely unpredictable as when one touches another human being; it becomes a reaching out as much as an acting upon. We aimed to reduce the music to an absolutely minimum. Rhythmic gestures were formulated precisely but were impossible to perform strictly. The absence of pauses within the phrases allowed for a continuum of movement with neither strong nor weak beats. The absence of pitch gave way to the faintest sound of the presence of the performers. The long pauses in between phrases created a “starting over again” feeling every time the players began to move. Reducing the musical material was a way to give space to something beyond music. It was a way to be visibly affectionate through music, rather than to let affect be a result of music.

I notated the piece for pragmatic reasons; playing with eyes closed requires much coordination and we did not have time to establish a catalogue of cues. Instead I left aspects of the score open in such a way that it could take new directions according to how Inga and Jennifer assimilated it. We ended up erasing only a few “echo” phrases but never opened the score up substantially; it felt more urgent to practice the quality of attentiveness towards one another.

The piece revolves around the basic premise that the performers continuously have to find each other anew. They reach out, and a continuous phrase ensues from that initial point of contact. There are elements that re-occur and there are elements that grow ever so slightly, but the piece does not evolve very much. It attempts to stay in the present and to be immediate in its ways of connecting. At certain moments the performers successively lower their heads very slowly, before approaching each other. This gesture was intended as an inwards sort of touching, moving closer to an interiority before moving towards an exteriority. In seven short phrases these were the ideas which we attempted to unfold.



(See [video example 6](#) and [score example 3](#))

Animalia IIIb (ver. 2)

We returned to the beginning, to the eyelid piece from 2020, to meditate on the material that we had developed to see if it fitted a different approach. We asked if the fox could be a solo performer, if it could replace Ane Marthe rather than play alongside her. We asked it to play the beginning of the first version and it did so magnificently, only a bit slower in some places which we felt was charming.

We spent hours probing vocal qualities and trying to find a pre-sung kind of tone; that moment in a voice where vibration starts. We listened to the cries of foxes in the night. We settled on an introvert and personalized humming on one single pitch, the lowest in Ane Marthe's register (an a), with the mouth closed and barely audible.

We invited the hand from the second version and felt that a tiny duet would be possible as an opening into another music within the same piece, one where the circular movement of the eyelids from the solo version would reoccur as gestures of the head and hand.

There was an unavoidable rhythmic character to the music. The bells of the fox, the short vocal hum, the brevity of sandpaper scraping from the fingers, these are distinct elements of impulse. We tried to move in and out of entrainment. Every singular element could be extended into long lines without metrical weight and conversely, we could juxtapose elements to make strong and weak beats by virtue of their difference. We allowed short pulsating zones alongside lines

with no accents. When we wanted to ensure a sense of direction we used short notated bars, and when we wanted the option to play freely we made short sections that could be improvised.

We repeated the same strategy of closure from the second version but less pronounced. The hand was left to play a tiny solo role towards the end while the fox stared into a void.



(Photo: Signe Fuglesteg Luksengard)

(See [video example 3](#) and [score example 12](#))

Animalia IIIc

There is a peculiar passage in the beginning of “Rhythm and Tempo: A study in Music History” by Curt Sachs. After distinguishing between metrical rhythm and additive rhythm, (where metrical indicates a fixed pattern of strong and weak beats and additive indicates groups of two and three), he states the following:

While the contrast of metric and accentual patterns is striking enough for ready distinction, there exists an important and somewhat embarrassing third group of verses and melodies in which no metric organization and hardly any recurrence of accents are considered. Philologists have tried to comprehend this group as a third, independent class along with the metric and the accentual group. They have taken the number of

syllables in a verse as the distinguishing trait – eleven for the Italian endecasillabo, twelve for the French alexandrine.....⁷⁷

He goes on to exemplify by citing the beginning of Dante's *Divine Comedy* and ends up concluding that:

This number (read: the number of syllables), then, is the essential quality of the verse (along with an absence of meter, and an absence, scarcity, or vagueness of accents). Musically, this type of organization is a shade of additive patterns.⁷⁸

I was intrigued by this passage and it reminded me of an article by Bernd Brabec di Mori, in which he reflects extensively on the proximity between speech and song.⁷⁹ Among a variety of sources he cites a passage by Gary Tomlinson:

Speech and song (and worse, language and music) are generally treated as “objects” present in a transcendent reality that can be recognized – correctly or incorrectly – by an observer. I think this approach is utterly wrong. Rather, speech and song are poles of a continuum, or, in Bloch's words, “Song is, therefore, nothing but the end of the process of transformation from ordinary language (that is, speech) which began with formalization” (1974:69-70).⁸⁰

I read an increasing amount of poetry during my research period, including a number of Danish translations of Sappho, and I began to wonder if a formal cycle of vague additive patterns could result in a singing kind of speech, or a spoken kind of music. Without words or any verbal spoken traces this would be less obvious. But perhaps a fixed number of elements in a rhythmic chain, coupled with a heavily reduced kind of song with only a few notes in a fixed register, could, nevertheless, be a meeting point of sorts for two foxes and one performer.

We organized passages which were free and improvised alongside passages that strictly adhered to the Sapphic stanza. The free sections consisted only of blinking. In the strict sections the performers sang the same pitch as their bells; only very small deviations from that norm was allowed, to create a slightly altered melodic contour for every repetition.

Towards the end, the three performers begin to assume their own identity, as had been established in the two prior iterations of the *Animalia III* cycle. Fox number one begins to hum and the eyelids of Ane Marthe begins to flutter while fox number two remains only a one-note musician, repeating a high c over and over.

⁷⁷ Curt Sachs, “Rhythm and Tempo: A study in Music History”.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Bernd Brabec de Mori, “Musical Spirits and Powerful Voices: On the Origins of Song.” *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 49 (2017): 114–28.

⁸⁰ Gary Tomlinson, *A million Years of Music. The Emergence of Human Modernity*. (New York: Zone Books, 2015)

In hindsight, the piece was equally informed by a foggy image of Sappho performing her poetry as much as it was by any animal. I think the foxes were too realistic for me to treat in an animalistic way. *Animalia IIIc*, then, is a parenthesis within the cycle, a commentary perhaps, in the form of a “Becoming Human” instalment.



(Photo: Signe Fuglesteg Luksengard)

(See [video example 7](#) and [score example 12](#))

Animalia IVa (ver. 2)

I decided to make the swan piece solely through a daily practice over two months. Nothing was notated, and nothing was a given. There was a great deal of resistance in the traces of the past version. The aggressiveness; the precision; the floor pattern, I tried to fit myself into these and it seemed awkward. It was as if there were multiple pieces within these components and they pulled in different directions. I tried to discard the wings, but felt attached to them once they were gone. I tried to move with ease and grace but kept stumbling.

Only very slowly, and with the help of my mentor Kristin Helgebostad, did I return to a point zero. I began every day as a movement routine. I walked across the floor and felt the heaviness of the mask. I raised my toes and felt how I became unbalanced. I stretched out the wings in

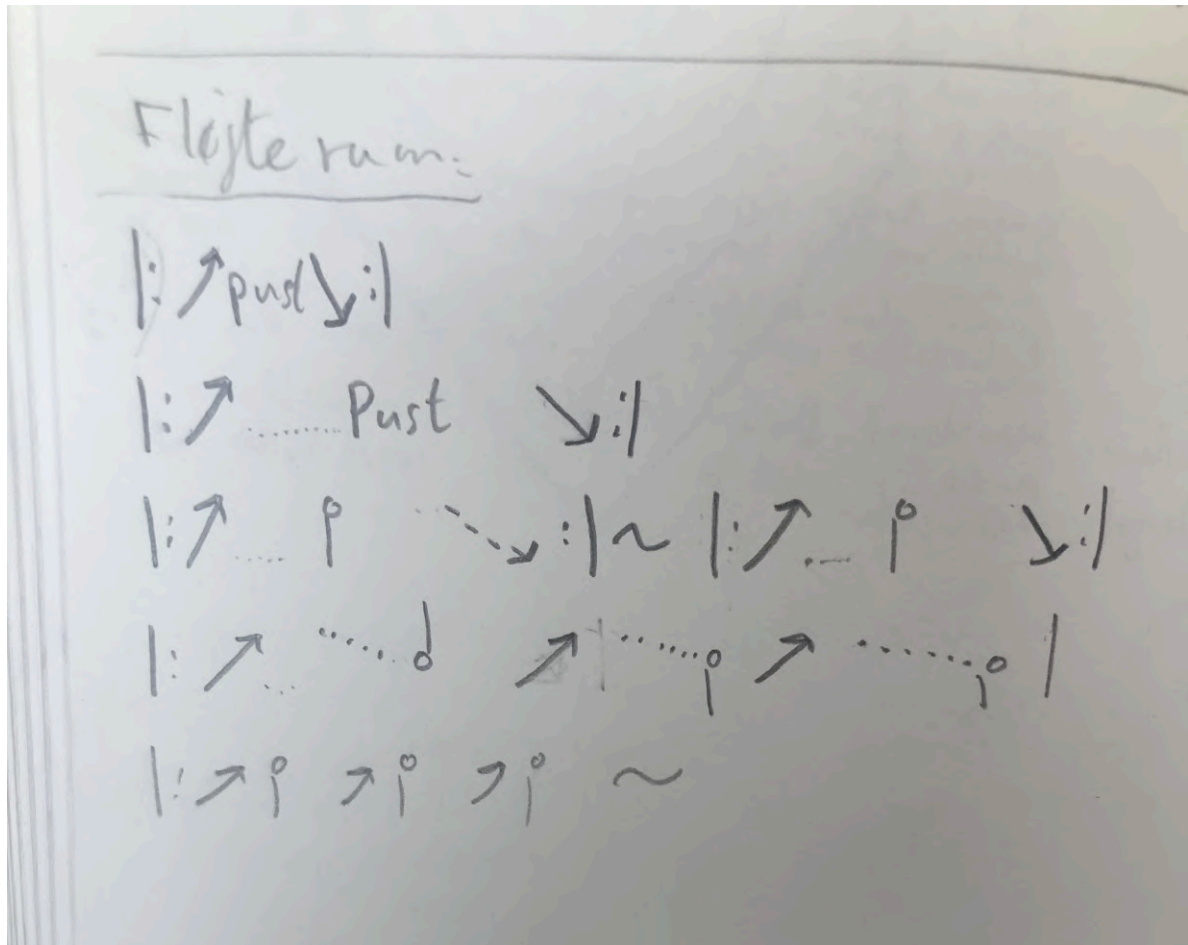
numerous directions and felt how the balance shifted accordingly. I stopped considering sound for a while, and surrendered to an apprentice role. I needed to fit myself into the dress, the mask, and the wings.

Eventually, a walking across the floor without any apparent floor pattern, with bent knees so that the dress scraped against the floor, felt nice. It also felt nice to constantly move the wings slightly in and out, to have a consistent activeness in the body. From this walking I began to investigate whether I could encircle a very small spot on the floor in a stationary yet moving manner and upon arriving at this spot, I practiced raising my heels and stretching out the wings in conjunction with holding my breath.

As I wrote in the first section, I did a number of inner child meditations on to attempt some mediation between myself, the swan, and the child of my past. There are many details which arose in the process, that I would not call conscious choices. They happened over time, in dialogue with a number of bystanders, and as elements that felt logical in a physical sense. The whole melodic section followed from this exploration and felt like a process of appeasement between the initial vision that I had of a swan music and my own body in the present tense. The swan commences to search a habitat that it finds suitable, it begins to aggressively demarcate a permanent spot utilizing all of its sensorial signing capacity, it gradually settles in one place; it settles in song; it settles in a sound that fades away and it starts to play a floating kind of music, a music that is already on its way to move on and away.

While the piece was not hard to retain in memory, it was informed in its making by two books about memory by Lynne Kelly.⁸¹ Right up to the last concert performance on the 17/9 2022, the whistle gestures continued to evolve. I drew several of them symbolically, as a mnemonic aid, and spontaneously I called the different stages spaces (“rum” in Danish, as written in my diary pictured below). And that is how I visualize the performance in hindsight, as clearly defined spaces in a three-part structure: 1) walking introduction, 2) song, 3) “floating dance”, each of which contained many smaller compartments, many smaller rooms, that I could move into or around as in a memory palace.

⁸¹ Lynne Kelly, *Memory Craft: Improve Your Memory Using the Most Powerful Methods from around the World*, (Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2019) and *The memory Code: The Secrets of Stonehenge*, (Pegasus Books, 2021).



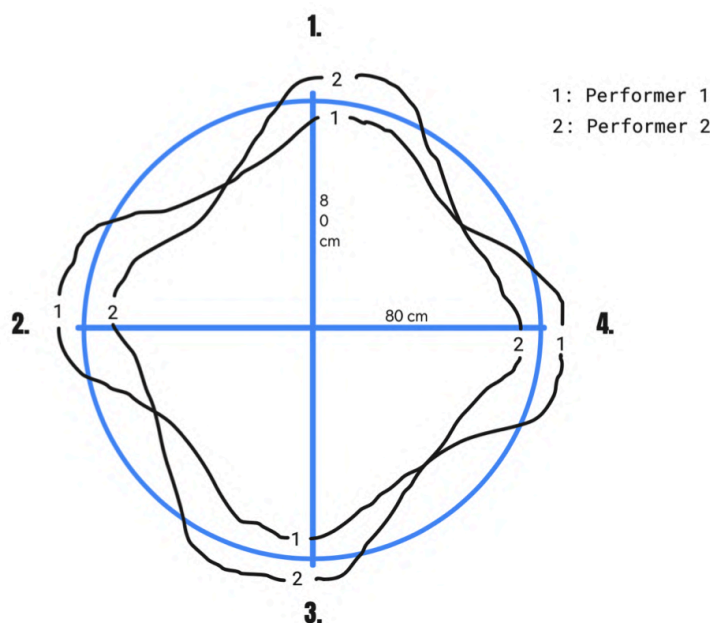
(See [video example 5](#))

Animalia IVb

Already as I made the first solo swan iteration in 2021 I conceived of a duo, one in which two swans would constantly float next to one another while playing a very distant music. I envisioned a general type of movement very close to that of a swan couple, floating continuously but with twists and turns and intersecting paths. Being mute, yet becoming music. If we could make a floor pattern on which our paths crossed, we could discipline a constant awareness of each other, perhaps even communicate primarily through a visible listening. Our vision was greatly compromised due to the masks.

A circular floor pattern was deemed ideal to avoid turning sharply and to fit the 4x4 meter stage we that knew we would have to use in our final presentation. We ended up formulating a very simple scheme.

Movement scheme:



It was not meant to be followed rigidly but it gave us a sufficient degree of coordination. A number of fixed attributes followed from this pattern: moving from an inner position to an outer required more time so there would have to be a degree of delay between the performer starting and the one following. This would necessarily result in two different phrase durations.

The work wrote itself from the restrictions imposed by the pre-compositional planning. There were eight pitches, four for each performer. I searched for a type of melodiousness that was highly flexible; expandable, contractible and infinitely variable. The circle had four positions, which produced a phrase with four stages.

I formulated two types of general walking patterns: a fluid one, with constant movement until position four, which became a fixed moment of repose, and a segregated type of movement with stops at every position.

Towards the end of the piece this systematically breaks down. We stand at position two, facing the audience, and play a whole phrase. We walk full a circle and repeat. Then we walk out, calling and responding to each other.

We, Inga Margrete Aas and I, rehearsed extensively. We did not change anything; we adapted as we went along. We grew an awareness of our mutual movement, our mutual melody, and our physical proximity. Time and timing were both objectively flexible seen from a metronomic perspective but between us, timing became a stable immediateness.

(See [video example 8](#) and [score example 15](#))



(Photo: Signe Fuglesteg Luksengard)

Endings

I am writing this epilogue in the form of a letter addressed to my future self.

Affection

You have treated musicians as mechanical in the past. You have asked that they play your scored instructions precisely and flawlessly. You have explored their physicality to enhance motor impulses. You have invented new instrumental concepts to make them play in different postures with other limbs beside their hands. You have treated musicians as a straight line of identical blocks. You have written music by subduing the performers, closing off their ears and eyes. You have placed them in closed boxes and exposed them in their intimate vulnerability. You have demanded of them that they perform fragility.

Can affection, a heightened state of awareness for one another, emerge between those who take part in your music? Can your music become a moving into zones of contact between performers? Can touch be as much a touching as sound stimulus? Can your instruments be sentient beings?

Words⁸²

You have spoken about animals, about instruments, about music but have you changed the way you understand these words? Have you developed an alternative to the word ‘composition’? Have you developed concepts which entangle body and instrument? Have non-human creatures become more than study objects in your language? Have you moved closer to the world in how you address it?

Can you speak differently? Can you respond differently? Do you perceive signs as more than messages? Can you perceive modes of expression beyond their functionality? Can you speak in ways that create, rather than delineate? Are your words inclusive? Can you hear voices and not animals?

Technology

You have asked how you would make music if the world broke down. If there was no electricity, no precision tools, no synthetic materials to make instruments with. No interior spaces to work in, no tables to work by, no chairs to sit in. If there was no paper to write on, no recording devices to demonstrate with. You have asked how you would write music if technical societies would vanish, and your music would disappear after every performance.

⁸² My external mentor throughout the last three years, Andreas Vermehren Holm, has asked how to lessen the effect of blindness in our words. His words have inspired mine here.

Can you make music in which instruments and memory grow from a common shared existence? Can you make technical constructions that are open and shared, rather than hyper-refined and closed off? Can you make music that builds living memory?

Music

You have worked with attributes of music that did not change regardless of your context. You have sought to attune bodies to a regular pulse, you have sought clear phrasing, discernable melodic contour and concise boundaries of form. You have persisted in thinking instrumentally. You have produced works of normalized longevity. You have persisted in using certain inherited modes of thinking, in spite of your ambitions to distance yourself from that those.

Can you grasp your own boundaries more clearly? Can you see their parallel with other boundaries more clearly? Can you resonate with other boundaries through your own?

Part II

Post-reflection disclaimer

..... : why
do you treasure your voice
when to be one thing
is to be next to nothing?
- Louise Glück, *Wild Iris* (1992)

This Part II is written some time after my initial reflection text which is now Part I. It is an attempt to shed light on less illuminated aspects in my original exposition.

Adorno writes in *Minima Moralia* that “[c]ognizing involves [...] a network of prejudices, intuitions, innervations, self-corrections, assumptions and exaggerations, in short in dense, grounded experience, which is by no means transparent in all places.”⁸³ For me, the promise of artistic research lies in an iterative approach that allows the network Adorno describes to exist openly. That is to say, the steps I take in my investigations leave traces, and I am able to retrace them even if they are considered missteps further down the path. In documenting my trajectory, I do not necessarily believe in the relevance of accounting for every detail, but I do find it important to document conflicts and areas of ambivalence. My project was full of them, and they drove me to revise endlessly. That is the condition that I attempt to show; my colleagues and I have spent the vast majority of our time working with materials that did not yet speak. When the contours of a voice finally appeared, who among us can truly say that we understood why it emerged?

My time at the Norwegian Academy of Music was thankfully not characterized by the political expectation for artistic research to produce clear, tangible results in the name of social progress, though the expectation nevertheless hangs over the heads of all those who undertake such research. I do not believe that music can produce sociopolitical progress on its own, but I do believe it can reproduce, anew in every instance, a state of humility and de-subjectification that bring someone and something closer together. Artistic research in music attempts to describe the methodologies through which to achieve that state, and failures are particularly enlightening in that regard.

I believe artistic knowledge production in my own part of the world, Scandinavia, should be reformulated with, or countered by, modes of caring and co-existing within and across species. For me, caring does not mean “peace, love, and harmony.” It is not an affectionate multitude of species living in close proximity, it is not necessarily cross-species understanding, and it does not mean peaceful human custodianship over the earth. Caring means that multiple life-worlds live

⁸³ Adorno, Theodor W. *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*. 2010: London: Verso.

alongside each other with potential points of contact and potential exchange of signs. It means that the all-pervasive, dominant force of the human species, particularly within capitalistic societies, should impose limitations on its geopolitical activities and embrace the world as inhabited by interrelated parts that cannot be conjoined into one global narrative. The steps I have taken in the past three years, many of them clumsy and awkward and doubtlessly guided by numerous misconceptions, comprise an iterative trajectory of my attempt to embody a self-reflective humility that might resonate with others.

The chapters of this second part are as follows: In the (second version) prologue, I attempt to pin down my overall aspirations for this research project. In “Contexts, positions, extended-isms and post-isms,” I provide a brief musical-historical context encompassing three generations, placing myself in between three older and two younger composers. In “Theoretical discussions” I attempt to establish the overall contours of my theoretical framework and illuminate some of the problems I faced.

Post-reflection prologue

I am not like you, I have only
my body for a voice; I can't
disappear into silence—

- Louise Glück, *Wild Iris* (1992)

In this project, I have researched how the creation and performance of music can be a tool for investigating our relationships to specific nonhuman creatures. Through close observation of animals and performers, I sought to understand how non-human creatures' corporeality and behavior could point me in new compositional directions, I envisioned a process in which I sustained a continuous dialogue between my usual musical imagination and the creative impulses I felt upon observing the apparent musicality of un-graspable, un-translatable, live-worlds: the repetitive signals that seem regular though not regulated, the movements that appear to have musical intent yet lack sound, the closely positioned bodies grooming one another like musicians playing melodies with care. There was a fine line between retaining these elements as they appear before us and uncovering the musicality that I observed within them. The performance was not important in this process, nor were the notated scores or any other finalized product; the ongoing negotiation was what mattered, the continuous re-making of parts.

I understood that such a dialogue would force me to seek out the limits of my musicality and to change my relation to the field of music at large. As a Western composer whose work over almost two decades has been created mainly within a European contemporary music context, I have ingrained notions of music and performance very much shaped by my cultural background. The naïve assumption that one can change anything from within a field without saying goodbye to its most obvious darlings faltered as my work evolved, and, after three years of research, I realized that it was beyond my capabilities to move entirely beyond the norms of Western music performance. I adhered to the time-honored stage-audience bind, to standard durations from two to twelve minutes per work, to maintaining authorship, and to composition that was, for the most part, carefully pre-structured.

At the same time, it felt increasingly fake to attempt to rid myself of my background. In a television interview, the Danish witch Dannie Druehyld⁸⁴ once described one of the rites she held most dear: going into the forest and sitting the entire night in silence, waiting for the animal spirit to visit her. The moment it appeared would always be unexpected and shocking. I have gone into Nordmarka, the forest north of Oslo, with my self-made bird beak and swan wings, to improvise freely with no spectators. Nothing came to me. But while on stage, in a

⁸⁴ Danny Druehyld lived most of her life in Rold forest in Jutland, Denmark. Her book *Handbook of the witch* was published in 1987. She died on May 3rd, 2021.

situation so familiar to me, I have felt an unexpected precariousness. The swan wings felt foreign, and yet imbued with some kind of intimate presence. Dannie Druehyld, at home in Rold forest, was able to experience encounters there that others would not; for the past twenty years, my own Rold forest has been the stage—which, as I see it, is as close to a real home as it gets.

My new paradigms were established in the creative process. The non-human living creatures that so captivated me inspired me towards a search for the border between a physical behavioral existence and music. I listened differently to the non-human being towards the end of my research than I had in the beginning, and I attempted to bring that listening into the music as music itself. In other words, the practice of listening to identifiable, analyzable, musical parameters was one I attempted to substitute with a listening that enters into engagement with a bodily totality, bringing the effort of movement, or the contact of touch, into experience as much as sounding elements.

Inseparable from this development was an increased listening awareness of the specific performative body. Rather than viewing the musician as a representative of musicians at large—a tendency that characterized my previous work to some extent—I began working very specifically with the bodies of individual musicians in Oslo, discussing with them the potential and constraints of wearing foreign limbs. The composer-performer relation in my project was not an outspoken theme when I arrived in Oslo, but it became central rather quickly. My collaborations with Ane Marthe Sørlien Holen, Ellen Ugelvik, Inga Margrete Aas and Jennifer Torrence did not move towards co-creation, but the musical work was essentially in them as specific performers. The work did not become an abstract piece with reproducible ideas, but was an “ontological choreography,” as Donna Haraway would say—inscribed in movement, touch and sound, assembled in processes over time. How the performers wore appendages, moved with them and with each other—those were my compositional tools. There are uncomfortable connotations of control and power in describing a practice as a “composing with bodies,” as well as a complex ethical dimension inherent in retaining a subjective position of authorship in relation to these bodies, and it is the case that I have not attempted to “incorporate an authentic bodily position of another,” to quote Jennifer Torrence in conversation. Trust and friendship ultimately allowed me to carry out this work with my collaborators.⁸⁵ I was changed from my involvement with them, I am a different composer from their engagement, and I would be pleased to know if they changed too but that assessment would have to come from them.

As some kind of Potnia Theron sculpture from the distant past, facilitating (as well as opposing?) a mediation between human and non-human bodies and body parts, stood the instrument.

⁸⁵ It should be noted here that the four main collaborators have been asked if they would like a personal account of their perspective on the nature of our collaboration. They have declined that proposal.

Indeed, I wanted to see how far I could go in blurring the distinction between instrument and body part. It became evident, however, that I could not help but to compromise in that search, for it seemed to me that the physical presence instruments take away from the body as their mechanical intricacy grows enables musical distinction in the form of clear pitch and other controllable parameters. Sometimes objects offer themselves as gifts that cannot be declined, like flat hand-cymbals that happen to fit perfectly on cheeks. I did not take these bells for granted, but I saw no sense in modifying their existence either. Instruments and music-technology are easily the most transforming paradigm in contemporary music, composers seek instrumental novelty like multinational franchises mine for copper and gold, but despite the time and efforts I have invested in them, and despite my stated aim to make them corporeal and distinct from tools, they should be allowed to just be sometimes.

I hope to have arrived somewhere near a musical domain that balances the forces described above. I hope the music that I and my esteemed collaborators made towards the end of the research period is anything but autonomous-sounding gestures, that it is experienced as carried by multiple agents. I hope that we became opaque yet specific by virtue of an entanglement with encounters that were imaginary yet present.

Contexts, positions, extended-isms and post-isms

The light has changed;
middle C is tuned darker now.
And the songs of morning sound over-rehearsed.
- Louise Glück, *Averno* (2006)

1.

For my generation of composition students entering the conservatory in Copenhagen in 2002, instrumental technique was paramount. The German composer Helmut Lachenmann wrote in 1996 that “composing is: building an instrument”⁸⁶, which implies that musical ideas and compositional strategies arise alongside developing a framework for one’s instrumental conceptions. Lachenmann greatly expanded the manner of playing on traditional instruments, using sonic potential available through unconventional playing techniques, to achieve a sound world he described as “musique concrete instrumentale.”⁸⁷ The listening act becomes as important in this approach as the sounding result. Lachenmann stressed how sounds are not only chosen for their own sake, but also for their ability to expose the conditions under which they are produced: their materiality, the effort to bring them forth, the movement of the performer, the resistance or difficulty in achieving a particular resonance.

In the 1970s and 80s, the composer Salvatore Sciarrino, developed another sounding instrumental approach with unconventional playing techniques, characterized by silence and minimal sound phenomena with a vague, fleeting quality. A small nucleus of specific techniques makes up the core of each instrument’s playing, almost devoid of any traditional modes of sound production, to the extent that a completely new instrument appears.⁸⁸ As he has described, Sciarrino has sought to achieve an “ecology of listening,” attempting to establish heightened perceptiveness in our listening as a resistance to our noise-ridden industrial surroundings:

”First quietness. Then sound, like the breath of the silence [...] Hence accustoming the ear to the imperceptible. The pianissimos that I require have to be placed at the limit of what man is really able to hear. While we are listening we become uncertain: something is coming, but what? Does the sound exist or not yet? The sonorous transfiguration of the indistinct produces the most anxious of magics, no longer being able to distinguish between presence and absence.”⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Lachenmann, Helmut: “Über das Komponieren.” In *Musik als existentielle Erfahrung: Schriften 1966-1995*. Wiesbaden: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1996.

⁸⁷ One particular enlightening piece for me to discover was *Pression* (1969/rev. 2010) for solo cello.

⁸⁸ See for instance *Sei Capricci* (1976) for solo violin, or the ensemble piece *Lo Spacio Inverso* (1985).

⁸⁹ Quoted from Vinay, Gianfranco, “Le carte da suono di Salvatore Sciarrino.” Introduction to Sciarrino 2001, xvii-xxxii.

Both Lachenmann and Sciarrino describe their musical thinking as an extension of tradition, but by no means a break from it. They seek to renew our listening sensitivity in instrumental composition by broadening the horizon of what an instrument can do. Their work thus allows an enhanced presence of various extra-musical elements, such as the body and effort of the musician, the relation between playing and choreographed movement⁹⁰, silence or near-silence, and noise and extreme registers. Those enhancements—the by-products of instrumental extension, so to speak—became a starting point for a number of composers, myself included. Some believed that they could continue extending instrumental idioms by bringing together a catalogue of elements such as new playing techniques, electronic sound, unconventional instruments and objects. Others came to feel that extension was becoming exhausted as tool, opting to find strategies to break away entirely from the complacency of being linked to tradition yet comfortably (rhetorically) distanced from it. I myself felt an imperative to invent new instrumental practices from scratch.

One factor that sets my generation apart from that of Lachenmann and Sciarrino is the growing presence of music technology. Amplification, live manipulation of sound, coding in programming environments and incorporation of trans-medial (video) tools have become mainstream. For my generation in Denmark, though, it posed a problem: should one subscribe to the techno-optimistic narrative that proliferated in the early 2000s, which posed technology as a path towards richer, more plentiful creativity? That it was yet another extension in the western musical narrative, one that enabled us keep composing more or less as usual, only with more dispersed means? Or did technological constructs press on a new type of musical thinking, one that would potentially change the practice of composition? Was there a cyborgian future before us where instruments, loudspeakers, musicians and laptops, the stage, and physical space are all inseparable agents in a collaborative narrative? And would that future render the traditional composer idiom obsolete? As Donna Haraway writes in her “Cyborg Manifesto”:

Late twentieth-century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines. Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert.⁹¹

For me, the notion of extended composition seemed hollow if one was merely going to consider new instrumental playing techniques and electronics as additions to a preexisting toolbox. It seemed more rewarding to start all over again from the beginning by renegotiating one’s relationship to technology and instruments. How to let oneself be redefined in, and by,

⁹⁰ Choreographer Xavier Le Roy has worked with enhancing the choreographical aspects of Lachenmann’s guitar duo *Salut für Caudwell* (1977) in “Mouvements für Lachenmann” (2005) and “More Mouvements für Lachenmann” (2008).

⁹¹ Haraway, J. Donna. “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* 1991: New York: Routledge, 149-181.

one's surroundings, rather than to seek the means to reproduce one-self with one's surroundings? In her vision of a cyborg future, Haraway writes (emphasis mine):

In the traditions of 'Western' science and politics – the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the production of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflection of the other – relation between organism and machine has been a border war. The stakes in the border war have been the territories of production, reproduction, and imagination.⁹²

I found an eye-opening perspective in the work of the American composer Maryanne Amacher. Amacher, as it seems to me, did not conceive of technology as a surplus, nor as a way to extend her control as a composer. Rather, she immersed herself completely in it and found new forms of listening, new modalities of acoustic ecology and new capacities and limitations of the human body. Amacher was interested in sound's physicality, and consequently how to extend the limits of hearing. Through her use of otoacoustical phenomena (the sounds that arise in our inner ear, perceived often as beatings, when two sinusoidal frequencies are placed close to each other in a particular manner), the human ear becomes a loudspeaker as much as a passive recipient of sound.⁹³ Amacher also explored how placement of speakers and live-transmission of sound could be used to orchestrate and enhance our perception of space and distance. In her series *Music for Sound-Joined Rooms*, she explored sound as a living part of space, arranging loudspeakers in positions that would allow sound to pass through solid mediums (floors, walls, etc.). As one moved through the installation, one would take part in what Amacher called a "sonic choreography." In her own words:

Creating the detailed sound design is very much like scripting a sonic choreography. In some episodes sound sweeps through the rooms; in others, chords and tonalities are intricately joined between the rooms; in still others, a particular sound shape is emphasized to animate sonic imaging of a distant room. The rooms themselves become speakers producing sound which is felt throughout the body as well as heard.⁹⁴

In a sense, technology in Amacher's work is as much a source to listen to in itself as it is a mediating object. She exposed possibilities in the human body by treating technology as a body in itself, and her work methodology is known to have involved slow and careful listening to minute differences and details.⁹⁵

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ See for instance the album "Sound Characters (Making the third Ear)" (1999).

⁹⁴ See her artist statement from 1998: <https://www.foundationforcontemporaryarts.org/recipients/maryanne-amacher/>

⁹⁵ See bio on the Maryanne Amacher Foundation website: <https://www.blankforms.org/the-maryanne-amacher-foundation#her-work>

Revitalization of the listening act connects the efforts of many instrumental and electronic music creators in the 20th century. How to expose how it is brought forth? How to move towards its boundaries, how to reformulate its territory? From Lachenmann, Sciarrino, Amacher and others, I inherited a fascination with physicality, with the machinic (that is, technology in itself), and with the problem of what an instrument was, is, and could be. These elements slowly drew me towards the non-human creature's musical presence as a way to bring music closer to the body.

2.

Ten or so years ago, in the pursuit of new instrumental practices, I began making mechanical constructions. My ambition was to circumvent a skilled musician's control by establishing a dialogue between musicianship, body, and instrument. I made constructs based around light formations (the work *e* (2014-2017)), fast spinning motors (*H* (2014-2017)), and string connections (*Marionette Piece* (2015)). In these attempts, traditional musicianship is greatly subdued. A subdued and restricted musician was part of a vision to move control away from the human and onto the mechanical realm, as well as to establish a sense of fragility, of being exposed.

Alongside these endeavors, I became increasingly interested in thinking of singular body parts as instruments. In *Monodactyl* (2017), I treated the human hand as having only one limp (as opposed to our actual pentadactylic hand), and, in *Dreamwork* (2018), four musicians play with fingers that are extended 50 cm with carbon square tubes.

Various influences heightened my awareness of the kinship between the kind of performative presence I desired and the musicality of specific non-human creatures. Through the growing environmental movement in Denmark, my generation came to realize the unnerving fact that a scarce 0.5 % of Denmark's total area is wild and protected from human interference. The butterflies, frogs, pigeons, bees, seagulls, foxes and hedgehogs that populate my usual environment all started to testify to an incredible lack of attention. I felt a sense of kinship emerge with these fragile bodies and the extended body parts I was using in my work.

I sought to encounter artistic work focused on the lives of other species. Knud Viktor, a Danish artist who lived for most of his life in France, was a revelation.⁹⁶ Recording minute details of sound phenomena amongst the living creatures on his property, such as a worm gnawing an apple, a snail eating a leaf, ants spraying acid, and wine flies in courtship song, Viktor attempted to work towards an ecology of listening that balanced his own artistic vision with the voices of

⁹⁶ Information about Knud Viktor's work is still in want of dissemination. For the French reader, I refer to the biography on Wikipedia: https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knud_Viktor. For Scandinavian readers I refer to the following article: <https://seismograf.org/knud-viktor-sonisk-seismograf-og-lydlig-buddhist>

other lives. Sometimes he left recordings unaltered, sometimes he edited them. The result exhibits the attempt, and struggle, to portray an untranslatable reality.

Another inspiration was contemporary dance. I wanted to gain distance from instruments and towards the body (which I describe further in Part 1), and, in 2011, I had the opportunity to explore such notions as a mentee of the dance maker and thinker Robert Steijn.⁹⁷ We spent a weeklong workshop in a forest embarking on practices such as what Robert called the “Deer Dance,” in which one attempts to channel the energy of a deer through one's own movements. Impossible as that endeavor may seem, it embraces figures of the imagination that connect untranslatable realities, and one can perhaps sense how I found it stimulating to observe, as I walked around in a forest pointing my index-fingers from my forehead as antlers, our frail existence when it is displaced ever so slightly away from urban normalcy.

I felt a desire to deepen my relationship to the non-human, non-domesticated, living worlds around me, and I began to envision the seeming musical behavior of certain creatures as realities in a kind of science-fiction world, unreachable yet full of signs (these would initially include mainly the species in my immediate surroundings; pigeons, frogs, butterflies, spiders, etc.). Instruments that grew out of body parts, technical constructs as appendages to the body, liminal modes of listening (near-silence), and music as behavior all came together in a project informed by specific animal creatures.

3.

To illuminate how vulnerability, the performative body, and listening have developed over three generations, I would like to briefly highlight the work of two composers in the generation following my own.

Marcela Lucatelli is an improviser, composer and voice artist born in Brazil and living in Copenhagen. Her work is multifaceted and very broad, depending on collaborators and context, but central to her own practice is her voice, which she performs with both in a solo capacity and with musicians. Lucatelli's performative voice, as it seems to me, is transgressive, both in relation to listeners and in relation to her own body. By embodying enormous contrasts that always stand in close proximity in time, such as aggression and faint tenderness, mechanic noise as well as spoken and sung utterances, Lucatelli's physicality is consumed by a constant urge to disappear into her voice and be un-done and re-done incessantly. Nothing is allowed to rest and be identified. There are no instruments in her solo act, no transitional objects that dialogue with tradition nor future. Lucatelli's voice is the ever fluctuating present.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ <https://www.parts.be/teacher/robert-steijn>

⁹⁸ See for Lucatelli's website for video material. For instance: <https://www.marcelalucatelli.co/magician>

Alexandra Hallén is a composer and musician born in Sweden and living in Copenhagen. Her work both as creator and performer spans a number of approaches and ideas that explore the boundary spaces in herself and in relation to an audience. Central to part of her work is to situate the body in a precarious and passive state, and to follow it along its trajectory towards an ever more exposed and vulnerable place. In her work *With Ice and Instruments* (2019)⁹⁹, Hallén and Johannes Feuchter sit next to each other half-naked while a third person strokes their bodies with ice cubes. We follow how they begin to shake and tremor when the ice cubes are moved across their skin. A similar concept takes place in her performance *Tviolaren*¹⁰⁰, where two persons with close up video filming of their faces are tickled by a third person who sings gently. We follow their weird and slightly desperate states of being tickled with no option to escape, to the extent that the situation becomes uncanny and strangely intimate.

For Lachenmann and Sciarrino, fragility and listening arise in relation to an external object, a traditional or un-traditional instrument. Fragility occurs in the attempt to master that which cannot be entirely mastered, exposing the effort and the resistance of trying. Traces of compositional history shine through these composers' works, but their use of unconventional playing techniques creates an alienating distance from the past. Lucatelli and Hallén need no instruments (although they do use any object or traditional instrument according to context), their bodies are the surface on which their work is inscribed, and their creational identity is not affirmed as an extension from tradition, but rather in constant negotiation with themselves: there would seem to be no prefabricated subjects or objects in their performative presence, only what I believe Judith Butler would call "contingent foundations"; a number of agencies and relationships continuously inscribed on the surface of the body. In "Giving an Account of Oneself" (2005), Butler writes:

Before the Other one cannot give an account of the "I" who had been trying all along to give an account of itself. And so there is a certain humility that must emerge in this process, perhaps also a certain knowingness about the limits of what there is to know.¹⁰¹

Music can be a medium for investigating this opaque self. By exposing the inside, or the surface, of the body to various stimuli, and responding with fragments of musical, or near-musical, gestures, a constant flow between interiority and exteriority reduces the coherence of an organized self on stage. It is enlightening to see how the boundary of the performative body changes in works by Lucatelli and Hallén in comparison to mine. While I have not transgressed beyond the skin, Lucatelli and Hallén wants to go deeper; they want to penetrate the skin and

⁹⁹ See the performance on youtube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4hB3d3yzDxo>

¹⁰⁰ See a trailer of the performance here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRW0QxdF8ww>

¹⁰¹ Butler, Judith. *Giving an Account of Oneself*. 2005: Ashland, Ohio: Fordham University Press.

go inside. Lucatelli has used her mouth (food and liquids) and vaginal opening (placement of a contact microphone) to provoke uncontrolled reactions, which she makes obvious through motion and sound, and Hallén documents the body when it is forced to endure stimulation without any means of escape.

In this research project, I still carry traces of instruments and direct musical gestures that refer to a traditional musical territory in some sense, however remote. These remnants stand at a distance both to Lachenmann and Sciarrino, but also to Lucatelli and Hallén in the way I conceive of the body. My appearance on stage, my musicality, and my attempt to acknowledge other non-human species' corporeality in myself are all negotiated in my work, but not my own self—I uphold the distinction between my own “I” and the performative “I”. I do not penetrate my skin, and I still hold on to some remote sense of the instrument as an external transitional object.

4.

Composers and musicians have been keen on using notions of extendedness and post-isms to describe their practice and its distance to tradition. In percussionist Håkon Stene's oft-cited PhD project “This is Not a Drum,” Stene contextualizes the terms post-instrumentalism and post-percussionism thus:

Percussionists are like nomadic gatherers, and since the birth of our genre there has been an ongoing search for musical potential in all sorts of sonic material. In this sense, *This is Not a Drum* does not change much. What may change, perhaps, with the crossing of boundaries into other practices, is the answer to the question whether it is still relevant to label myself “percussionist” within a weirdly mutating practice, where striking is hardly involved, where the instruments themselves are not traditionally recognized as percussion, or whether it in fact deserves a brand new labeling. I propose calling these practices post-instrumental or post-percussive, suggesting something that comes at the end of a chain of mutational processes of an already hybrid and multi-directional practice: a musicianship that, departing from the domain of multi-tasking percussionists, further abandons its fundamental grammar, making its original characteristics practically unrecognizable.¹⁰²

Norwegian composer Henrik Hellstenius sets the stage for his research project “Extended Composition” thus: “In the sphere of contemporary composition, the material for composers and musicians is not only sound, but increasingly emphasizes movement and words.” According to Hellstenius, this poses a number of fundamental questions, such as: “What new strategies for composition and performance will have to be developed to master the multitude of sign systems emergent from music's expanded material array?”¹⁰³

¹⁰² Stene, Håkon. *This is not a Drum*. p. 12. PhD Thesis.

¹⁰³ Cited from the website of the project: <https://nmh.no/en/research/projects/extended-composition>

I do not contradict how elements of other artistic disciplines have found their way into contemporary music, and that percussionists are multifaceted musicians having to relate to a growing number of hybrid domains. What I would like to point out, however, is that the narrative of expansion—e.g. “expanded material array”—does not necessarily change the ontology of musicianship. In other words, musical practices do not necessarily change just because the domain is broader and more multi-directional. Musicians still count, they still rehearse, they still perform in one hundred festivals a year and need strict procedures of discipline and identifiable qualitative criteria to guide their learning curve in order to feel comfortable walking onto the stage night after night. Composers can compose for battery-driven drills like they would for a violin, they can write rhythmic sentences with words like they would develop a phrase, creating form and variety with repetition and difference in roughly the same manner as Beethoven, notating with the similar symbols (or making in-ear click tracks if reading from the score is impossible), making the performer jump on stage and roll sideways out and expecting their work to be identified, evaluated and applauded as theirs as always.

What I find much more interesting is the question of what remains when borders are extended. Adorno writes in *Minima Moralia* (quoted by Judith Butler in the aforementioned text *Giving an Account of Oneself*):

The value of a thought is measured by its distance from the continuity of the familiar. It is objectively devalued by the diminution of this distance; the more it approaches the previously established norms, the more its antithetical function disappears, and its claim is founded only in the latter, in the apparent relationship to its opposite, not in its isolated existence.¹⁰⁴

In the musical situation there are several directions away from, and towards the familiar. The notion of extension loses its relevance when one ponders on the nature of these directions. If one element moves away from the norm, towards unfamiliar territory, it's not certain that other aspects of the work does the same, perhaps even the contrary. To see a work as identified solely by the elements furthest away from the familiar is not productive, but to evaluate the interdependency of all components, and how they influence each other, is. Consider as an example one of the works that came out of Håkon Stene's research project, *Black Box Music* by Simon Steen-Andersen.¹⁰⁵ Through a large video screen, Stene's actions inside the black box become both that of a conductor and musician, like a puppeteer both moving his puppet's body and assembling that body's own self-commentary. The ensemble placed around the audience works with varying degrees of independence: sometimes they are led by the soloist, and sometimes there are breaches in the interaction pattern in which the musicians become more independent. In the third and final movement of the work, several mechanical objects take

¹⁰⁴ Adorno, Theodor. *Minima Moralia*, p. 80.

¹⁰⁵ Premiered in 2012 by Oslo Sinfonietta and Håkon Stene at the Darmstädter Ferienkurse.

shape within the black box, creating a rhythmic, cacophonous texture that the ensemble takes part in. The prominent overall elements of the work are then: a large scenographic scaffolding around the music (the black box and large video screen), playful patterns of interaction between soloist and ensemble (including the lack of the same), and a gradual disintegration of everything as the work concludes. While *Black Box Music* can certainly be analyzed from many angles, what I would like to point out is that Steen-Andersen balances the prominence of extra-musical forces with a musical discourse that is, mostly, rather simple. The opening of the 1st movement consists largely of a group of call-and response gestures initiated by the soloist, pedagogically building up our awareness of the interaction schemes that will later be broken down. The 2nd movement consists mainly of sustained tuning fork pitches, lightly supported by the ensemble. The 3rd movement, as mentioned, is one gradual building up of rhythmic density. Therefore, while the theatrical (and humorous) play with signification throughout the work is facilitated by a number of elements that extend the normal palette of compositional tools, the musical (sounding) flow is reduced to clear and easy-to-follow procedures that I don't believe the composer would have been content with had he focused purely on formalized sound. And in fact, if one would trace the development of the larger stage works of Steen-Andersen since *Black Box Music*, I believe one would find one general tendency: Ever greater scaffoldings, ever simpler music.

Another stage piece will briefly serve to contrast that of *Black Box Music*: a scenic composition entitled *Intervall* (2023) by the Oslo based percussion group Pinguins in collaboration with scenographer Kjersti Alm Eriksen.¹⁰⁶ *Intervall* is made up of one big construction with strings and objects hanging in and around it, including metal objects, small percussion instruments and two containers full of sunflower seeds. The three musicians stand at the edge of the construction, causing a number of sounding events to unfold by pulling, blowing and pushing objects around. Sometimes sounding events are very simple and static, sometimes a chaos of sound breaks out. While there has been a careful pre-performance planning of the overall span of *Intervall* through many rehearsals, the work is largely improvised. The three musicians are guided by the construction itself, what they can do in it and with it, and by a listening to each other. The musical result is not precise locally, the musicians cannot react in a split-second to each other, but they follow one another in the general contour of events, in the rising and falling intensity levels and in the duos and solos that happen by chance when objects run their own course. The main elements at work here are not as clear-cut as in *Black Box Music*. The function of the construction is not carefully built up, there are no clear and simple interaction patterns, there are no clear distinctions between the scaffold as instrument and as scaffold. What is at stake, as far as I am able to perceive, is a constant unfolding relation as the main strategy, between performers and the construction, and as an audience one is sucked in to that mode of listening.

¹⁰⁶ Premiered in 2023 at the Borealis Festival. See description and trailer on their website: <http://www.pinguins.no>, and in review in NY times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/22/arts/music/borealis-experimental-music-festival-norway.html>

But as a consequence, the entire performance takes on an ephemeral and illusive character. What exactly is guiding the performance, how exactly are they following each other, what exactly are we, the audience, supposed to listen for?

Again: numerous directions expand and contrast in relation to familiar notions. There are no unfamiliar elements in *Intervall*, they are all recognizable as belonging to the world of percussion, but they are arranged in space in a novel way which demands a twisted type of musicianship. While *Black Box Music* negotiates a simple (relatively speaking) music with unfamiliar objects, Pinguins and Kjersti Alm Eriskén negotiates an unfamiliar way of playing with displaced yet familiar objects. Both stage-works are enriching, in my opinion, because they take nothing for granted. They negotiate and balance different directions of movements, they do not extend or abandon (in the sense of being “post”) anything.

It is likely that Western contemporary music has moved beyond the era of extended-isms by now, and that this discussion is outdated. But it was a prominent concept when I entered conservatory, and I believe one of the inner motivations for this research project was to formulate a way to move away from it. My hesitation in using concepts such as “extended practice” and “post-instrumentalism” is that they can become an excuse to reproduce inherited ways of working and producing. Composers and musicians clothe themselves in new objects and practices without allowing these any agency.¹⁰⁷ My question is: How can we be affected? How can we allow material to take hold of us? How to move away from the identifiable, yet towards specificity, and rendering that becoming visible?

¹⁰⁷ Håkon Stene will hopefully allow me to cite his remark in response to having to perform my Swann piece (elaborated on in Part 1): “Simon, I am just a percussionist.”

Theoretical discussions

Far, far away I heard cowbells
crossing the meadow.
The night grew quiet in its way.
I sensed the vanished words
lying with their companions,
like fragments of an unclaimed biography.
- Louise Glück, *Faithful and virtuous night* (2014)

The theoretical basis of my research has included many sources in addition to philosophical theory, including poetry and ethnomusicological texts. In this chapter I am focusing mainly on theory and poetry, for while music theory and ethnomusicology has been part of my field of inquiry they remain more remote topics.¹⁰⁸

1.

I feel a strong affinity with the trajectory of Donna Haraway's thinking, from her writings on cyborgs in "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1986) to her concept of "naturecultures" in the "The Companion Species Manifesto" (2003) to the "Chthulucene" in "Staying with the Trouble" (2016). Across her work is a search for ways to think and live within contradictions and establish coalitions and kinship while embracing hybridity. In the image of the cyborg, the machinic was one active component that blurred the distinction between the organic and in-organic through such fields as microelectronics and genetic engineering. While the cybernetic organism grew out of the space race in the 60s as part of an imperialist techno-human vision, within a feminist context the techno-sciences nevertheless held the potential for a new social reality ("one that was never more acute") that opposed patriarchal and colonial methods of control and domination:

From one perspective, a cyborg world is about the final imposition of a grid of control on the plant, about the final abstraction embodied in a Star war apocalypse, waged in the name of defense, about the final appropriation of woman's bodies in a masculinist orgy of war (Sofia, 1984). From another perspective, a cyborg world might be about lived

¹⁰⁸ My interest in sources that described Indigenous ways of living, especially Indigenous perspectives on music and non-human creatures, led me to *The Falling Sky* (2010), recounting the words and life story of Yanomami Shaman Davi Kopenawa, along with various other texts that described different Indigenous modes of listening. I was a guest in reading those depictions and listening to recordings, and the inspiration was about a search for a heightened sense of being in a relationship with one's surroundings, nurtured by a search for ways to enhance listening sensitivity and made manifest in how one makes music. With regard to ethnomusicology, I have been reading both about musical cultures in Indigenous communities as well as critical theory within Indigenous sound studies. Dylan Robinson's "Hungry Listening - Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies", Kofi Agawu's "The African Imagination in Music", and Shawn Wilson's "Research is Ceremony - Indigenous Research Methods" have greatly helped to broaden my understanding. The topic is nevertheless so vast and complex that I have chosen not to pursue it further in this text.

social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints.¹⁰⁹

During roughly six years of producing machinic constructions (2012-2018), my idea was to subdue the musician by quieting their trained virtuosity, and loosen instruments from the grip of human mechanistic control. I was not familiar with Haraway's perspective at the time, but I believe my search for ways to lessen control in the machine-human constellation was akin to a staging of contradicting bodies that, indeed remotely, resonates with the cyborgian figure.

But this project ran out of steam for me. Technologies for building things was becoming more and more available, software became more and more user-friendly (and restrictive), and DIY aesthetics moved from peoples living rooms or workshops into maker spaces with 3D printers, laser cutters, and product designers. Building became standardized and therefore less attractive to think inventively through.

In "The Companion Species Manifesto," published some years following "The Cyborg Manifesto," Haraway applies her thinking towards our relationships with other living beings. She writes: "Earth's beings are prehensile, opportunistic, ready to yoke unlikely partners into something new, something symbiogenetic. Co-constitutive companion species and co-evolution are the rule, not the exception."¹¹⁰ The many stories in one such co-evolution, including that between dogs and people, resist broad categories and advocate for us to "live within" the specific, messy, tangible narrative.

I live in a household with a dog, Frida. We meet every morning in the garden. Sometimes we exchange various tokens of appreciation and play, though sometimes she ignores my presence entirely on her sniffing route. I don't pretend to really know her, but there are many patterns that I feel are somewhat consistent and that shift daily by slight degrees, such as when she starts to dig in the grass right next to me, or when she brings a wooden stick but won't let me grab it from her mouth until I ignore her. I do not feel entangled with her, admittedly. But, if we had more time, ideally over her entire life had it been possible (she is already 10 years old), I'm pretty sure we could begin to narrate our relationship differently: less precisely and more immediately, with less distance, with less self-consciousness, and perhaps indeed our life would be different. As Haraway writes: "Dogs are not surrogates for theory; they are not here just to think with. They are here to live with."¹¹¹ But what about non-domesticated creatures, which strive to persist in spite of human activities? Should I not relate to them from a distance, and

¹⁰⁹ Haraway, J. Donna. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century", in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The reinvention of Nature*. 1991: New York: Routledge.

¹¹⁰ Haraway, J. Donna. *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Chicago, Illinois: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

only through the brief moments of crossing paths? How can I treat those encounters as constitutive of a “living with”?

Haraway points out that the Anthropocene—a geological term that projects humans as a geological, planet-altering, force—has become too big a notion to grapple with, too flawed with human exceptionalism, too cynical with self-fulfilling predictions. In response, she has invented the word Chthulucene:

In the tasks of thinking, figuring, and storytelling, the spider of my first pages, Pimoya chthulhu, allies with the decidedly nonvertebrate critters of the seas. Corals align with octopuses, squids, and cuttlefish. Octopuses are called spiders of the seas, not only for their tentacularity, but also for their predatory habits. The tentacular chthonic ones have to eat; they are at table, cum panis, companion species of terra. They are good figures for the luring, beckoning, gorgeous, finite, dangerous precarities of the Chthulucene. This Chthulucene is neither sacred nor secular; this earthly worlding is thoroughly terran, muddled, and mortal—and at stake now.¹¹²

I interpret Haraway's thinking as an imperative that the stories I narrate should be real and present, of flesh and blood, that becoming should be a becoming WITH. I want to move out of the city and into some (non-existent) forest in Denmark when I read her, I want to make my life inhabitable, to open my windows and let the mosquitos sing me to sleep. But when making music, I have also felt a need to put all of these fervid wishes aside. It's very difficult to think and live ethically while trying to feel what works and what does not in musical terms. I do not wish to uphold some binary between life and art, but there are so many directions to listen for, so many materials whose weight to feel, in one musical instant. References pull away and towards the familiar, as Adorno noted, and my own references undoubtedly reveal their ingrained patterns of creation. The balancing act then, being aware of it when I put some distance to the ideologies that I subscribe to, trying to remain within a thinking WITH as long as possible, that has been the trouble and potential of Haraway for me.

2.

Not long ago, I went on a walk after having performed an improvised solo version of *Animalia II* (the butterfly iteration, as described in Part 1). A butterfly landed right in front of me, sitting in the sun and moving its wings slowly as I had in the beginning of the performance. I felt an affinity—not with the butterfly itself, but rather with the unforeseeable circumstances that flowed into those few seconds. Artistically speaking, I am much more sensitive to that encounter than to my morning meetings with Frida. I am enraptured by that fleeting instant when something seems to connect or align or become infiltrated. Hence why I have found the various becomings of Deleuze and Guattari to be so inspirational: they describe the interaction of flows,

¹¹² Haraway, J. Donna. *Staying with the Trouble: Making in Kin in the, Chthulucene*, ch. 2. 2016: Duke University Press.

movements, intensities, and fragments as an alternative to binary opposites and clear boundaries.

The at times bewildering description of these becomings—becoming animal, becoming woman, becoming imperceptible—is partly the reason they have ignited so many ideas in me. There are many moments when reading *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) where images that are weirdly present yet unclear replace distinct understanding. I am aware of some the critical objections to these concepts, and they are in part relevant to extend to my work also. Haraway coins that critique well when claiming that it is not enough to theorize human and non-human relations; one must lead a life inside that relation. Elizabeth Grosz, in her book “Volatile Bodies – towards a corporeal feminism” (1994), criticizes the concept of becoming-woman, which is explained by Deleuze and Guattari as the becoming through which all other becomings are made possible (“Although all becomings are already molecular, including becoming-woman, it must be said that all becomings begin with and pass through becoming-woman”¹¹³). She writes:

[...], Deleuze and Guattari’s frameworks inevitably fall prey to their own criticisms (this of course is not a claim made only with reference to rhizomatics, but is probably emblematic of “the postmodern condition” insofar as all critiques succumb to what it is that they criticize), insofar as they deterritorialize women’s bodies and subjectivities only to reterritorialize them as part of a more universalist movement of becoming. In short, the relation between “being” (in all its ambiguities and impossibilities) and becoming is obscured; until it becomes clearer what becoming-woman means for those beings who are women, as well as for those who are men, the value of their work for women and for feminism remains unclear.¹¹⁴

This relation between being and becoming is certainly not a problem that has found its resolution in my project either. As I have admitted previously, several dualities still have some tangible presence in spite of my ambition to blur their distinction (instrument vs. body part, composer and performer, defined work vs. process). One can get the impression that the different becomings of Deleuze and Guattari are affirming a comfortable distance to the problems I pose, that I clothe myself in their complexity of language and their active affirmative conceptions. Nevertheless, I find it fascinating to read their description of the body as a discontinuous, nontotalizable series of processes, and their use of concepts such as territory, song (refrain) and animal behavior in describing “lines of flight” in ways that produce a musical-creative reflection. The musical connotations that abound in Deleuze and Guattari’s writing are stimulating in their own right. Song (refrain) is conceived as a temporary territorial organization and demarcation, rhythm is conceived as that which exists in between different milieus – in between the territories of humans and non-humans, in-between boundary and chaos:

¹¹³ Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 277.

¹¹⁴ Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*. p. 182. 1994: Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Between night and day, between that which is constructed and that which grows naturally, between mutations from the inorganic to the organic, from plant to animal, from animal to humankind, yet without this series constituting a progression [...] In this in-between, chaos becomes rhythm, not inexorably, but it has a chance to. Chaos is not the opposite of rhythm but the milieu of all milieus.¹¹⁵

Rhythm has been one of my most significant compositional problems in this project. Per Deleuze and Guattari, my approach has existed somewhere between chaos and bounded rhythm (Curt Sachs's "finer rhythms"), between a closed structure and an open one that is always on its way to something else. Rhythm can be "entered": it can be in the body and it can go outside and into other bodies, it can stretch out of itself (dissipating into unmeasured-ness) and become inaudible, yet present (like frequencies below 20 Hz), it can grow so dense as to enter into different perceptual domains (light). A living musical creature can be said to be constituted by an interior milieu that emits rhythmic signs, and is in turn affected by exterior stimulus, and in between is a porous intermediary membrane. It is that membrane that I have sought to make visible in music: the fragile internal rhythms that draw continuously (especially in *Animalia* iterations where there are more than one performer) from new exterior stimuli. Repetition is not foreign to this, distinct rhythmic character neither. What drives repetition forward however, is a continuous contextualization.

With regard to the concept of becoming-animal, an example is given in *A Thousand Plateaus*:

An example: Do not imitate a dog, but make sure your organism enters into composition with *something else* in such a way, that the particles emitted from the aggregate thus composed will be canine as a function of the relations of movement and rest, or of molecular proximity, into which they enter. Clearly, this something else can be quite varied, and be more or less directly related to the animal in question: it can be the animal's natural food (dirt and worm), or its exterior relations with other animals (you can become-dog with cats, or become-monkey with a horse), or an apparatus or prosthesis to which a person subjects the animal (muzzle or reindeer, etc.), or something that does not have a localizable relation to the animal in question...¹¹⁶

How did I "enter into composition" with the butterfly I encountered on my path? The movement and rest of its wings sparked an affinity with my arms, which, placed around my chest, caused my imagination to move closer to that affinity and imagine a correspondence. But there are many details in that moment that do not necessarily correspond with one unifying impression. I am sensing sound in the butterfly (perhaps the sound of its wings) without actually hearing anything, and I am sensing a desire to fly away (in both of us) without any signs of such desire. I am sensing a relation to air (how to move in, and be moved by it) and I am sensing a

¹¹⁵ Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 313.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 247.

play with gravity as the butterfly stays on the tip of a grass straw, one in which I would like to participate by becoming feather-light. There is a multitude of assemblages and molecules in the moment, a feeling of imperceptibility and impersonality. The concept of becoming-animal inspires me to see the moment as involuntary, unpredictable, beyond my control. As I cannot take the moment with me, I am faced with the realization that I, as an individual, am remade continuously from entering into composition with something else, and as a composer I am inspired to translate that re-making into music.

One can lose a tangible sense of what and where in this labyrinth of movements. Certainly, in the prism of these concepts, I would not know where ethical thinking about the butterfly would start, except perhaps as an idea of a co-inhabitable territory. A sense of getting lost also shows itself in the concept of becoming-imperceptible which, as Deleuze and Guattari describe, does seem to point towards a dissolution of sorts: “The imperceptible is the immanent end of becoming, its cosmic formula. For example, Matheson’s *Shrinking Man* passes through the kingdoms of nature, slips between molecules, to become an unfindable particle in infinite meditation on the infinite.”¹¹⁷

What I do find productive is how one can enter into new alliances from a process of becoming more anonymous. The un-specific wing, or beak, or eyelash, enable a being-composed-with other un-specific elements (head-masks, other beaks, bells) to move towards specificity. And while it seems easy or trivial to describe a brief encounter with a butterfly as constituting a relation from which to think and live, that is how many non-human non-domesticated creatures show themselves to us, and is therefore what we are left to work with.

3.

There are three voices in *Wild Iris*, Louise Glück’s poetry collection from 1992; the divine, the human, and a “natural” voice, which takes the form of various flowers in a garden. All three take part in a kind of dialogue or debate about the cycles of life and death, which some scholars have argued give the cycle a theological atmosphere. Apocalyptic visions as well as narrations (for the flowers who have passed and come back) of death and resurrection abound. While the human and the God-like voice frequently address each other, there are also other implied listeners which the flowers address whose identity is not particularly clear to me.

As often happens when I read, I attempt to write myself into the text regardless of the fact that its vision is different from mine. I am very interested in the voice of the flower, the one that is heard but not necessarily debated with (it is even talked down to at times). And I’m very interested in considering myself as being in the role of the human (or the god for that matter) and researching ways to make opaque those roles in a musical translation. But in order to do that, I feel I must take those roles seriously in order to investigate them properly, and expose my

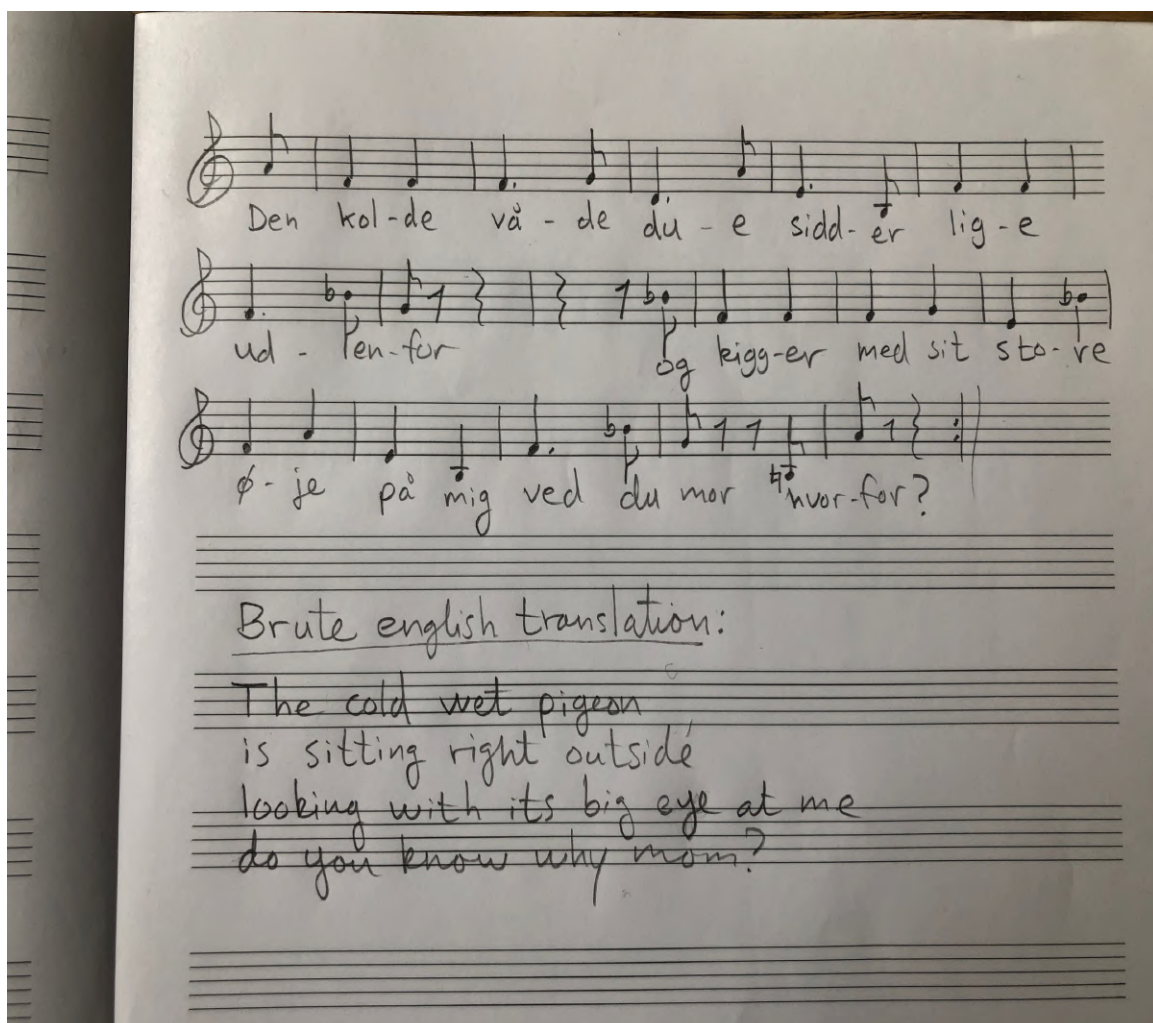
¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 279. The science fiction novel alluded to is “The Shrinking Man” by Richard Matheson.

own limitations in the process. I am attempting to form a bond with the frail voice of a flower not by honoring it, but by becoming frail myself in relation to something else, and in opposition to the order of positions in the poem. The poem might disappear altogether in so doing.

In the following, I'd like to intertwine the first poem if the collection, The Wild Iris, with my Pigeon fragment from 2021, which can be seen in the video documentation, [example 20](#).

*At the end of my suffering
there was a door.*

Outside my window there was a pigeon. It looked straight at me, in the winter of 2021, and is shaking. I did not open my window. Instead, I addressed the encounter entirely from inherited conceptions, with nostalgic childish rumination, as if all animals are best reflected through the child's eye; I made a children's song. It was naïve and incomplete, and the text was especially weird, but I liked it:



The image shows a handwritten musical score on a piece of paper. The score is written on three staves. The first staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. The lyrics under the first staff are "Den kol-de vå-de du-e sidd-er lig-e". The second staff continues the melody with a B-flat key signature change and includes the lyrics "ud-ten-for" and "og kigg-er med sit sto-re". The third staff concludes the melody with a double bar line and the lyrics "ø-je på mig ved du mor hvor-for?". Below the musical notation, the text "Brute english translation:" is written, followed by a four-line translation of the lyrics: "The cold wet pigeon", "is sitting right outside", "looking with its big eye at me", and "do you know why mom?".

Den kol-de vå-de du-e sidd-er lig-e
ud-ten-for og kigg-er med sit sto-re
ø-je på mig ved du mor hvor-for?

Brute english translation:
The cold wet pigeon
is sitting right outside
looking with its big eye at me
do you know why mom?

*Hear me out: that which you call death
I remember.*

The pigeons' eyes are penetrating; they remind me of an endless void. They know what is just around the corner. And there is more in them: a big, brutal stare, a broadening of the present. I feel compelled to listen, which I do, in this case, by attempting an escape from inside my window. Inside my dry and safe milieu. Finding a coded appearance to enable a line of flight; a mask with dead eyes. Doesn't matter how it looks, as long as it makes something in me escape into something else.



*Overheard, noises, branches of the pine shifting.
Then nothing. The weak sun
flicker over the dry surface.*

The pigeon has gone. I'm left with a desire to relate to it through the traces of its appearance. There is the melody. There are these stiff eyes I have put on. There was its shaking in the cold. And there are other elements in and around; there are more pigeons that *kkrruuuuuuu* with each other and groom each other, and there are possible movements and repetitions and phrases that potentially connect all of these things.

*It is terrible to survive
as consciousness
buried in the dark earth.*

It's terrible to be human and see everything die. It's terrible to see a pigeon lie on the street and to realize that it's still staring at you. It will disappear, but so will you, and it will still be looking at you. It's all irrevocable. Only one thing to do, attempt to ritualize oneself as a relation, rather

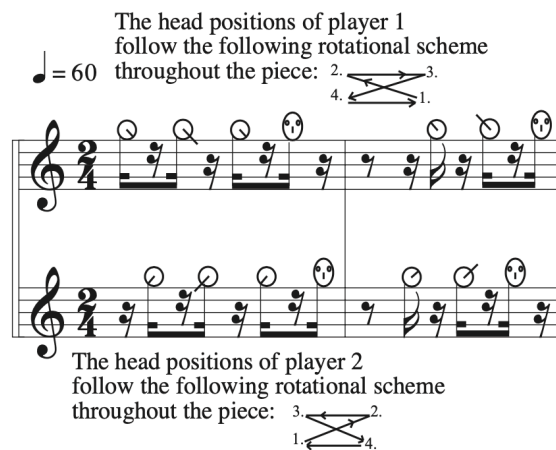
than to be a by-stander, until consolation/'mediation'/'transformation'/'whatever sets in if it ever does.

*Then it was over: that which you fear, being
a soul and unable
to speak, ending abruptly, the stiff earth
bending a little.*

Then it began: that which almost feels like a transgression, to make music with the eyes and the shaking of
a soul unable
to speak, ending abruptly
in pragmatic problem-solving issues of how to coordinate with a common pulse when we can't see each other, and how to make the body shake from the inside. Everything has to fit, including my melody. Everything is composed with; handled, but respected. I make masked versions of the stiff eyes, and we put our hands underneath our shirts and shake from clapping our chests.

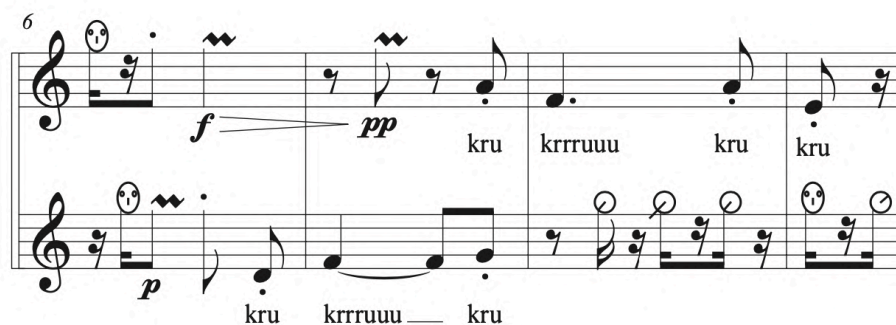
We begin by emulating the movement of pigeon heads. Stiff, quirky, abrupt. These movements are formalized; there is a pattern. That's me and my musical thinking inside the head movements of a pigeon. I want some form of repetition, recognizability, in order to create larger groupings. The result is a code that allows for a potential decoding. It is a tangible being that will make visible a becoming towards something else.

The head positions of player 1
follow the following rotational scheme
throughout the piece: 2. 3. 4. 1.



The head positions of player 2
follow the following rotational scheme
throughout the piece: 3. 2. 1. 4.

Then fragments of the melody, sung in pigeon "tongue" (*kkrruuuuuu*). Perhaps they will materialize into an actual refrain later (we never got that far), but, for now, only in call and response sequence. And, at the same time, shaking when the co-performer bumps you with her elbow (*forte*), and a soft echo shake (*pianissimo*):



That's me and my musical thinking attempting to be inside the interaction of two pigeons. We sing in their tongue but we melodize our singing. We shake with their bodies, but the cause is musical gesture rather than outside stimuli (cold, excitement, etc.), and we rhythmize time, quite strictly in fact, in order to be together.

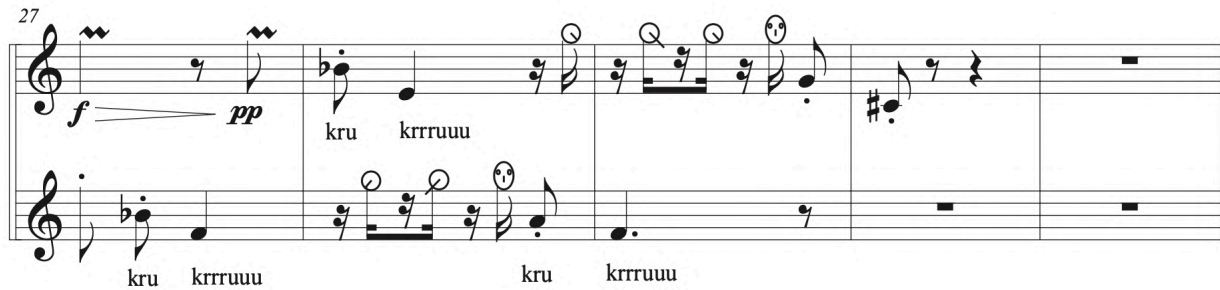
*You who do not remember
passage from the other world
I tell you I could speak again: whatever
returns from oblivion returns
to find a voice:*

Whatever has found a voice now can be abandoned to let new voices insert themselves from within. But that is compositional technique, not an endorsement of what the flower is actually saying. Indeed, I do not remember “passage from the other world.” I know only how to keep music alive and moving. Death should have its rightful place here. Something should be given back after all the things I have extracted for my artistic purpose. But how to give back? How to disappear and return? How to let the voice of this pigeon music die out, and can it ever be resurrected again? I don't know. I compromise by cutting out one segment, the shaking, and stretch it out. Something like a new music within the music appears:



*from the center of my life came
a great fountain, deep blue
shadows on the azure seawater.*

A melody now, flowing forth, momentary wholeness, suspension of doubt!!?? No. One could have tried, I very nearly did, to imagine a sustained C-sharp and then a fluid kind of songlike continuation:



But something died out and never came back again.

: whatever

returns from oblivion returns

to self-doubt.

4.

The tension between artistic exploration and ethical considerations—particularly regarding human and non-human co-existence, but also in a general sense—has fueled me throughout this project. Music adds and subtracts from the world. It does so materially, and it does so intellectually. From an unintelligible nothing or everything, a movement from obscurity towards a perceptible something is formed. I subtract a lot from this planet in order to make music. The rich chaos of the world is confined to a tiny window for us to peruse, and I use a number of resources to build that window. I have modeled much music on non-human bodies and behavior, and the question has relentlessly been: how to give back? The only answer I have found adequate is to subtract from myself what the non-human has given. I have wished to give space, as I have taken space, within music. This reflection text, if nothing else, has tried to demonstrate the difficulties herein.

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A short selection of sound sources

Archives

The Archive of the Indigenous Languages of Latin America (<https://ailla.utexas.org>).

In particular the Curripaco Collection of Jonathan Hill:

<https://ailla.utexas.org/islandora/object/ailla%3A124457>

World and traditional music collection - British Library:

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<https://www.mister-toad.com/frogcalls.html>

<https://songsofinsects.com>

Film

Jeremy Marre, The Nature of Music. Pt. 1-3.

Besides on an old VHS tape in the library of the Norwegian Academy of Music, parts of it are presently (17/11 2022) on YouTube:

<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLcqRfGSvZmkJSFIrIw2u-aSV2IScUBBqG>