

The Shared Space: Towards the “Otherness” of Musical Meaning.

Abstract:

The conventional hierarchy of the Western music canon suggests that the responsibility for the production of musical meaning lies primarily with the composer or the performer (Gaut and Livingston 2003; Hirsch 1992). Through my practice as a performer, I question this hierarchy in favor of a co-creative approach and *responsive* performance. This approach acknowledges and explores the interaction between multiple co-creative agents¹—both human and non-human. These agents include my instrument, the composer’s score, the performance space, the listeners, and the broader context within which the performance takes place. By recognizing the complex dynamics of this interaction, I seek to create a *shared space* which allows for participatory and socially engaged experiences. Through my practice, I have developed the concept of the Shared Space, which has become a method to create a dynamic non-hierarchical field, where all these agents resonate together or resist each other, allowing for the emergence of plural and fluid meanings, recognizing the co-creative role of the “Other” and the “Otherness”.²

In this sub-project, I focus on co-creative collaborations³, which reflect on these issues and question the self-evident aspects of performance that are often taken for granted. This is preceded by a brief summary of the Shared Space concept, which has allowed me and my collaborators to delve deeper into the “Otherness” of art and research—not what is, but what could be (Grand 2011). By emphasizing the interconnectedness and agency of these diverse components, including the listener’s active participation, the research invites a rethinking of how musical meaning is produced. It offers new perspectives on understanding performance as an inclusive and exploratory process that transcends traditional boundaries and embraces the unknown and the unrealized.

¹ The words “agent” and “agency” are used in terms of Actor Network Theory and Bruno Latour: “Within ANT, agency is extended beyond human intentionality. An agent is plainly understood as “any thing that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference” (Latour 2005:71). ... (W)hat matters is not the intentionality itself but how intentionality is shaped (allowed, encouraged, blocked, rendered possible) by an extension of causal relations between humans and nonhumans. From an ANT perspective, rather than being passive resources at the disposal of humans, nonhumans are active, vibrant agents that also exert power” (Dwiartama and Rosin 2014). See also (Sayes 2014)

² I refer to Otherness as “the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group (‘Us’, the Self) constructs one or many dominated out-groups (‘Them’, Other) by stigmatizing a difference – real or imagined – presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination” (Staszak 2020).

³ I use the term co-creation or co-creative collaboration to describe the mutual awareness of the shared responsibility for “co-creation of a musical outcome” (Gorton and Östersjö 2016). See also (Taylor 2016; Hayden and Windsor 2007).

The Shared Space (Summary)

Developed from an artistic statement within my practice, the Shared Space has become for me a method, and a dynamic environment where the production of musical meaning(s) arise(s) from the interactions between various agents, including the performer, the score, the instrument, the listeners, and the surrounding context. Its theoretical grounding draws from research conducted by both practitioners and theorists, particularly those who challenge the notions inherent to the regulative work-concept, and the power relations in music (Torrence 2018; Hellstenius et al. 2023; De Assis 2018; Rink et al. 2018; Goehr 1992). It is further influenced by Michel De Certeau's concept of space as a "practiced place" (Certeau 1988, 117), Böhme's (2017) theory of atmospheres, as well as my own artistic and personal experiences (Tchirkov 2022). The Shared Space acknowledges that meaning is not pre-determined but emerges through the active and responsive engagement of all these agents in real time. Referring to Böhme's theory, similarly to atmospheres, characterized by the "co-presence of subject and object", the shared space in music can be viewed as a space though which "affective and emotional aspects of human lives ... unfold" (Bille 2018). According to Böhme, "music occurs when the subject of an acoustic event is the acoustic atmosphere as such, that is, when listening as such, not listening to something, is the issue" (2000, 17) The objective of the performer and composer is thus primarily to create a set of conditions for the emergence of the specific acoustic event – and this is also the driving impulse of the Shared Space.

This method goes beyond notions of site-specific or collaborative performance, although the artistic projects exploring them were crucial for my own practice (e.g. Torrence 2018; Modney 2018; Tchirkov 2021; Hayden 2002; Ham 2023; Røttingen 2021). The Shared Space implies a responsive approach, recognizing how the performance space, time of day, weather, emotional context, and the listeners contribute to shaping the experience. It requires the performer to be conscious of these situational contexts and of the plurality of experiences and resonances, emphasizing the vulnerability and uniqueness of each performance situation.

The Shared Space, therefore, becomes a "productive space" where tension exists between the pre-composed and the immediate, embodied response of the performer. It is an ecosystem of co-creation where the performer's awareness, work-specific technique, and responsiveness are crucial in articulating interactions with the surrounding environment, making each performance a unique, site- and context-responsive event.

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