Musical Realities

Anders Førisdal

Introduction

This text was written in response to the artistic research project Music with the Real (MwtR) which ran from 2014 to 2018 at the Norwegian Academy of Music, Oslo, Norway. The project was led by percussionist Håkon Stene and composer Henrik Hellstenius and funded by the Norwegian Artistic Research Programme. MwtR sought to address a supposed material fatigue found in contemporary music through explorations of recent developments in digital technology and how these developments facilitate opening up the musical work to external, everyday reality.[1] According the presentation of project on the homepage of the Artistic Research Programme, the project aimed to 'develop compositional and performance-related practice through cross-media works integrating audio-visual samples'.[2] Given these aims, the project revitalizes the dream of the historical avantgarde of integrating art and life in a context where digital technology is permeating most aspects of life in Western societies. The result of the project is a series of performances, recordings and seminars as well as newly written works by composers Carola Bauckholt, Clemens Gadenstätter, Henrik Hellstenius, Johannes Kreidler and Matthew Shlomowitz in addition to the accompanying text material published on the Research Catalogue website.

The present text seeks to shed light on the five works in question. Particular attention will be devoted to the works by Bauckholt, Kreidler and Shlomowitz, each of which highlight one of the three currents that run through the project in a clear-cut manner – performativity, multimediality and sample-based composition. My discussion of the works is not meant to be an assessment of the project as such and does not seek to question whether the works

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[1] *Music with the Real*, project presentation.

[2] Ibid.

succeed in fulfilling the criteria set by the project. I am more interested in the aesthetic merits of the separate works and will discuss the works primarily on an individual basis. Since the format of each work is so different, an approach which would pose the same set of questions to all the works seems formalist and counterproductive. I will rather let myself be guided by a general notion of an inherent heterogeneity of the individual works. By addressing heterogeneity, one can bracket the question of the inside and outside of the work or the opposition of musical and extra-musical and a binary logic which these works seem to subvert, suspending this dichotomy in favour of exposing the mutual permeability of its two poles. Referring to heterogeneity one can also avoid questions of preformed styles or aesthetics. My notion of heterogeneity derives from the work of Michel Foucault, who writes in his 1979 Collège de France lectures on biopolitics that 'heterogeneity is never a principle of exclusion; it never prevents coexistence, conjunction, or connection'.[3] In Foucault, the notion of heterogeneity is a means to avoid a reductive and homogenizing dialectic. He suggests replacing dialectic with what he calls a 'logic of strategy' which

> 'does not stress contradictory terms within a homogeneity that promises their dissolution in a unity. The function of strategic logic is to establish the possible connections between disparate terms which remain disparate. The logic of strategy is the logic of connections between the heterogeneous and not the logic of the homogenization of the contradictory.'[4]

In the present context, suggesting that the works are heterogeneous in Foucault's sense implies that they follow such a logic of strategy where heterogeneous elements – structural, semantic, performative – are not necessarily subsumable under a conception of unity; a strategic logic suggests the avoidance – or deconstruction – of closure. The claim to heterogeneity addresses an opening towards alterity, difference and new insight. In the words of Derrida: '[H]eterogeneity opens things up, lets itself be opened up by the very effraction of that which unfurls, comes and remains to come'.[5]Similarly, a discussion and analysis of the works must seek to address this logic and sustain their immanent

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[3] Foucault, *Biopolitics*, p. 42.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Derrida, *Spectres*, p. 33

heterogeneity. However, as I will return to below, the pursuit of heterogeneity is occasionally at odds with the character of the source material.

Johannes Kreidler: multimedial heteroglossia

In *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault famously refers to Jorge Luis Borges' '*Chinese Dictionary*':

> This book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of thought— *our* thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography—breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old definitions between the Same and the Other.[6]

What so amused Foucault in Borges' text was the possibility of organizing our knowledge of the world according to wholly different categorizations. For Foucault, Borges' 'Chinese Dictionary' seems to represent a mirror in which he could see his own project of archaeology and discourse analysis clearly. Borges' 'Chinese Dictionary' represents the notion of the floating signifier which fed the poststructuralist economy of the sign. This economy of representation permeates the work of Johannes Kreidler and is a central feature in *Fantasies of Downfall* which was written for the MwtR project. The floating relationship between different media, or between auditory, visual or performative signs, often explored through crude montage methods, is a topic for which Kreidler seems to have a particular fancy. This notion runs through all his work like an open wound where the gravitational forces that underscore the 'natural' and relatively stable casual relationships of our everyday experiences as well as traditional musical aesthetics are undermined and challenged. In Kreidler's works from the recent years, another central preoccupation is the figure of the fall. Materiality and gravitational forces come together in the figure of the fall, which has both musical and political implications and thus extends the reach of musical organization

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[6] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. xiv

into non-musical realities. This figure has had a prominent position in a number of pieces: in *Charts Music*, cheery pop songs are written on the basis of falling stock figures from the 2008 crash; dropping plastic letters onto an electric guitar in *Typogravitism* (2016); and in various sections in *Audio Guide*, as when the pianist is asked to simply drop her hand on the keyboard. Certainly, one could list a number of composers who are explicitly engaging gravity to produce sound (indeed, gravity plays a pivotal role in the technique of a number of instruments). A striking example is found in Lachenmann's 1971 orchestral piece *Kontrakadenz* where ping pong balls are dropped onto the floor and water generously poured into bathtubs. Examples are also found in Mathias Spahlinger's *éphémère* and *inter-mezzo*. An example contemporaneous with Kreidler could be found in Simon Steen-Andersen's *Piano Concerto* (2015) which opens with the recording of a Steinway Grand being dropped from seven meters onto a concrete floor.[7] The most striking passage related to the fall in *Audio Guide* is in a section for video where the composer seemingly falls onto a piano keyboard repeatedly for roughly 20 minutes.[8] Interestingly, the real keyboard is outside the video frame and a photo of a keyboard is edited onto the video as a simulation of the hidden, real, keyboard. The sound of the body falling onto the keyboard comes when Kreidler's body passes the keyboard photo and is therefore not synchronized with the actual moment the body must hit the keyboard. The different levels of the video that supposedly document the event are torn apart and unhinged in a way that raise the question of truth in relation to the video. Discussing the transition from analog to digital photography, Bernhard Stiegler highlights the question of reliability in a way which is relevant for the understanding of Kreidler's fall – in Stiegler, the essentially indubitable documentation of an event ('the *this was*') represented by analog photography becomes 'essentially *doubtful* when it is digital'.[9] Certainly, there are no essentially indubitable relationships to be found between the various elements forming the economy of representation documenting Kreidler's fall; in Kreidler such relationships are always already unhinged, destabilized and 'out of joint' as Jacques

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[7] The demolished piano takes a central role in Steen-Andersen's concerto. Documentation of the falling piano can be found on SWR's homepage: http://multimedia.swr.de/steen-andersen-piano-concerto#345.

[8] A documentation of the premiere of *Audio Guide* can be found on youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S3aFutNFiCc. The section in question starts at 2:19:06

[9] Stiegler, 'The discrete Image', p. 153.

Derrida quotes Shakespeare in lieu of Marx.[10] Kreidler's keyboard fall represents nothing but a loss of faith in stable causal relationships. This is also the case in *Fantasies of Downfall*. Let us for now not inscribe the figure of the fall or even down-fall in a stable chain of signification. It is a general strategy in Kreidler's work to explore and re-contextualize the same material elements in various works and thus these elements take on different meaning in different works. Suffice it to mention certain key words related to the figure of the fall: loss of faith, economic crashes, social and political instability, cultural disintegration, melancholia and death.

Fantasies of Downfall, for vibraphone, audio and video playback, was written for Håkon Stene in 2015 and premiered at the Darmstadt Summer Course on August 1, 2016. In dealing with the relationship between the different sensory visual and auditive perceptions offered by the performance, it explicitly addresses the same issues as Borges alternative taxonomy; the 'natural' relationship between sight, sound and performance is brought into play through various means. The main element of this play is repetition, which is used in multimedial reinterpretations of connected materials. In my discussion of the work my main source has been the video documentation found on YouTube.com.[11] One result of this is that

Section/duration	Time	Video	El. audio	Performance
1.1 – 04:42	00:00	Falling camera	Falling camera; Electronic tremolo; Vibra material (chords)	Installing vibra; tremolo
1.2 – 00:31 / **05:13**	04:42	Ping pong ball	Electronic sounds cont.	Tremolo Cont.
2.1 – 00:34	05:13	Foot + curve	pause	Rising chromatic figures b nat-a nat
2.2 – 02:16 / **02:50**	05:47	Hand playing keyboard	Chromatic scale	pause
3.1 – 04:10	08:03	Pause	Rising figures b-e, tremolo+vibra 2.1; later vibra chords and other sounds	Diverse material: scales, chords, figures
3.2 – 00:57 / **05:07**	12:13	Hand writing music - > curves	Distorted electronic sounds	As before – sparse
4 / Coda 00:48 / **00:48**	13:10 (-> 13:58)	Shoes falling onto Kreidler's face	From video, extremely compressed	Corporeal sounds with hands; 'Scream'

Figure 1. *Fantasies of Downfall*, form summary. The figure sums up the basic material for each section. Duration of main sections is given in bold numbers.

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[10] Derrida, *Spectres*, p. 1.

[11] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lJCZFWZUUio

performance related questions will not play a central role in the discussion, even if the notion of performativity is of primary importance to an assessment of the incessant material bifurcation found in this work. The performer undoubtedly plays an important part in configuring this process, a part not granted the subdued figure in the lower left corner of the video documentation.

Fantasies of Downfall has seven distinct sections, which I group in 2 + 2 +2 main sections plus a coda (summarized in Figure 1). The work opens with dramatic gesture: a camera falls crashing onto an acoustic guitar (00:00).[12] The camera is left hanging just above the instrument, picture spinning and the sound continuously transforming as the proximity of the microphone to the sound source changes. At the second fall, the percussionist begins to prepare on stage. The vibraphone is rolled into position and the bars are installed on the frame win a deliberately noisy manner. After the third fall, the percussionist starts playing a sustained tremolo on f (01:33). However, it very soon becomes clear that dominant sound of the vibraphone is not the acoustic instrument but an electronic tremolo based on a sound which resembles the vibraphone – the tremolo is much too fast for a human performer.[13] After a short while an electronic filter is becoming more and more prominent in the electronic tremolo. At 03:33, electronic vibraphone chords are introduced. Except for a vibraphone glissando at 04:20, the situation remains unaltered until the next section at 04:42. Already from the initial minutes of the work a number of characteristic features are prominent: repetitions, the disjointed relationship between sound and image, the distortion of live sound by electronic sounds, as well as a general lo-fi character in both audio and visual output.

The lo-fi aesthetic permeates all levels of the work. The video footage has low resolution and the sound from the falling video camera is very unbalanced and abrupt. This gives the video material a character of honestly documenting the fall of the camera, representing the truth

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[12] All references to timings are to the video of the first performance at Darmstadt, 2016. For reference, see note 10.

[13] Incidentally, a similar sound is heard at the beginning of the orchestral piece *TT1* composed at the same time as *Fantasies of Downfall*.

of the event. Whatever faith the video footage induces is quickly undermined by the live performance. The clumsy entry of the percussionist (which is asked for in the score[14]), the relationship between the live and electronic tremoli, as well as the rather cheap sounding electronic timbre in the succeeding passage convey a sense of carelessness which goes counter to any sense of faith asked for by the documentary quality of the video material. Rather, they represent their own sense of fallenness, related to the fall from the analog to the digital suggested by the reference to Stiegler above, a fall from documentary indubitability to a situation permeated by doubt and suspicion. In particular, the electronic tremolo suggests a questioning of the realism of the imagery.

Whilst the electronic and live vibraphone sounds continue, the video is abruptly cut at 04:42 as a new section articulates itself as a sober contrast to the dramatic opening section. In the video, a hand lets go of a ping pong ball which bounces on the floor. However, the image is quickly turned upside down and back again, giving the impression of the ball not only being pulled towards the floor by gravitational force but also being pulled towards a virtual ceiling (the upside-down floor) by a magnetism stronger than gravity. The ball is finally still on the floor even if the flipping editing of the image continues. The gesture is repeated: a hand lifts and drops the ball while the editing continues – even the arm and hand is now turned upside-down which implies an insecurity as to whether the ball is to be dropped or thrown. The whole sequence is repeated a third time, now with even more intense editing, giving the impression of the ball bouncing rapidly between the floor and ceiling. The electronic sounds (sampled vibraphone chords) and acoustic sounds (tremolo) carries over from the previous section and find themselves reimbued with a material quality within the context of the bouncing ball. The rapid bouncing of the ball as well as video editing itself certainly relates to the tremolo of the sticks. Both tremolo technique and repeated chords in vibraphone playing calls for a strong sensibility of the interplay between gravity, the material qualities of the sticks used and muscular force. Thus, the forces displayed in the image of the ball find themselves represented or interpreted by the musical material or vice versa. However, one can hardly call this a one-to-one relationship; a multimedial heteroglossia seems a more apt

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[14] Kreidler, *Fantasies*, bar 1

description. The dynamic and rapid editing of this section is in contrast with the longer shots of the first section. The rhythm of the editing seems suggested by the bouncing of the ball, in a way which centrifugally distils editing as a separate element in the network of tensions explored in the work. Indeed, this process of distillation is one of the main characteristics of this work. Separate levels of the general multimedial texture are exposed as carrying individual weight in different sections, and one could describe the development of the work along a number of such individual trajectories. One could perhaps speak of *sub-parameters* – individual levels that go into the different artistic means. Later, we will see that highlighting one such sub-parameter will cause a balance in the general fabric of the multimedial texture.

As the ball is finally brought to sit still, materials are cut on all levels and the second main section commences at 05:13. The question of representation is here brought to the fore in a decisive way, as a 2 second event is repeated 16 times. The video shows a female foot descending from the lower step of a staircase, not without a certain grace. Superimposed on the foot, a white curve describes a falling figure related to the movement of the foot (see figure 2a).
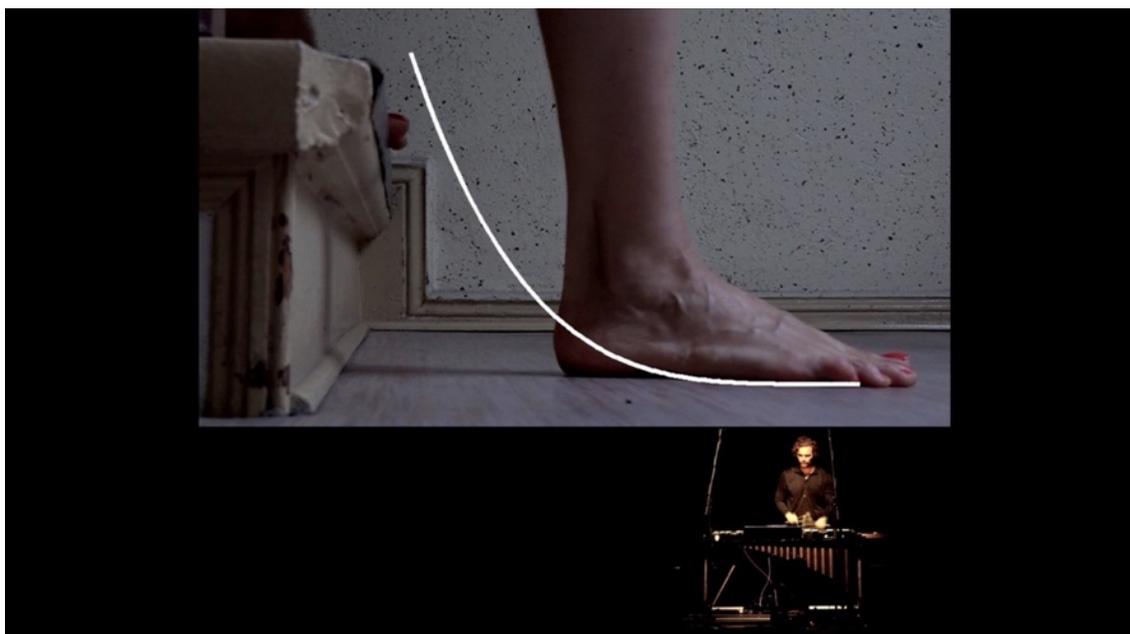

Figure 2a. Still from *Fantasies of Downfall* (05:23).

Figure 2b. Johannes Kreidler: *Fantasies of Downfall*, bar 10.

Simultaneously, the performer plays ascending figures on the vibraphone, figures which also describe curves in various ways (see figure 2b). Interestingly, the shot of the foot is identical while the superimposed curve and vibraphone curve changes. The aural and visual curves do not follow the same pattern however but follow different trajectories. The strictness of the repetitions and the differences or variations articulated by the curves leaves one wondering whether the shot of the foot is actually the same each time or if the vibraphone is actually playing identical phrases. Before irritation sets in the section is over, and the question of identity and representation is raised anew, this time venturing into the absurd.

Section 2.2: on the video, against a black background and mounted horizontally, a right hand is repeatedly playing a chromatic scale from the bottom of a keyboard to the top and back again. However, what we see is not the hand but the keyboard moving – the hand is fixed in the centre of the screen while the keyboard sinks towards the bottom end of the screen and eventually moves outside the edge of the frame as the hand moves towards the top end of the keyboard. What we hear is a rising scale, but what we see is the keyboard and not the hand moving, even moving in opposite direction of the scale. The effect is as striking as it is simple – the normal conception of the relationship between the hand and the keyboard, between what is fixed and what is moving, is radically changed, turned upside-down like the video of the ping pong ball in section 1.2. The opposition of the ascending scale and the descending keyboard is also a parallel to the opposing curves of the previous section. Again, a sub-parameter, a level of representation taken for granted, is challenged through extremely simple means. As the hand begins to descend, so the keyboard is rising. However, in the middle of its second ascent (at 06:13) natural order is restored as the keyboard is fixed mid screen and the hand moves up the keys as a gesture of blissful reminiscence of

everything this piece is not. The idyll is broken within a couple of seconds though, and soon the keyboard follows the hand slowly in its ascent. It is as if the movement of the keyboard is breaking free from its subservient mirroring pattern and taking on an individual role, signalling a process of individualization of audio-visual parameters. And indeed, from now on things start get more complex. As the hand, now outside the edge of the frame, commences its second descent, the keyboard still slowly rising (and thus keeping the hand outside the frame), the intervals of the chromatic descent have shrunk to barely distinguishable microtonal distances, slowly widening and abruptly transforming to descending minor thirds as the hand again comes into view. Simultaneously, the keyboard rushes down the screen, only to start rising again as the hand reaches the lower frame (06:26). The lower edge of this screen is for a brief moment associated with the lowest pitch of the piano; nonetheless, the hand has yet to reach the lowest key of the keyboard. Thus, one can see that key becomes unhinged from pitch and again our trust in the documentary 'there is' of the video is broken, this time through the use of keyboard samples or midi and simple video technology. Also, the relation of the hand and instrument is broken, and the directional movements of pitch and keyboard is dissociated (fully explored in the next cycle across the keyboard). Finally, all these levels or sub-parameters of the multimedial fabric transform at individualised paces which occasionally see them briefly falling into synch with each other, thus creating a rapidly shifting web of alliances and connections. From this moment the only stable elements are

Figure 3: Still from *Fantasies of Downfall* (07:57).

the relentless hammering of the fingers and the movement across the keyboard which must have happened live in a studio as a real event. Somehow, the form of this section is reminiscent of a theme with variations: the theme would be the movement of the hand across the keyboard as it performs the chromatic scale, and the variations consist in highlighting different elements of the image or sound that recasts the latent elements of which the theme is a compound. The result is paradoxical though, as the clear heightened tension achieved by the development of the material seems to leave the material empty and void of any individual qualities, these latter being ripped apart by a centrifugal logic.

As the image of the hand continues its trajectory across the keyboard the audio-visual forces push the material relations into ever more absurd situations. For instance, the image itself is loosened from its central position and starts to float around. And again, as the interest in the material development gradually wears off as it reveals its own emptiness, the lo-fi, crude, quality of the material operations become ever more exposed. The manipulation of the video material has a distinctly mechanical and 'un-musical' quality as does the robotic perfection of the piano material which exposes none of the material qualities of live performance such as dynamic, rhythmic or timbral variation. Surely, this lo-fi quality is a positive feature in this work in that it heightens the sense of the fall, representing the socio-cultural processes that relate to the development of digital technology.

Moving into the next section (at 8:02), the persistent hammering of the piano and parametric complexity and of the keyboard sequence is abruptly cut. The video goes black and the electronic tremolo vibraphone heard earlier outlines a glissando from b natural to d natural; as the pitch rises the intensity of the tremolo decreases. This simple gesture is repeated throughout the section with variations in duration, pitch, intensity in the tremolo and the interaction of these three parameters. The vibraphone plays sparse and varied material over the glissando – chords and small phrases. The live vibraphone occasionally approaches its electronic counterpart, either in pitch or in playing repeated notes. In this way, a flexible proximity is established between the two. After a while, the electronic vibraphone glissando extends into a downward movement, and abrupt electronic vibraphone chords enter. The general texture becomes more and more complex and

heterogeneous and is abruptly cut after an extremely high glissando at 12:10. As the work continues, the preceding texture is maintained but now the electronic material is distorted and dirty, fallen. In the video, a hand tortuously tries to write music on staff paper, the hand pressing the pen so hard on the paper that the paper moves and no music is being written. Or is it the camera that moves? All of a sudden, a few notes are seen on the staff and the hand jerks again. As a composer subject has entered the screen, this small section begs interpretation. Are we witnessing the difficulty of writing music in a time of conceptuality? After the fall from tonal, and later, structuralist grace, the actual sound of the music has lost the dominant significance it held formerly. Now, one finds sound subsumed under more general aesthetic concepts where all notions of beauty or timbral efficacy relate to extra-musical and/or performative ideas. A downfall indeed. In a classicizing gesture, the approaching end of the work is signalled by the substitution of the image of the hand by the drawn repeated curves from the third section, However, the relationship between the image and curve presented earlier is reversed, and against a black background the curve now serves to draw a gap in which we are allowed to get a glimpse of an image. Vainly, one tries to come to terms with the underlying image – blurry colours moving to the right, is it a crowd moving? As with the descending foot in section 2.1, it seems the hidden image is repeated with each curve. This gives the impression of gradually revealing the image.

Figure 4. Still from *Fantasies of Downfall* (12:54).

However, what we see is to indistinct to be properly assessed, leaving one's perceptive apparatus at a loss coming to terms with the image. Focus is lost from the image to the curve itself, now an empty signifier senseless without the foot to which it was formerly related. Senseless, fallen. This section presents a complete stasis in both visual and musical terms – the only movement to be found lies with the audience's groping perception. The stasis serves as the high (or low) point of the piece, the sound being completely distorted, the image indistinct and incomprehensible.

A coda shows the composer lying flat on the floor, a microphone documenting the sounds of women's footwear being dropped onto his face. A fallen composer, footwear falling. Is this the last 'fall', the composer subject punished and suppressed after all his materials have been subject to processes of falling, emptied of inherent meaning and expressive potentials? Or should we simply enjoy the sounds produced without taking in the violence of the image? And if so are we mockingly asked to do as we do habitually do with classical music and ignore the materiality of the sound production, a task exposed as impossible? Or are we witnessing an ironic variation on the theme of exposing the artistic means of production, which has been such a central task since Lachenmann?

In the coda, the performer puts away his sticks, using the hand to make sounds on his own body hitting his chest, gliding a nail over the teeth and so on, also producing occasional sounds on the vibraphone. Like the composer, the performer is reduced to a sound producing body, a resonator, all other means but the body having been deprived of aesthetic functions. In a last gesture, the performer mimics Edvard Munch's *Scream* (1910), a modernist icon normally interpreted as expressing the alienated subject of modern Western societies. At the end of this piece, after all materials have been drained, emptied, is this the only gesture available, expressing a total alienation from expressivity? Is there no way out of the ironic play of signs? But can the *Scream* itself be understood in a literal manner after all sense of literality has been subject to ironic subversion, erosion and degrading distortion?

Figure 5. Still from *Fantasies of Downfall* (13:32).

Fantasies of Downfall negotiates the multimedial reality of performance and evokes distrust of established orders or relations conceived to be given or 'natural'. In addressing the fall in such a seemingly off-handed manner Kreidler somewhat paradoxically encourages a resistance to falling, whether it be falling back into standardized patterns of perception or the soothing comfort of modern mass culture.

Clemens Gadenstätter and Henrik Hellstenius: a 'blooming, buzzing confusion'

Scored for six singers, clarinet, accordion, piano/keyboard, cello, electric guitar, percussion, electronics and video, and with a duration of roughly one hour, Clemens Gadenstätter's multimedia contribution to MwtR, *Daily Transformations*, is by far the longest work in the MwtR portfolio. Written in collaboration with author Lisa Spalt and video artist Anna Henckel-Donnersmarck, the work was premiered by the joint forces of Neue Vokalsolisten Stuttgart, asamisimasa, Anna Henckel-Donnersmarck and technicians from SWR Experimentalstudio Freiburg conducted by Bas Wiegers at Wien Modern in November 2017. The pervasive disjunction of multimedial elements in Kreidler's work invites for comparison

with *Daily Transformations*. But where Kreidler's work is based on processes of disjunction and parametric distillation, in Gadenstätter's work all elements of the expressive and technical apparatus come across as already disjunct and parameterized. In *Daily Transformations*, the aesthetic material and technical apparatus is involved in the processes of mediation and combinatorial play which makes up the fabric and thematic of the work. The instrumental and vocal techniques employed reflect a contemporary performance practice that imply a thorough suspension of a classical ideal of timbral and tonal purity. Techniques like multiphonics, crush-tones and extensive use of slide in the electric guitar and glissandi in the midi-keyboard result in a dirty and unstable general sound. Decentring the natural instrumental sound further, the instruments are amplified and their sound distorted by individual signal processing, ideally using simple electric guitar effect pedals. All instruments except percussion are run through ring modulation throughout, as well as different echoes and distortion. The guitarist also uses a talk-box, with which timbral filtering is controlled using the mouth cavity. In this way, the sound of the instrumental ensemble comes across as de-naturalized and mediated. Additionally, both the percussionist and the singers operate samplers. The singers are grouped in three pairs, and in each pair one singer operates a sample keyboard and the other controls various filtering processes of the samples on an iPad. The singers therefore have a shared and mutually dependent responsibility for the samples, the technical apparatus severing the expressive control of the individual performer associated with musical performance. The scoring of six singers and six instruments is therefore considerably extended through technical means, and this complex expressive apparatus enables an infinite combinatorial play among the multitude of parameters and sub-parameters engaged in the overall sound production. The musical material is dispersed among the instrumental forces in such a way that any form of self-similarity or simple identity is avoided or suspended.

The work unfolds in three major sections. However, this overall architecture is punctuated by sections where the sound steps back in favour of voice-over text reading and video. The text and video are largely narrative and explore the same material related to everyday experience and sensibility. But although the two media are closely related, a clear hierarchy

between them is avoided, the two unfolding in parallel, heteronomously. This creates an interesting tension between the text and video. Both text and video also explore their own internal complexities. For instance, the video is not simply a film but involves three differently sized screens each with individual material (see Figure 6). Two screens are placed behind the ensemble, one of which covers the other slightly, the third being placed stage right, in front of the guitarist. There is an interesting play of images between the three screens which creates a visual tension analogous to that found in the disposition of musical material among the musicians and singers. In this way, the relational play of multimedial signs and individualized parameters of the single media 'opens things up, lets itself be opened up by the very effraction of that which unfurls, comes and remains to come'; indeed, it engages the audience in a possibly transformative experience.

Figure 6. *Daily Transformations* **performed at Eclat, Stuttgart, February 2018. Copyright © 2018 Martin Sigmund. All rights reserved.**

Thus, one can see a strong contrast between the use of a multimedia set-up in the works of Kreidler and Gadenstätter. I would not hesitate to disagree with Harry Lehmann's evaluation of *Daily Transformations* in his text on the MwtR project, where he claims that the complexity of the work results in extending the ideals of an absolute music onto a

multimedial apparatus.[15] Immersion is not by necessity uncritical. Evoking a multitude of relations both internal and external, the work opens a large-scale sonic space in which the listener can reflect on as well as experience the process of semiosis not only in the relationship between the different media but also within the individual media themselves.

Henrik Hellstenius' *Instrument of Speech* raises the question of music and text in a more direct fashion than *Daily Transformations*. Consisting of four movements and scored for clarinet, cello, piano, electric guitar, percussion and samples, the work was premiered in Bergen, Norway, in May 2016. Exploring the relationship between music, language and meaning, conceptually, the work traverses the opposing forces of *chiaroscuro* as the relationship between music and language in the work is highly ambiguous.

In the first movement, *Bennet talks*, a dark and mysterious texture counterpoints recordings of philosopher, diplomat and mystic John Godolphin Bennett talking about language and its importance to our understanding of the human species. The music is clearly supportive of the voice, its pensive character providing space to reflect on the content of the speech. In the second movement, *Readings*, the music seems to be the main protagonist. The movement presents two distinct but intertwined layers of sound which lets musical and non-musical sounds enwrap each other. The main layer is formed of the sound of the instruments - an ephemeral and exuberant texture based on rapid figurations and short, energetic sounds. The other layer, performed by the percussionist, is composed of samples of stuttering vocal sounds in combination with the sound of writing and a newspaper page being turned violently. Against the rapid and sprightly first layer, the second layer provides stubborn punctuation according to a different kind of temporality. The distinction between the two layers is certainly permeable, as when the sound of writing convenes with rapid scratching sounds in the instruments or the vocal sounds are brought into proximity with staccato instrumental sounds. Non-musical sounds become music and our modes of listening are challenged.

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[15] Lehmann, *Artistic Research*

In the third movement, *Chomsky Lectures*, the main material follows the voice of Noam Chomsky talking about the process of language acquisition in children. The melody of Chomsky's voice is transcribed in the instruments so that Chomsky's voice is carried over into the music. The musicians also read aloud sentences from Chomsky's lecture, their voices distorted by talking into different tubes. Enframing the Chomsky material is a set of dramatic and clearly identifiable musical gestures that contrast the murmuring music associated with Chomsky. As the focus of Chomsky's lecture turns from the structure of language towards the infant bringing order to the chaos of vocal sounds, the music changes towards a soft-spoken and delicate texture. The last words from Chomsky – 'the infant is faced with the famous blooming, buzzing confusion of...' (bars 91-96) – is supported by a dry, whispering music which harks back to the second movement, interpreted in retrospect as anticipatory. The open-ended words from Chomsky pave the way for the multilingual confusion of the final movement, *Babel*. Here, as in the second movement, the music is the central element. The sound-world is harsh and rough with a kind of stomping obstinacy; short and distinct motives repeat with only small variations, echoing the clearly defined gestures of the former movement. Short samples of speech in a various languages rush by, together with the music illustrating the blooming, buzzing confusion (of which Chomsky speaks in the third movement) out of which the infant somehow picks out elements which are language related (Chomsky in the third movement, bars 81-87). A transitory passage opens up for the crystalline and restful final section which brings the cycle to a close, evoking a strong sense of lucidness.

Like *Daily Transformations*, *Instrument of Speech* addresses the question of the construction of sense and meaning. It does so by seemingly subordinating the music to textual meaning; nonetheless, the music does not lose its expressive independence. Rather, it does not simply support the text but takes flight on its own, pursuing an independent trajectory of semiosis.

Matthew Shlomowitz: engaging the outside

Matthew Shlomowitz' contribution to the MwtR project is called *Popular Contexts, Volume 8. Five Soundscapes for a Contemporary Percussionist* and is scored for midi pads and assorted acoustic instruments. The work is part of a cycle of works called *Popular Contexts* which at the time of writing comprise nine works for different instrumental forces and electronic sound. Like the other pieces in the *Popular Contexts* series, *Vol. 8* invites the listener into a world of clichés and various extra-musical references. The works share an engagement with popular culture and everyday sound sources both when it comes to form and in the materials chosen. The works in the *Popular Contexts* series are all multimovement cycles, and the individual movements are usually based on a single musical process or stylistic reference. The musical material typically derives from stereotyped musical styles, and sampled materials derive from a vast area of sources including field recordings of urban spaces, mechanical and natural sounds, as well as musical sounds. Formal strategies are just as diverse, as are the composer figures conjured: there is the composer-as-anthropologist who appropriates signs and gestures from various cultural contexts; also, we find the composer-as-cartoonist who conjures images and narratives through the use of hilarious and excessive set-pieces and props; finally, there is the composer-as-critic who exposes the superficiality of modern Western commodity culture. As this brief list of diverting tendencies suggests, the *Popular Context* works an inherent heterogeneity on multiple levels, and the works seem guided by general strategy of defamiliarization. Certainly, one could discuss these works in terms of alienation and determinate negation; however, the pessimism with which these terms are associated is itself alien to the genuinely humorous character of many of the individual pieces. The notions of romantic irony and play seem more apt to describe these works, permeated by an ironic play of signs or semiotic playfulness initiated by the idea of recontextualization and which in the end is reflected in even the minute details of the works. Below I will discuss this in more detail. For the sake of clarity, I will retain the classical dichotomy of form and material, if only to show that this dichotomy is unsustainable.

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Popular Contexts 8 consists of five movements. Each movement is based on distinctly individual material and evokes a particular situation. The performer moves between two set-ups between the movements something which creates both and coherent symmetry throughout the cycle as a whole and variety of texture between individual movements. Station one, where movements 1, 3 and 5 are performed, features an electronic drum-kit, and station 2 features glockenspiel and kalimba, thus facilitating the melodically based movements 2 and 4. Both stations feature midi controllers for samples. Movements 1, 3 and 5 have different samples assigned to the kit, and this gives the movements an individual timbral profile and character. In fact, the drum kit could be seen as emblematic of the semiology which underpins the *Popular Contexts* cycle. The kit looks like a set of drums but of course it is not simply producing drum sounds. The midi pads of the kit function as an interface between the performer and the patch controlling the samples, the pads in themselves empty signifiers waiting for the patch to trigger the sound and pass them through the speaker membrane. Although the sounds for each movement are fixed beforehand, the change of sounds from movement to movement suggests a general structure of semiologic play. Stiegler's notion of dubitability discussed above is also relevant for the conceptualization of the midi pads. With the digital image, we cannot according to Stiegler have absolute faith in that the image shows us something which has actually taken place in the same we can rely on an analog photo to refer to a moment in history which must have taken place. The situation is the same with digital instruments, where we cannot rely on the sounds we hear to have been recorded and sampled in the way we hear them, that the chain of events from when a sounding body is set to reverberate, airwaves oscillating and in turn producing a physical reaction in a microphone diaphragm which is imprinted onto wax, celluloid or magnetic tape, has actually taken place. Following Stiegler, we could say that the introduction of digital instruments represents an element of dubitability in that such instruments – in contradistinction to acoustic instruments, whose sounds are immediately recognizable – are not used – or at least not designed to be used – for their own intrinsic musical value. Although the physical midi pads are the same throughout, the sounds change, exposing the dubitability which accompanies any digitized sound. Stable signifier, unstable signified – repetition and difference in emblematic form. Interestingly, the midi drum kit resembles only the skeleton of an acoustic drum kit, a

skeleton bereft of corporeality, doomed to take on any and every identity offered by the patch, its own soft thud marking a ghostly presence accompanying the sound from the speakers. There is a marked disparity between the virtuosic and powerful engagement demanded by the performer of this work and the indifferent feedback of the electronic instruments.

Like the other pieces in the *Popular Contexts* series, *Vol. 8* invites the listener into a world of clichés and various extra-musical references. The first movement, *Drummin' in the rain* suggests driving a car in the rain while listening to music. The music is in three parts: sustained notes on crotales, samples, and a fast beat played on the drum kit. The drum kit has only six sounds two of which are short electronic sounds, while the midi pads have four samples: rain, car wipers, a car engine and thunder. The form of this movement follows a pattern found in a number of other pieces from the *Popular Contexts* cycle where the material gradually comes together in the course of the movement before being subject to very basic transformational processes towards the end of the movement. The first section of the piece combines one or two sustained pitches on the crotales with the samples and sounds of the kit, the sounds being presented in a very systematic and didactic manner. The samples and kit sounds are introduced so that we first hear the sample, then a beat pattern on one of the pads from the kit, and then the two in combination. The kit sounds are laid out so that the patterns become more and more dense. Then, after a silent fermata, the samples and kit sounds are combined (from bar 41) – first the samples, then the kit, and then the samples and kit together. In combination, the patterns of the various sounds of the kit form a fast EDM beat; however, the most striking effect is the result of the pairing of this beat with the sound of the car wipers, whose rhythmic wiping pattern fits with the drum beat and offers a heavy accentuation of the beats of the dense EDM pattern. The sounds combined educe the situation of driving in the rain whilst listening to music, musical and everyday sounds combining for a brief moment to evoke the avantgarde dream of breaking the art/life dichotomy of classical aesthetics. The samples and crotales are then subject to a short development before the beat is reintroduced and the movement is brought to a close, the sound of the wipers being sustained until the performer begins the next movement at station 2.

The second movement, *Comfortably Glock*, is semantically more complex. As the title suggests, it brings together Pink Floyd's *Comfortably Numb* (from the album *The Wall*) and a glockenspiel, in addition to differing samples played on a midi pad. Like in the first movement, the sound material is presented in a uniform manner. The upbeat presents the sound of a mechanical device being turned on, followed by a glockenspiel chord and a sample. In addition to two device-samples, there are four different kinds of samples freely chosen by the performer according to specifications given by the composer (the sounds suggested in the score are crickets, electric tools, planes, and bubbles). There are four different samples of each sound type, and each of these is presented in the manner described above together with rising inversions of four-part chords (Cmaj7, Cmaj7, dmin7, G7 respectively). At the end of the presentation of each sound type, a very short phrase is heard from the glockenspiel (bar 21). Between the presentation of each sound type, two device samples alternate in a fixed pattern (bars 22-24), giving the impression of a machine being turned on and off. When the four-times-four sounds have been presented one has become very familiar with the pattern and expect it to continue. The music does in fact continue according to the same pattern, but now the samples present generic pop music in different styles. A moment of rupture and surprise occurs with the fourth pop music sample which is prolongated and turns out to be Pink Floyd's *Comfortably Numb* in an electronic arrangement. This sample is not broken off like every previous sample, and the performer plays the famous electric guitar solo on the glockenspiel with the sample as a backing track. The small glockenspiel phrase heard earlier turns out to be the opening of the solo. The effect is striking – the original song seems to be packed in plastic as if it were reproduced by Jeff Koons. Gone is the heavy beat and airy production of the original, and David Gilmour's expressive and subtly nuanced phrasing is undermined by the limited expressive range of the glockenspiel. The rhythms are decidedly square, nuances reduced to fit a simplified grid. It is interesting to note that there seems to be a difference here between samples and quotation: whereas samples are left as they are (or at least they give this impression), the qualities of the quoted song are compressed to be flat, lifeless and inexpressive (this is even more striking in the next movement). Abruptly, the music returns to its former self, but now with a much more intense character. However, the previous sound types are exchanged for sampled gongs, and live tam-tam strikes are introduced. The harmony is now major 7 chords

descending from E flat to C; after a few rounds the chords are arpeggiated. As in the first movement, the material is subject to a process of foreshortening which in the second movement (bars 183-209) is much more elaborate than in the first. The movement draws to a close with the resonance of a scalar passage on the glockenspiel and the decay of a gong sample and the acoustic tam-tam.

The third movement, *Session Drummer*, stages what could easily be described as a freelance drummer's nightmare – backing Claude Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* with a cool drum beat. Conceptually, the movement extends from the heels of the former movement. It opens with a midi version of Debussy's score which sounds intentionally silly; for instance, in addition to the low quality and dynamically flat instrumental sounds (the vibrato in the flute sound is completely uniform and inexpressive), the midi flute halts going into the third beat low g of the opening motive. The percussionist enters with the orchestra in bar 4 with a cliché rock break going into a heavy three-against-two 6/8 beat to accompany the hesitant bars following. The midi orchestration is obviously of intentionally low quality – it sounds flat and mechanical, the orchestral sounds not being samples but electronically generated with a low budget synthesizer. As if Roy Lichtenstein would copy *Mona Lisa*, it certainly invites comparison to Isao Tomita's 1975 arrangement of the piece. But where Tomita takes Debussy into the space age exploring state of the art instrument and recording technology with great insight and a brilliant musicality, Shlomowitz seemingly lets the playback function in the notation program Finale do the job for him. As the opening motive returns in bar 11, the drummer goes into a complex fusion beat for the 9/8 bars, as if insecure about what to do with this kind of music. One gets the impression that the drummer is caught in a kind of labyrinthine game from which s/he has to escape, and seemingly unsatisfied with the results achieved so far, the drummer bursts into a fast rock beat for the oboe solo at bar 15. This strategy exposes a complete mismatch of the squareness of the beat and the undulating orchestral music. The beat of the drums immediately suggests listening for four-beat patterns which does not fit the structure of Debussy's music – the Debussy would let itself be fixed to the metric grid of the beat only at great cost. The inherent heterogeneity of material and forces is spelled out on multiple levels: the typical qualities of Debussy's music – its ephemerality, vagueness and mystery –

clashes with the decidedly inorganic quality of the lo-tech midi instrumentation, the crossing metric patterns, the mechanical beat and the flatness of the drum sounds. A moment of surprise not unlike the one in the previous movement occurs at bar 17 where the midi orchestra is substituted by a proper orchestral recording. However, the possible relief provided by the sound of an actual orchestra is only momentary, and only works to enhance the distance between the electronic drum sounds and Debussy's music. Elements related both to instrumentation and performance practice further enhance this distance. At bar 17, the drum kit sounds change, exposing the dubitability of the medium. Having previously explored the richest set up of the whole cycle including three tom-toms and three cymbal sounds, the kit is now reduced to a 'Lo-fi kit' consisting merely of five sounds. Even the quality of the sounds employed is reduced, in striking opposition to the increased nuances found in the proper orchestral performance. The production of Håkon Stene's recording supports this effect, in that the midi drums are left completely dry and up-front in the mix. Additionally, the performer is instructed to play in time with the recording and follow the rubato of the recorded performance. One quickly understands why the midi orchestra is substituted at this particular moment: The great fluctuations in tempo typically found in performances of the following section do not sit well with the mechanical and un-resonant sound quality of the 'Lo-fi Kit', and, trying to keep up with the orchestra, the drummer enters into a halting way of playing, dragging behind the organic temporality explored in the recorded performance.

As the midi orchestra returns with the head motive in bar 26, underscoring the relationship between form and instrumentation, the drum kit changes back to the '80s Rock Ballad Kit' of the opening and our imaginary drummer again opts for the fusion beat heard earlier. Strangely, the return of the midi orchestra seems to provide an element of comfort as the abysmal chasm between the proper orchestra and the electronic drums is seemingly overcome in that the midi orchestra and drums are at least closely related when it comes to expressive qualities. Relations are turned on their head: The midi orchestra does not take on the character of being in the wrong when it comes to Debussy, it teams up with the drummer – who, after all, is the protagonist of this piece – leaving the proper orchestra and Debussy's music itself with the shorter straw, the musical material trumped by the

instrumentation. The hierarchy of the material falters, and where one would normally say that when a composer quotes other music the music of the former is based on that of the latter, this is no longer valid in this piece. It is Debussy who seems out of place, not the midi coating and mechanical drumming. This position seems only strengthened by the return of the orchestral recording and 'Lo-fi Kit' for the flute triplets in bar 28. The drummer again follows the plastically shaped rhythms of the flute in a futile effort to match the ebb and flow of acoustic instruments. Before the *Prelude* moves on from bar 30, the orchestra crossfades with the midi orchestra which gets the final word, slowly fading out as the performer moves to station two and prepares for the next movement.

One could argue that in telling this narrative of the drummer I am going against my Foucauldian intention of subjecting the heterogeneous to a violent homogenization. However, I think the heterogeneity which runs through this movement can withstand the subsumption of any over-arching narrative. If the midi orchestra and the drums come together as the orchestral recording recedes, it merely represents a change of alliances or shift of balance within the centrifugal force field of heterogenous and diverging elements and forces exhibited by the differing elements of the set-up of this movement. It is as if every element – material, sound, instruments, technology, form – becomes unglued or unhinged in a material way, threatening a collapse which is really the collapse of the homogenizing tendencies of our perceptive categories. The form of this movement is not really a narrative, form here is rather the juxtaposition of different signs or materials whose inherent heterogeneity lets them combine in multiple ways. For me, this movement reveals these 'tendencies of the material' in an impressively convincing way, simultaneously exploring the gap between conceptually complex critical thinking and on-stage silliness.

One should take a moment to consider the relationship between the different materials at this point. The samples of the movements considered so far are of a very different character, from the everyday car sounds of the first movement, over the random sound categories of the second, to the midi and recorded versions of Debussy in the third. In the first movement, sounds of the everyday are appropriated into the metric network of the drum beat. One should note that the samples have to be stopped by the performer by a second stroke on

the appropriate midi pad; the start and end of each sound is therefore clearly delineated and made audible because of the soft sound emanating from the pad itself. In the second movement, the samples of the four sound categories seem only to have the function to prepare the ground for the surprise of the pop samples and finally the quotation from *Comfortably Numb*. The samples should be chosen to be clearly identifiable and contrasting,[16] something I understand to mean that they should not serve any kind of concatenation except as a flat base from which the pop samples and the song proper can stand out. One should note that the juxtaposition of sampled gongs and live tam-tam towards the end of the movement creates a blurring of live and sampled sounds. In recording, this tendency is further enhanced – at least in Håkon Stene's recording it is virtually impossible to distinguish between the sampled and live sounds represented in the score. Whether this should be understood as a virtue of the recording or a misrepresentation of the material is not so important; suffice to mention that in reproducing the work there is a gap here for performer intervention even in the (re-)presentation of the relationship between the sampled and live material. The recording poses the question of what the difference is between a sample and a recorded live sound. This question is – at least when listening the recording of the work – further explored in the third movement. Here, as suggested above, the midi orchestra in the end seems to be more authentic or emphatic than the orchestral recording which nonetheless must be said to provide the original material for the midi arrangement.

It is interesting to note that, as in the second movement, when the performer interacts with pre-existing music in the third movement, the instrumentation effectively cancels out the expressive qualities associated with the material. This is however not the case with the fourth movement, *Exotic Tourism in Recorded Sound History*, where a kalimba plays a central role. However, if the kalimba emanates an air of spiritual and musical authenticity, this air is perhaps not as sweet-scented as it appears to be, as suggested by the constellation of sound materials. As the other movements in the *PC 8* cycle, there is a marked difference between the recording and live performance, and the compound, disjunct character of the movement

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[16] Shlomowitz, *Popular Contexts vol. 8*, viii.

so apparent in concert is lost in the artistic documentation found in the MwtR portfolio. Like the first movement, the heterogeneity of the constellation is evened out in the production, producing a smooth and polished result which downplays the critical and political potential of the music. In *Exotic Tourism*, the result is particularly problematic as I will show below.

Exotic Tourism opens with the performer turning on an LP. The sound from the LP is simply crackling vinyl, suggesting a nostalgic mood and memories of old, dusty LPs. Soon, the performer starts the first sample, a recording of the voice of British ethnomusicologist Hugh Tracey. In the recording, Tracey presents various African lamellophones, of which he was an important collector. After a while, the performer starts playing the kalimba, and the Hugh Tracey sample fades out. The kalimba material at first consists of single notes which are soon harmonized in sixths and is eventually interspersed with rapid, rising melodic passages. The material is modal, based on the notes of a G major scale and has an improvisatory character. The intensity of the texture increases as melodic material comes to dominate. At bar 79, the rising material reaches its highest note, an f sharp, for the first time which leads into a series of descending figures from this note. With the prominence of the f sharp, the material transforms from modal to tonal and takes on the distinct character of a D dominant seventh harmony which cadences to G major at bar 85. A sample of applause cheers, undoubtedly for the virtuosic passage work and the beautiful cadence. As the applause fades out, the initial harmonized Kalimba material is repeated as a short coda, the vinyl record spinning until the performer starts the last movement.

The construction consists of three elements, the crackling LP, the samples and the kalimba, each of which needs to be considered separately and in conjunction. The LP is by itself the simplest of these elements and provides an aura of nostalgia. When the voice of Hugh Tracey enters, one could imagine it being an ethnographic LP documenting Tracey's work in Africa – as an historical document intended on disseminating research on African music and culture. Tracey's accent certainly brings to mind the style of the typical early BBC voice, and he obviously has pedagogical intentions with his demonstrations. What is crucial is that the LP and Tracey are two separate elements are not one, and that the nostalgic idyll which an old LP could have represented is shattered. This will be clear in a live performance where

one can see and hear the performer starting the Tracey sample from a pad but is lost in the in Håkon Stene's recording where the thud of the pad is not present. But what about Tracey himself – who is he, and what is he talking about? Hugh Tracey (1903-1977) was a British ethnomusicologist who did field work in many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, being particularly interested in the various lamellophones found across the African continent. Tracey travelled throughout Africa recording music and collecting instruments, he founded and ran the International Library of African Music (ILAM), he wrote numerous books on African music, lectured on three continents and manufactured African instruments through his company African Musical Instruments (AMI). For many years he was widely regarded as the leading expert on African music, but in recent decades this image has begun to crack. Christine Lucia describes him as an 'imperialist exploiter of 'Other people's' cultures a colonialist, a puritanical preservationist',[17] and the work of Paulette Coetzee retells the story of Tracey as a man with ties to the apartheid regime in South Africa who was in no doubt regarding the superiority of the white man in relation to his native subjects.[18] Indeed, as early as 1970 Philip Peek had described Tracey's project as 'paternalistic intellectual neo-colonialism'[19] and a 'hollow academic endeavour.'[20] Thus, any nostalgia evoked by the crackling LP must be said to represent Tracey's own longing for the 'good old days'. The sample of Tracey speaking is taken from a 1960 BBC documentary on Tracey.[21] The sequence in question begins at 07:53, where Tracey shows his collection of lamellophones. The sequence is interesting for a number of reasons. First, it exemplifies Tracey's self-conscious behaviour in front of camera. According to Coetzee, Tracey's 'form of physical expression was built upon an innate awareness of its own representation, transmission and preservation via technologies that seemed to offer direct and unmediated accuracy, at a time when such media were becoming widespread, yet still being experienced as novel and remarkable.'[22]

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[17] Lucia quoted in Lambrechts *Ethongraphy and the Archive*, p. 71

[18] Coetzee, *Performing Whiteness*.

[19] Peek, 'Review', 505

[20] Ibid., 507

[21] *A View from the Farm*. (1960) Documentary film. UK: BBC. Available on Vimeo.com: https://vimeo.com/41472208.

[22] Coetzee, *Performing Whiteness*, p. 128. *A View from the Farm* provides numerous examples that support Coetzee's claim.

Coetzee provides a detailed account of his rhetoric, iconography, and behaviour to support this claim (and examples are found throughout *A View from the Farm*). Secondly, and in close proximity to the first point, is the introduction of the kalimba. Interestingly, after the kalimba enters in the piece, the Tracey sample fades just as he is about to introduce this instrument, the live kalimba taking the place of the one mediated in the film. The kalimba as we know it is in fact Hugh Tracey's own design, introduced to the commercial market in 1954 by the AMI. It broke big in the US after AMI contracted the delivery of 10.000 kalimbas to Creative Playthings of Princeton (NJ) in the early sixties[23] and has since been a huge success. Now, though it reverberates with spirituality, the Hugh Tracey kalimba is an instrument designed to fit Western consumption. He has made several organological adaptions of his lamellophone models, which come in all shapes, sizes and tunings. He standardized the shape of the resonator (presumably to fit large scale production and standardized shipment) and most importantly tuned it to a Western diatonic major scale. He also adjusted the layout of the tongues so that one can play a scale with right and left thumbs in alternation. Additionally, the instrument is cleansed of any of the rattling and buzzing materials often found on lamellophones. It seems Tracey cleansed his kalimba thoroughly before hitting the Western – white – markets. Coming back to the Tracey sample, the sequence from which the sample is taken ends by Tracey demonstrating his invention by assuring the interviewer that it is even well suited for Bach, demonstrating this by playing the famous closing choral from Bach's Cantata *Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben*, BWV 147 (popularized in the UK as *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring* after the 1926 publication of a piano transcription of this movement by Dame Myra Hess). The kalimba represents a typical appropriation of the foreign by Western culture. The paradox of the Hugh Tracey Kalimba is even recognized by his stern supporters at Kalimbamagic.com: 'It is ironic that Dr. Tracey spent his life loving, collecting and preserving traditional African Music, yet he ended up inventing and disseminating a non-traditional, brand new species derived from traditional ancestral instruments to the world outside of Africa.'[24] Interestingly, a similar process of aesthetization and appropriation is involved in Tracey's recording method, the details of

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[23] 'Hugh Tracey founds African Musical Instruments'. https://www.kalimbamagic.com/info/history/23-hugh-tracey-founds-african-musical-instruments-ami

[24] Kalimbamagic.com

which are tracked by Coetzee.[25] Tracey's recordings were not simply made in order to document musical African music and musicians objectively but were in fact the result of a careful and conscious process of production designed to satisfy a consumer market. Coetzee's assertion regarding Tracey's activities seem valid for his marketing of the Kalimba as well as of his recordings: '[E]ven if it also involved goodwill and affection, the network of human relationships on which his work was based always bore the marks of capital'.[26] In Shlomowitz' piece, the kalimba as an alienated instrument distanced irreversibly from its origin, representing cultural appropriation, is not returned to its African roots – indeed it cannot be. Nonetheless, in Shlomowitz, the distortion of certain idiomatic properties of the kalimba point towards the African lamellophones proper. Some notes of the kalimba are prepared with paper clips, thus returning some of the distorted effect found in certain lamellophones. Also, the kalimba tuning differs remotely from the diatonic tuning envisage by Hugh Tracey, the lower f sharp being tuned to f. Stene and Shlomowitz however decided on using a tongue tuned somewhere between f and f sharp, as if evoking a fake authenticity.[27] The kalimba in Shlomowitz is degraded to evoke a cultural context which Tracey's construction sought to eradicate. Doubly distanced from itself and its ancestral origin, the kalimba in Shlomowitz does not represent a return to the authentic African spirit from which this instrument is forever distanced. It rather represents a critical strategy of heterogenization, a stratification of the semantics of idiomatic, cultural, historical and political properties set in motion by this instrument: it represents what Jacques Derrida would describe as the movement of ex-appropriation, 'that movement of the proper expropriating itself through the very process of appropriation'.[28] That is, reclaiming or returning the banned properties of African lamellophones to the Hugh Tracey kalimba only serves to expose the paradoxes and politically questionable motives to which this instrument is inextricably tied. The applause heard after the cadence to G in bar 85 now irrevocably reverberates as applauding Tracey's G major cadence in Bach in *A View from the*

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[25] Coetzee, *Performing Whiteness*, p. 181-95.

[26] Ibid., p. 126

[27] Conversation with Håkon Stene.

[28] Derrida, 'Politics', p. 171. I have investigated the notion of ex-appropriation elsewhere (see Førisdal, *Music of the Margins*, p.285-307).

Farm. But whose applause is this? The applause suggests a moment of identification for the audience – is it we, the listeners, who are applauding? Who constitute this 'we' and why are we applauding? As a listener, I immediately feel a sense of identification with the applauding crowd; nonetheless, one understands at once that the applause is a recording which gives a sense of an enforced reaction. Alienation and identification in the same gesture. Of course, the applause will be experienced very differently depending on whether one attends a concert performance or listens to the recording. Which brings me back to the question of the aesthetics of recording and the strategy of heterogeneity which underpins the work. The seamless quality of the recording, where the semiotic disparity of the sound materials is smoothed over, subverts the critical potential of the music. This is especially pertinent in this movement, where the question of recording techniques itself is part of the contextual subject matter. The coda resumes the modal harmonies of the opening, leaving headroom for reflection. Though centred on the kalimba, this movement raises a number of issues for any musician concerned with the political history of instruments.

The final movement, *Royalty Free*, is a fast cascade of samples and beats, a whirling centrifugal fantasy with samples pointing in all directions. The form of this movement again follows a simple pattern based on two different beats presented in four cycles. The main tempo is a crotchet = 160, and again the kit is a rich rock kit with nine different sounds. The opening bar presents a fast and somewhat rolling beat in 4/4. Let us call this 'beat 1'. The opening bar is repeated 44 times, each time with a different sample. The sounds present a huge range of sources, from animal sounds, mechanical sounds musical sounds and so on. The 44 sounds can be substituted by other sounds at the performers will, something that suggests that the 44 sounds have no structural function except marking a certain difference to the other sounds. In the 44 sounds provided by Shlomowitz, eight are taken from the samples heard in movements 1 and 2, providing a subdued sense of wholeness to the cycle. After 44 repetitions, beat 1 is cut by the stroke of a gong and a long bar of rapid cymbal attacks. Bar 3 and 4 present 'beat 2', a jagged two bar pattern in 6/4. The first of the two bar presents a 'sci-fi sample' the second a synth pad. The pattern is repeated 4 times. Bar 5 presents a pause where the samples are allowed to finish before the percussionist again plunges into beat 1 at break-neck speed. Beat 1 presents the same set of 44 samples, only

now the samples are fired every minim of the 4/4 pattern. The pattern is thus repeated only 22 times before moving on to the gong and cymbals. In the second cycle, beat 2 is coupled with drum beats (that go against the main tempo) and jazzy sax phrases. Again, a moment of rest is provided before the third cycle of the pattern commences. Now, beat 1 is altered to a 2/4 pattern with samples on every crotchet. The shortening of the samples results in a very hectic pacing, but interestingly the samples are still distinctly recognizable due to their different sources. The pattern is repeated 22 times before the gong and cymbals kick in. in the third cycle, beat 2 presents samples of phone calls and LP scratching, which unlike the samples in cycle 2 have no relation to each other. In the last cycle, beat 1 is reduced to two 2/8 bars with samples on each quaver. The first bar is repeated 12 times, the second 10 times. Though the samples are still recognizable, at this point one feels that the material is exhausted, void and empty – indeed, one can sense the end of the movement and the cycle as a whole is approaching. This is achieved through a simple process of foreshortening and the gradual disembodiment of the samples through the cycles of repetition. Before beat 2, the basic pattern is interrupted by a tennis interlude: a slow beat is coupled with tennis sounds. Interestingly, attention is directed towards the typical back-and-forth ballistics of tennis, the physicality of which is embedded in the music. All of a sudden, the music returns to its former self as the tennis is substituted by table tennis over a repeated and halting 6/4 pattern. The cycle continues with beat two, drum beats and trumpet samples, but rather than going back into beat 1, after the pause bar, beat 2 continue, this time with (synth) brass chords and car rev alternating. The brass chord is the same G major chord in every repetition, underpinning the sense of end already underway. After the seventh brass chord, both the chord and the car sounds are substituted by G major chords played on various guitars. Again, repetition and difference presented in emblematic form, this time in the music itself, summarizing the semiotic play of the whole cycle. As if trying to break out of the strictness of the repetitions and the insistence on identity despite the diversity of guitar sounds, a final out of tune, non-identical, guitar chord pushes the music into the gong and cymbals before coming to an end on a last brass chord. This final chord, serving as a kind of tonic only because it has been so insistently repeated, fails to provide a sense of grounding because the synth sound lacks sufficient credence – dubitable because of its synthetic timbre, it only mimics the function of tonic. A simulacrum, it serves to leave the sense of

play that runs through the whole work intact, the process of semiosis not terminating even if the musical form has run its course.

Carola Bauckholt: material encounters

If Johannes Kreidler evokes paralysis through bifurcating parameters in *Fantasies of Downfall*, and Matthew Shlomowitz sets in motion a play of signs through recontextualization in *Popular Contexts 8*, Carola Bauckholt evokes a quite different set of issues in her work *Oh, I see*. This work presents a kind of spectacle of instrumental theatre run according to a surrealist logic of associations and continuity. This is not to say that Bauckholt necessarily is a surrealist composer related to the historical movement of surrealism, but that she creates a kind of music which has a number of typically surrealist features in that the music evokes a world in sound where non-musical natural and everyday sounds are deployed on the same plane. In this sense, Bauckholt is affirmative rather than critical. This sets her apart from senior composers like Lachenmann or Spahlinger with whom she has shared her interest in untraditional sounds. Whereas the elder composer's work has been explicitly directed at critiquing institutionalised modes of perception and performance, Bauckholt addresses our perception of the ordinary and extraordinary realities which her work suggests. Bauckholt has explored the relation to the outside in a number of works going back to her 1992 homage to John Cage, *Geräusche*. In this miniature for two performers, all sounds are made using kitchen utensils. In a number of works since *Geräusche*, she has explored this kind of extended set of instruments. Using everyday objects as instruments seems perfectly natural in Bauckholt and is not something which is deliberately exposed in the works. Nonetheless, the use of everyday objects as sound sources is an invitation to the performer to engage in a dialogue between of aesthetic and everyday realities. In discussing *Oh, I see* the focus will be on performance practice and the materiality of such musical instruments.

But first a few general remarks. The piece *Oh, I see* is written for clarinet, cello, piano, two large balloons and video, and was premiered in Bergen, Norway, by the asamisimasa ensemble. The musicians are seated so that the piano is in the middle, facing inwards, with

clarinet front left and cello front right seen from the audience. The balloon players sit on high risers at on each side of the inner end of the piano. The balloons are large enough to cover the upper limbs of the performers, but their bare legs should be clearly visible from the knees down. The balloons are used both as sound sources and video screens, the video showing two eyes variously directed at the audience and instrumentalists.

Figure 7. asamisimasa performing *Oh, I see* in Linz, Austria, December 2016.

The use of everyday objects sets Bauckholt's work apart from the rest of the composers involved in the MwtR project, where such objects-turned instruments are not in use. Everyday objects carry with them both a semantic and often highly personal component or aura as well as a distinctive sensitivity or haptic correlate; one has a distinctive understanding of how it feels to touch and use them. This sensitivity is not necessarily in conflict with traditional musical technique, but rather suggests a sensation of touch of another kind which enriches classical finesse. In *Oh, I see*, in addition to the balloons, the musicians use for instance sponges, cassette tape, credit cards and rivets to play their instruments, all objects that carry with them a number of private associations. For me, these associations go back to childhood memories in particular. For instance, playing and handling the balloon conjures the memories of birthday parties – once, celebrating my birthday one

particularly hot June day in the early eighties, the temperature was so high the balloons hanging from the terrace ceiling blew up. Even pumping up the balloons brings to mind summers at the seaside summerhouse, spending endless days on the beach playing with a rubber boat, using an old foot pump to inflate it. A child of the very late seventies and early eighties, the cassette tape was an important source of early musical experiences, listening to *Born in the USA*, *Destroyer*, *Welcome to the Real World*, *Invisible Touch*, *Tug of War*, *The Joshua Tree*, *Brothers in Arms*, *Women and Children first*… Also, making mix tapes from favourite LPs (indispensable on long car rides and holidays; entering the Academy of Music in 1996, I immediately copied a number of contemporary music LPs to MC…) or copying songs from the radio, or even those first attempts at writing and recording music with a beat-up Tascam four track tape machine. Not a staple of the Førisdal household, the kitchen sponge carries with it a number of sensations, smells, tastes, tactile experiences and memories distinctly related to my grandparents' seaside lodge just over the Swedish border (family rituals, fishing, swimming, dressing up as witches for Easter, playing Memory with my grandfather, exploring the plundered Bronze Age graves overlooking the Hvaler archipelago). This is not the proper place for elaborating such a Proustian discourse – it is doubtful whether the details of such private associations bring with them anything relevant for the understanding of the musical work in question. Nonetheless, these experiences and associations form a dense web of meaning around the different objects, which, though of a private character outside the work structure proper, go into the handling of the objects and sound production of the work.

For me, a guitar player, playing the balloon involves investigating and developing a tactile sensitivity specific to the tasks at hand. Playing the guitar, my arms, hands and fingers are accustomed to the particular haptic qualities of the instrument; indeed, developing a haptic sensitivity is central to a musician's development of skills. Playing the balloon, I have only the most cursory sensitivity with regards to the specific idiomatic qualities of this everyday-object-turned-instrument, a sensitivity developed through informal contact with balloons and other rubber objects. Initially, I feel I have no control over this huge beast, but with time an instrument-specific sense of touch develops. I am not unfamiliar with this situation which I have experienced performing a number of pieces involving unconventional performance

practice like Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Mikrophonie II*, Mathias Spahlinger's *éphémère* or Simon Steen-Andersen's *Rerendered*. I know that the experience of familiarization and overcoming of the initial alienation is transformational and I know this experience will affect my reality as a musician. Certainly, this kind of transformation can also be induced by learning a new piece for one's main instrument and one could argue that this experience is a central aspect of contemporary performance practice;[29] indeed, any kind of learning process is ideally transformational to some degree. However, the multimodal sensory experience of learning a new instrument often makes for a highly conscious transformational experience.

The balloons present a wide range of sounds, from a low rumble to high squeaks. The balloons are amplified in order to bring out the material quality and resonance of the rubber. The balloons are prepared with strips of gaffer tape with different distances between the tape. The different distance between the tape conditions the natural elasticity of the rubber and lets the players perform sounds with different pitches more easily. Many of the sounds of the balloons are performed using the fingers, hands and arms, engaging the friction of the rubber with different forms of touch. In order to bring out certain sounds, the surface of the balloons is prepared with apple juice. Before we decided on the apple juice a number of different sticky materials were tested – honey, a particularly sweet homemade plum marmalade, soda and other kinds of juice. The memory of this process is brought to life every time I perform the piece, and the process itself and the scent and touch (and taste!) of the apple juice bring with them their own set of associations that increase the web of subjective meaning surrounding the instrument – the performance practice is permeated, or perforated, by references to everyday situations and experiences. In addition to the apple juice, the balloons need to be moist and the players continuously need to apply water onto the balloon using the sponge or the hands. As the water runs of the rubber surface, the level of moisturization changes continuously, something that affects the timbral possibilities quite dramatically.

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[29] I have analysed such transformational potentials elsewhere. See Førisdal, *Music of the Margins*.

The different sounds produced with the balloons have a distinct sense of touch. High squeaks are produced with a swift and light movement, but lower sounds are produced by applying force to the rubber surface. Certain sounds are produced by moving the hand or sponge across the gaffer strips in a circular movement producing repeated patterns of sounds, e.g. at bar 148 ff (10:10;[30] see Figure 8). In these passages one becomes particularly aware of the different surface textures involved: matte and silver gaffer tape, the balloon rubber, all with varying – and changing – degrees of moisturization. Circling the sponge over the surfaces produces its own rhythm based on the different degrees of friction of the different surfaces. An analogue passage is found at bar 186 ff (12:51; Figure 9).
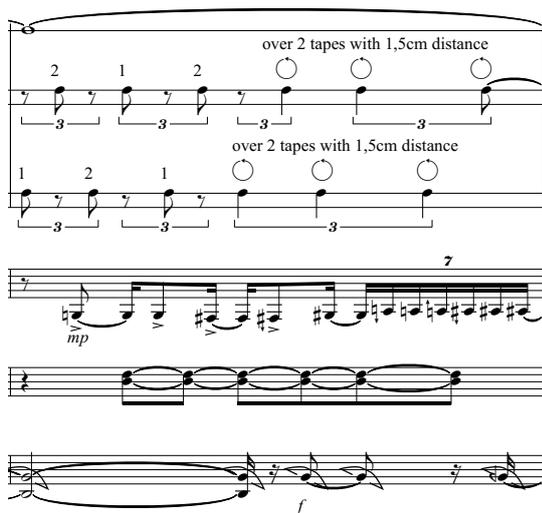
Figure 8. Carola Bauckholt: *Oh, I see*, bar 148. Circular motion starts on the third beat. All examples from *Oh, I see* copyright © 2016 Carola Bauckholt. All rights reserved. Reproduced with kind permission from the composer.
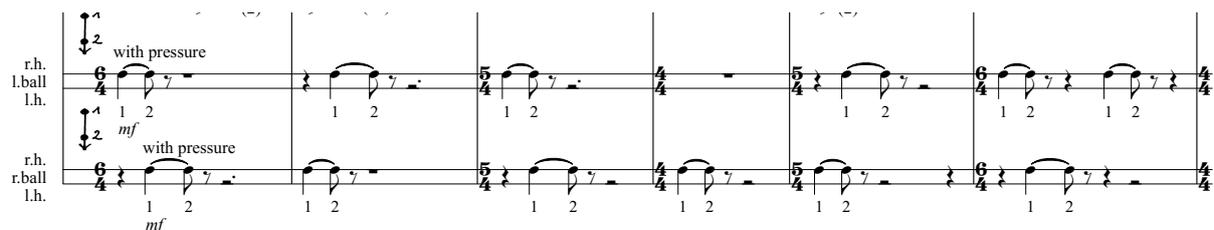
Figure 9. Carola Bauckholt: *Oh, I see*, bar 186-191.

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[30] Timings refer to the documentation found on youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcSHjkoaVas.

Here, the balloon players alternately drag the sponge across all the gaffer strips from low to high, producing a rapid alternation of gaffer and rubber sounds. The differences in friction of the various surfaces of tape and rubber are overcome by applying the right amount of pressure, also adjusting for a crescendo towards the bottom strip of tape.

In many passages the balloon players invoke the sound of steps or heartbeats using either the hand or finger on the sticky area (e.g. at bar 33 ff, and bar 105 ff); sometimes the fingers need to be pulled slowly across the rubber or tape, sometimes swiftly, sometimes with a heavy pressure and sometimes with the only the lightest touch. In a certain passage (i.e. bar 160 ff), the elbow is used for a particularly deep sound. The movement needs to come from below, the elbow moving upwards in a circular motion. These actions foster an intimate and subtle relationship with the elastic qualities of the balloon as an instrument based on the correlate of touch and sound, haptics and auditory sensations.

In this description of the performance practice of the balloons I have highlighted certain important elements: the inflation pressure of the balloon, the level of moisture and friction on the surface, the area on the surface where action takes place, the degree of pressure applied by the performer, and the material used on the balloon (sponge, skin or nail). These elements provide the coordinates of the practice, and their continuously changing interrelatedness is present in the performer's consciousness at all times.

Now, if the instrument itself is elastic, my conception of the balloon is certainly plastic[31] – my conception of balloons and rubber surfaces, and by extension idiomatic qualities and my corporeal and haptic relationship to musical and other technologies is transformed or transported, extended through the interaction with the balloon. The balloon is caught in a double bind of art and everyday – real – life and finds itself articulating a hinge between – or

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[31] In Catherine Malabou's work, the plastic is that which retains a new shape after being exposed to external stimuli. See Malabou *Que faire*, 61-66.

better: an interlacing of these two life worlds; indeed, it provides a site of deconstruction of this dichotomous relationship that returns art and life to me in a new configuration.[32] Realities are also configured in the music-theatrical fabric of the work. The work opens with a dialogue between the balloon players and the clarinet trio. The balloon players ask and the trio responds: 'what?' – 'no!'. The trio produce clicking sounds in unison rhythms (with small soloistic deviations). The balloons enter at bar 32 (02:29) with a 'walking' texture that will dominate large sections of the work. The players continue the dialogue saying '*b t b t*' (i.e. *bitte, bitte*, German for 'please').[33] As the balloon players develop their walking material, the trio re-enters with soft, mysterious material: mumbling clarinet passages is coupled with sustained sounds in piano and cello. From bar 70 (05:08), the balloons and trio explore the same kind of similar material based on pressing the balloon with one finger (see Figure 10).

Figure 10. Carola Bauckholt: *Oh, I see*, bar 76-77 (05:24).

The trio also produce friction-based sounds, instruments passing their sounds around in an eight-note rhythm. The material develops and the piano breaks out with a soft chromatic passage in the high register leading to a moment of great rupture – suddenly the projectors

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[32] In the work of Derrida, the notion of the double bind (*la bande double*) circumscribes the paradoxical concurrence of both structure and the undoing and reconfiguration of structure. See Derrida, *Glas*; see also Critchley, *Ethics of Deconstruction*, p. 127-129.

[33] The *bitte bitte*-material also plays a significant part in the music theatre piece *Hellhörig* (2014).

are turned on and the image of two large eyes open on the balloons, staring at the audience as if having been abruptly woken from sleep, the music changing character completely with high notes in the clarinet and large piano chords, *subito fortissimo*. The piano passage was not simply a musical transition, it was also a transition from sleep into wakefulness. The ensemble is revealed to be a kind of face or head where the balloons form the eyes, the piano the mouth and teeth and the clarinet and cello the right and left ears of the onstage ensemble subject. The appearance of the on-stage subject suggests a distinction between internal and external attention. In light of this, the dialogic materials of the opening section could be understood as an internal discussion in a dream and the music of the second section suggests a response to the external stimulus provided by the theatre audience as if the on-stage subject is trying to come to an understanding of the situation. The music is reflecting, circling around small microtonal motives against the deep and disturbing rumbling of the balloons. One could say that the work stages a conflict of different realities, questioning which would be the more properly real of the two. Interestingly, Bauckholt initially planned to name the piece *Musique Surréal* as if to invoke the idea that all music is a music with the real albeit returned to us in a super-real fashion. The work also addresses its own performative reality: When focus is directed from the eyes towards the audience the subject-object relation so central to Erika Fischer-Lichte is disturbed and the roles of observer and observed is brought into play.[34] If audience participation is not actively suggested in the work, one can at least say that the feedback-loop between ensemble and audience is raised as an element of reflection and that the traditional and strict division of performer and audience is interrupted. The ensemble subject observes the audience and contemplates the situation. After a while the walking sounds of the balloons re-emerge as if the subject all of a sudden is reminded of the dream of the opening section. The walking and reflecting materials are combined and developed, and after a crescendo in the balloons and voices a new level of self-consciousness of the subject sets in: the eyes start to look at the cello and clarinet players, the players alternately directing their attention at the eyes or audience (Figure 11). The ensemble subject is becoming aware of its own organs and limbs. At this point the music is uniform, the balloons are silenced as the trio plays with the loose

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[34] Fischer-Lichte, Erika, *The Transformative Power*, p. 17 ff.

ends of gaffer tape rolls. Playing the gaffer tapes induces performer consciousness regarding materiality and tactility as discussed above.

Figure 11. Carola Bauckholt: *Oh, I see*, bar 118-124.

As if excited by the observation and heightened awareness of self and surroundings the balloon players start breathing excitedly and go into deep guttural sounds and deep balloon rumbling, the subject seems to have come to grips with the situation and falls asleep again.

Figure 11. asamisimasa performing *Oh, I see* in Linz, December 2016.

The piece continues to juxtapose sleep and awakening, blurring the distinction between the two. Subsequent passages further develop the confrontation with the external reality by the eyes addressing the audience directly; in another passage, existing music enters the dream (the famous habanera from *Carmen* as well as marching rhythms). Towards the end of the work, Bauckholt's surrealist leanings come to the fore as the eyes go through a number of plastic transformations evoking both the famous eye close-up from Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's 1929 film *Un chien andalou*, and those transformational masks of which Catherine Malabou is so fascinated.[35]

Oh, I see is a work that addresses the issue of reality on multiple levels – on the level of its own performative reality, on the level of its internal structure, and on the level of the instrumental practice. These three levels unfold separately, heterogeneously, but are also tightly interconnected. Nonetheless there is no necessary movement from the one to the other, no causal relationships between them, but rather a parallel unfolding without strict borders.

No more purity

The aim of this text has been to shed light on the works written in response to the artistic research project Music with the Real. I have discussed how the different materials and strategies of the composers that point beyond what we can bracket as sound, in order to expose the inherent heterogeneity of the works and suggest how such a thing as a virginal purity of sound – a music *without* the real, or without some sort of concatenation to the non-musical – is inconceivable. Even sound itself is the dissemination and of movement and transference of energy in the air. Music is always already music with the real – music is a central element of human life and as such music is by necessity related to other aspects of human reality. Being both an object of everyday reality as well as a *sur-réal* object of aesthetic contemplation, a work of music presents us with an antinomy whose delimitation runs through musical thinking since Pythagoras. One should therefore perhaps seek to maintain a certain resistance to the literal implications of title of the project under

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[35] Malabou, *La plasticité*.

discussion, *Music with the Real*, and see it as a point of departure for reflecting critically – and creatively – upon the dichotomy it evokes. To suggest that there exists such a thing as music *with* the real is to evoke a strict demarcation between music and non-musical reality (whatever that may be), a position grounded in the notion of aesthetic autonomy. Such a position is thoroughly dismantled by the works discussed in the present text and by the project itself. The claim to heterogeneity was made in order to bracket the antinomy of the real and the aesthetic; it was made to avoid the imposition of preformed receptive schema. The relationship between what is and what is not music needs to be carefully scrutinized and deconstructed in order to allow the inherent and multi-layered complexity of even the simplest of musical objects and actions to flourish.

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