

MUSIC ACADEMY BASEL

Music and the Social Object

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I. Introduction

In the era of the ‘like,’ affirmation bends backwards into reification, hardening the social fabric, obscuring power relations, and ruling out non-compliance. The culture wars clamor on our smartphones while a fresh wave of imperial conquest yields bodies and buyers for weapons production. Art looks ever more like the sleek offspring of technology and design, while finance and service become the poles around which the world turns. Against the vicissitudes of history, how can art not be swallowed up, its autonomy plundered, relegated to celebrating or decrying the gravities it is subjected to? For me, there is only one answer, and that is to push, push, against the torrents of the times into futility (or perhaps not).

My assumption is that art can affect the way humans interact with the world, and contains therefore an inherent politics. By this I do not mean explicit political messages represented in a medium. I far more believe in the implicit political power of artworks: by enacting models of subject/subject or subject/object relations that provide confrontations and alternatives to existing hierarchies and power structures in society, a concrete political dimension emerges. I do not, however, believe that art is a stand-in for politics, or a type of political activism on its own. I merely assert that these relational models created by artworks can be a site of development for, or expression of, a proto-political consciousness.

In light of this, I declare the object of my music to be that of the *social object*¹. This is a music that points towards the compound of myriad subject–subject and subject–object interactions and social behaviors in and around music which form and augment the listening experience, before, during, and after sound appears. It is present in all art throughout history, yet few have taken the social object as an end in itself², and fewer still have applied this aim in musical composition.³

¹ Every distinct entity in existence has an autonomous life of its own, separate from the world of appearances. I refer to this, in line with Graham Harman’s Object-Oriented Ontology, as objects.

² Nicolas Bourriaud’s Relational Aesthetic or Beuys’s notion of social sculpture being the few exceptions.

³ The most notable exception is the work of English composer James Saunders, whose work draws from social psychology to explore and demonstrate group behaviors. There are also some well-known pieces from the 20th century, like Henri Posseur’s *Votre Faust* (1969) that include social aspects such as limited decision-making for the audience.

II. Background

In order to arrive at the importance of the social object to music, I must first undertake an explanation of the *world-relation* through historical developments in art and music. The world-relation can be understood as the access points of a material, medium, or artwork to the sensual world, bridging the withdrawn interior and relational exterior of an object, which allows music to relate to the social object. Since the world-relation is rooted in language, and language is entangled in social processes, there is an inherent social quality to the world relation. In music as in the visual arts, the historical trend is towards an amplification of the world-relation, so much so that at times the interior of the artwork disappears. It is precisely at this point that the social object becomes most visible.

The music philosopher Harry Lehmann has in recent years been promoting what he calls the *Gehaltsästhetik* (roughly translated as ‘relational aesthetic’ in English). For Lehmann, in lieu of new sonic material to explore, as was the program of New Music in the 20th century, a paradigm shift has begun to take place, foregrounding the *Gehalt* of the artwork, whereby the *Inhalt* (content) becomes less important than the *meaning as it is interpreted*⁴. According to Lehmann, the content of 20th century New Music (the ‘classical modern’) was musical material, not musical concepts – thus the move from the content of the classical modern into a looser form of interpreter-focused meaning becomes a focus on conceptual material, since interpretation necessarily involves naming aesthetic phenomena, giving them a higher degree of world-relation.

A considerable addition to the theory of *Gehaltsästhetik* comes from the work of Johannes Kreidler, with his idea of “Begriffliches Hören” (English: conceptual listening). He posits that the historical material tendency of music is that of a ‘nominalization’, whereby finding terms for things makes them into conceptual objects through exemplification. He touches briefly on the old debate on absolute music, reminding us that even music, commonly thought to be the most abstract and otherworldly of the arts, has since its earliest history been full of semantic meaning, whether the “naturgetreue Wiedergabe

⁴ „der Gehalt ist die Bedeutung einer Sache, die erst durch eine Interpretation erschlossen werden muss und in Bezug auf der Kunst heißt dies, dass der Gehalt eines Kunstwerks die Bedeutung eines Kunstwerks ist, die aus dem Zusammenspiel von sinnlicher Wahrnehmung und begrifflicher Konzeption entsteht...Der Gehalt des Kunstwerks ist die Interpretation eben dieses Zusammenspiels von Perzeption und Konzeption.“ Lehmann, „Gehaltsästhetik – Relationale Musik – Konzeptmusik,“ 9:00.

akustischer Phänomene aus der Umwelt", or "bestimmte Emotionen, die durch Musik evoziert werden", or more concretely that "kultureller und zeremonieller Handlungen repräsentieren beispielsweise spezifische Instrumentalklänge ein symbolisches Zeichen".⁵ According to Kreidler, there have always been external relations to things outside of 'pure music', and through the application of names and concepts, one can not only create new world-relations, but also render the world-relation itself as material for composition, reformatting and reprogramming the semantic connections between sound, image, and concept with compelling results.



Figure 1: Harry Lehmann's model of absolute music, where the structure of music reflects the structure of the world. There remains a clear boundary between the two.

Although both Kreidler and Lehmann describe a shift in meaning-formation that took place much earlier in the visual arts, it is a crucial theoretical shift in music due to the heavy presence of the aesthetics of absolute music in the 19th and 20th centuries. Instead of creating a parallel world "detached from the affections and feelings of the real world"⁶, relational music uses the world-relation to maintain an active connection to the sensual

⁵ Johannes Kreidler, "Begriffliches Hören," 7

⁶ Dahlhaus, Carl. The Idea of Absolute Music, p.7.

existence commonly experienced by humans.⁷ It is no surprise that when evaluating the works of the most recent generation of composers, one finds a myriad of extra-musical or inter-medial additions to the sounds organized in time: everyday objects, installations, costumes, interviews, film excerpts, samples of popular music, theater, choreography, comedy routines, etc. This is because, by serving as a bridge from ‘pure’ aesthetic phenomena to the objects of our sensual world, the world-relation is necessarily extra-medial, beyond the aesthetics of ‘pure art’ or ‘absolute music’.

Idee der relationalen Musik

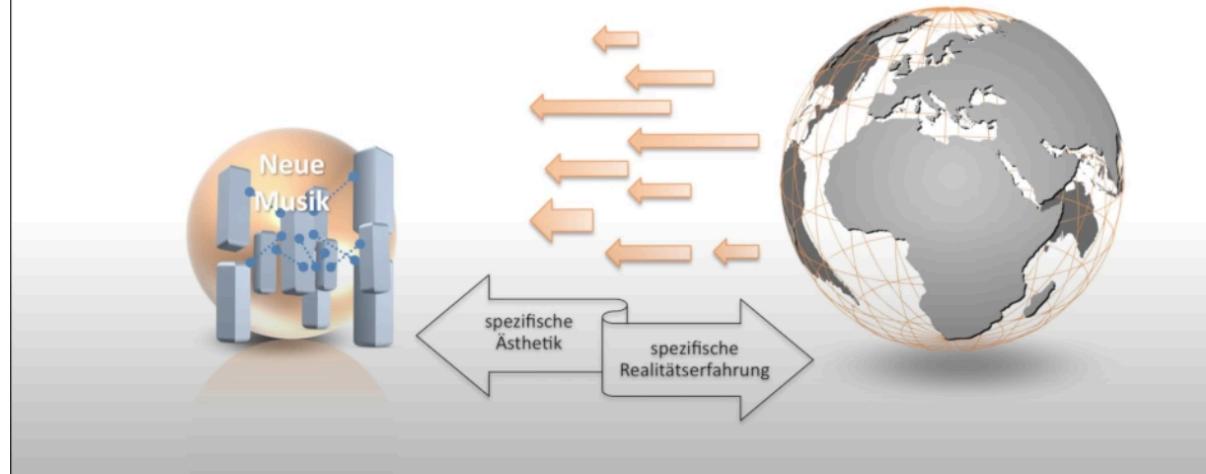


Figure 2: With relational music, specific experiences from the world are brought into music. The sphere of music is no longer held apart from everything else in the world.

In the visual arts, on the other hand, concern for the world-relation has since at least the time of Duchamp been growing. The famous ready-mades themselves exemplify a high degree of world-relation, as when Duchamp presents us with a snow shovel in his *In Advance of the Broken Arm* of 1915. Aside from challenging notions of artistic production and perception, what we are given is a shovel – an object so overwhelmingly familiar and of this world that it seems to resist aestheticization. The philosopher Graham Harman, in his book *Art and Objects*, states that “the implicit metaphor with ready-mades is ‘art is like a urinal,’ or ‘art is like a comb,’ and this is the metaphor the beholder

⁷ Commonly but erroneously referred to as the ‘real world’. My treatment of ‘real’ vs. ‘sensual’ follows that of Graham Harman’s Object-Oriented Ontology, which will be discussed later.

performs."⁸ In other words, such a high degree of world-relation clears out the *inside* of an artwork to focus on the *outside*. Without any metaphorical use of materials, by giving us just a shovel, the spectator is called upon to view ‘shovel-as-shovel’ and ‘art-as-shovel-as-shovel.’ Thus, through means of the world-relation, the metaphor of the artwork becomes primarily conceptual: it is performed upon the concept of art itself, challenging the morphology of the tradition of art⁹ and calling us to aestheticize an object from outside the sphere of art.



Figure 3: Duchamp's *In Advance of a Broken Arm*, 1915.

It bears mentioning here that this ‘global gesture’ of Duchamp, as Graham Harman describes it, where the inner qualities of a work are hollowed out in order to focus on an outer layer of meaning, is exactly what art critic Michael Fried called the ‘theatricality’ of ‘literalist’ sculpture in his “Art and Objecthood” of 1967. Referring to minimalist sculpture of

⁸ Harman, Graham. *Art and Objects*, 156. This analysis connects Harman’s theory of metaphor (that through metaphor one can indirectly access the real) with a ‘literalist’ treatment of art: that, as minimal sculpture showed us (after Fried’s “Art and Objecthood”) the ‘literalization’ of objects results in a situation between spectator and object.

⁹ This mechanism is very similar to what Joseph Kosuth describes in his essay “Art after Philosophy,” whereby each artwork is a ‘proposition’ for a ‘definition’ of art.

the time, Fried argues that when sculpture is reduced to *objecthood*¹⁰, the artwork is negated, leaving only the situation in which the beholder encounters the work.¹¹ A work like Tony Smith's *Die* of 1962 is an exemplar of this effect: the beholder is confronted with a looming cube that seems to thwart attempts at interpretation. For lack of clear entryways to possible avenues of meaning, one becomes aware of the relation in space and time of the spectator to the artwork, in a space, and in relation to other spectators. In other words, Fried (while using the word theater pejoratively) theorizes the hollowing-out of the interior of the art object as an encounter or confrontation between spectator and object.



Figure 4: Tony Smith's *Die*, 1962.

As sculptural practice embraced more and more the outside of the object in the coming decades, art critic Rosalind Krauss famously gave a taxonomy of sculpture in 1979 which accounted for the relation between sculpture, architecture, and landscape in as "...a universe or cultural space in which sculpture was simply another part."¹² This

¹⁰ Fried details in his analysis of works by Donald Judd, Robert Morris, and Frank Stella, among others, that this objecthood results from a refusal of pictorial illusion or anthropomorphism and the emphasis on *actual* space and the articulation of the wholeness of space.

¹¹ "...the literalist espousal of objecthood amounts to nothing other than a plea for a new genre of theatre; and theatre is now the negation of art." And, "literalist sensibility is theatrical because it is concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters the literalist work." Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, 125.

¹² Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," 38.

openness to the relationship between the art object and its surrounding environment epitomized movements such as land art, where the boundary between natural landscape and human-made artwork cannot always be easily or simply defined. In Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1969-1970) for example, we are indeed confronted with a jetty, but this *spiral* jetty is an artificial formation *and extension* of the natural landscape simultaneously, without the obvious addition of foreign material. Like the ready-mades of Duchamp and the minimalist ("literalist") forms of Smith, here we have an artwork where there is very little *inner* content (here understood as subjective, expressive, or metaphorical). Instead, the *outer content* is *inseparable from the inner content*: the sculpture of a spiral jetty *is* a jetty and as such, is nearly inseparable from the surrounding landscape, and yet it is not *just* a jetty (it is, in the end, an artwork). The literalism of 'sculpture-as-spiral-jetty' contains both the world-relation (it reminds us of a jetty so much that it is almost indistinguishable from an actual jetty), and the metaphor of the artwork, thus also functioning as the *inside*, or *content* of the work. In this way, the world-relation of the material and the material itself become lost in each other, blending *inside* and *outside* in a compelling tension that brings the world-relation into the environment in which the artwork exists.



Figure 5: Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty* (1969-1970).

Krauss further specifies that this cultural space opened up by sculpture in the 1960s and 70s is not any more organized around a material, but rather "through the

universe of terms that are felt to be in opposition within a cultural situation."¹³ As with Kreidler and Lehmann, the focus becomes oppositions of concepts and therefore on *world-relations*, since concepts and terms create bridges between the *inside* and *outside* of things: the name, by creating a virtual space in which to store information, becomes a storage medium for the imperfect translation of the sensual qualities of the thing, thereby acting as a conduit between the unreachable depths of the object-in-itself and the sensual world as we perceive it. In this way, sculpture that operates within Krauss' logical poles of landscape, architecture and sculpture, their combinations and inversions, is not only inherently conceptual, but also relies on the world-relation by playing with and often confounding the tension between the *inside* and *outside* of artworks and objects.

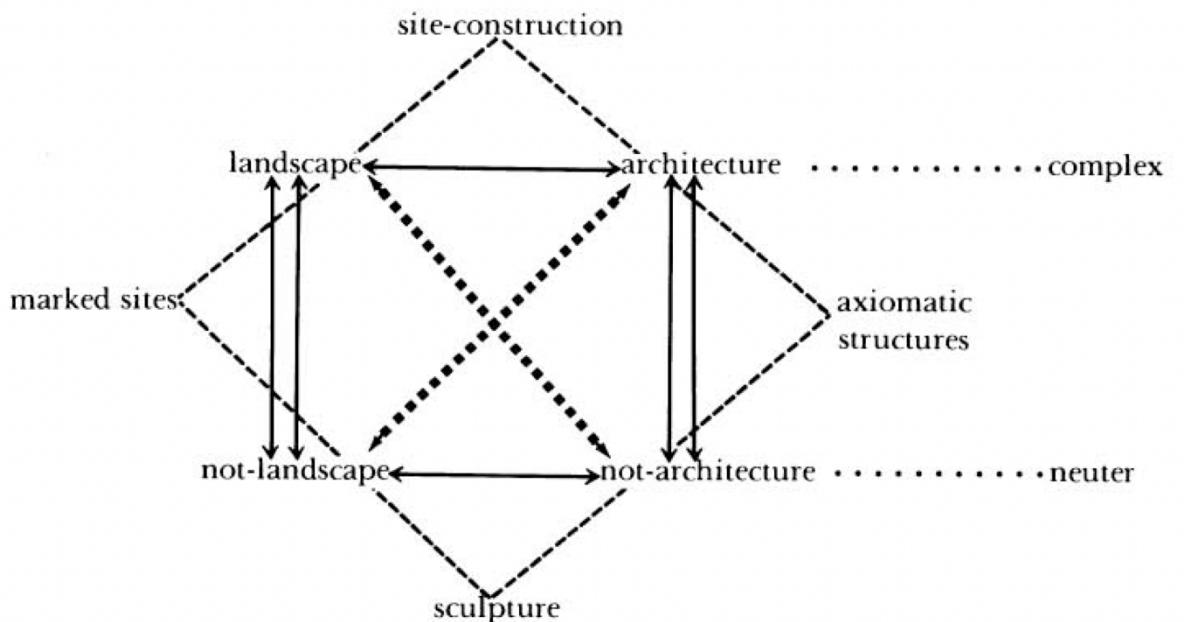


Figure 6: Rosalind Krauss's taxonomy of sculpture.

By the 1990s, the focus on the world-relation in the visual arts had become so intense that art critic Nicolaus Bourriaud used the term 'relational aesthetic' to sum up a generation of artists at the end of the decade. In the relational aesthetic, various quasi-actionistic and installative pieces that use quite diverse methods and materials, confounding the boundaries of performance and sculpture, installation and event, are all treated as an 'inter-human game' that arises from the relational quality of the human

¹³ Ibid., 43.

being.¹⁴ Bourriaud's claim is that art is essentially trans-individual and the artwork represents a *social interstice*¹⁵, "...[a] place that produces a specific sociability" that creates "free areas, and time spans whose rhythm contrasts with those structuring everyday life," encouraging "...an inter-human commerce that differs from the 'communication zones' that are imposed upon us."¹⁶

Bourriaud's lens is then used to explain pieces like Felix Gonzalez-Torres's *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* of 1991, where a subtle twist results in the potential for the disappearance of the sculpture, foregrounding a reciprocal and paradoxical encounter between museum visitor and art object. The visitors are invited to take pieces of candy, so that after a certain point the sculpture disappears. Yet the absence of the sculpture becomes more effectual than its presence: the spectators, by taking, have caused its disappearance – at the same time rendering the effect of the encounter glaringly (in)visible, enriching the life of the work through its afterlife. Through a simple interactive mechanism, the relation between inside and outside is made clear, encapsulating the relational encounters theorized by Fried and Krauss in a poignant transaction between individual,

¹⁴ "...the essence of humankind is purely trans-individual, made up of bonds that link individuals together in social forms which are invariably historical." Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 18.

¹⁵ Bourriaud states he term 'social interstice' was used by Marx "to describe trading communities that elude the capitalist economic context by being removed from the law of profit...", and that "the interstice is a space in human relations which fits more or less harmoniously and openly into the overall system, but suggests other trading possibilities than those in effect within this system..." Ibid., 16.

¹⁶ Ibid.

collective, and the symbolic body of Gonzalez-Torres' deceased lover.



Figure 7: Felix Gonzalez-Torres's *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*, 1991.

The foregrounding of the encounter between spectator and artwork is a necessary consequence of this kind of presence and absence, where the world-relation dissolves the work, leaving only the spectator and their object of spectation. This view is also an outgrowth of my previous theoretical work, where I argued that "when one views the musical situation as originating primarily in the interaction between subject, sound, and sensation, what is left is a *situation*, a term that highlights the interrelatedness of bodies, objects, and means of perception."¹⁷ Originally applied to Fried's analysis of minimalist sculpture, whereby a type of *theatrical* situation is produced, I thereafter realized the social consequence of this relational approach to art.

While Fried applies the term theater somewhat unfairly, there are certain approaches to theater that emphasize the social nature of the encounter between spectator and artwork, specifically Erika Fischer-Lichte's notion of *co-presence*, in which the joint presence of bodies in a particular moment of space and time creates a unique

¹⁷ Wayne, "Music as Performance Situation," 12.

type of feedback loop which gives the live situation its particular mediality.¹⁸ The concept of co-presence, as I will show in my analysis of my composition IT'S NICE 2 MEAT U, is essential to understanding the social object in the arts and music, since it is indeed the medial condition of a live performance, which traditionally had primacy in theater, yet is undeniably present in music and much of visual art.

In music, one must only think of John Cage's 4'33", where in addition to the rich network of meaning initiated by the absence of piano sound, the concert situation is foregrounded. When the piano does not intentionally sound, we are left with a stage, an audience, an instrument, a score, chairs, a seating arrangement, listening expectations, social behavior norms, interpretative faculties, etc. Although Cage's aim was somewhat different, here we find a clear example of the social object in music: the network of subjects and objects, behaviors and interactions, phenomena and concepts *in and around the perception of music* that constitute a social and musical situation. With Bourriaud's relational aesthetic, this is taken as an explicit starting point for artistic exploration, intentionally producing certain types of social interactions that invert, subvert, deconstruct, typify, commentate, or suggest inter-subjective relations in the world.

It must at this point be stated that Bourriaud's relational aesthetic, in its Marxist political motivations – positioning itself against reification of human interactions supposedly imposed upon us by the 'information super-highways' of the late 20th century – has by now already peaked as a trend in the visual arts. One must only look to the most recent documenta festival as evidence, where the entire organization seemed to be an application or reproduction of Bourriaud's notion of conviviality (itself only a small part of his art theory): the curators' vision of communal sociality resulted in a situation where the festival became "less a series of exhibitions and more a meta-event where activities –

¹⁸ „Es ist das leibliche Ko-Präsenz von Akteuren und Zuschauern, welche eine Aufführung allererst ermöglicht, welche die Aufführung konstituiert... Die Zuschauer werden als Mitspieler begriffen, welche die Aufführung durch ihre Teilnahme am Spiel, d.h. ihre physische Präsenz, ihre Wahrnehmung, ihre Reaktionen mit hervorbringen... Die Aufführung entsteht als Resultat der Interaktion zwischen Darstellern und Zuschauern.... die Aufführung ereignet sich zwischen Akteuren und Zuschauern,“ Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen*, 47.

cooking, gardening, partying, and communing – occur".¹⁹



Figure 8: Rirkrit Tiravanija, pad thai (1990).

Although Bourriaud is careful to emphasize that the value he sees in relational works is not conviviality itself, but "a complex form that combines a formal structure, objects made available to visitors, and the fleeting image issuing from collective behavior"²⁰, thirty years after the first appearance of these types of works²¹, repeating the same situations with little variation in form and leaving the background theory untouched drains them of their meaning. Without the historical and theoretical novelty that these works first posed at the time of their inception, the artistic drive (a radical provocation to both form and content, a political gesture against a hyperefficient social order) becomes lost, leaving a vague social activism in an echo chamber.²²

Regardless of the aging of its political goals, the relational aesthetic still presents one fruitful theoretical avenue that bears mentioning. In a discussion about the developing

¹⁹ Nadine, "The DIY Chaos of Documenta 15".

²⁰ Bourriaud, 83.

²¹ One could point to Rirkrit Tiravanija's pad thai of 1990 as the quintessential relational piece dealing with conviviality.

²² Indeed, the motto of documenta fifteen's curators ruangrupa listed on their website is "make friends, not art."

attitudes towards the exhibition he perceives in his 90s generation, Bourriaud introduces the idea of the *cinematographic model* as model for the exhibition, a result of the "relationships between art and ideology ushered in by technologies".²³ Specifically, he speaks of the *photogenic space*: "the space of a virtual darkroom within which viewers evolve like a camera, called upon to frame for themselves their way of looking, and cut out viewing angles and bits of meaning."²⁴ This model of a space of perception is used by Bourriaud to not only typify the effect of recent technologies upon artists and the forms they create, but also to conceive of a theoretical background that allows the diverse forms of interaction, socialization, and conceptualization practiced by artists of the relational aesthetic to be viewed as art in itself, similar to film as a "time span to be crossed, sequence by sequence..." It is also an inherently relational concept, as the emphasis on the evolution of the viewer *through* the photogenic time span is correspondingly interactive. One should also note that this affords a degree of agency, freedom, and responsibility to the spectator that does not usually appear in other formally conservative types of art.

²³ Ibid., 72.

²⁴ Ibid.

III. The Phonogetic Space

I propose to adopt this thinking into music as a way to conceive of conceptual and relational music as a sphere of influence between various entities with submerged interior and relational exterior. Just as the exhibition in the visual arts has been inexorably influenced by the technology of film, so too has the concert space been forever altered by acoustics. Like Bourriaud's metaphor of the spectator that moves through their own filmlike experience of a gallery, image by image, so too can one imagine the spectator's ears to advance, sample by sample, inch by inch, or phase by phase through the recording-analogue experience of a concert. Thus, I propose the concept of the *phono-getic* space.

Music lives in the phonogetic space, a physical and cultural space of phenomena, concepts, situations, subjects, and objects, that at different times in different places for different people(s) has taken on different breadth, with different focus on the balance between inside and outside contained in any artwork. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the musical object was formulated in terms of sound and motion, as expressed by Eduard Hanslick and the absolute music aesthetic. By contrast, the phonogetic space is not strictly about sound-in-itself or -as-itself, but *music as it is practiced in all its extremities, peculiarities and variations*. It is both a conceptual and actual space in which various types of music happen, whereby a musical object is seen not only in-itself and for-itself, but also in relation to other musical objects. This means the focus of the object of music is shifted away from only sounds and their articulation through time to *sounds and their articulation through time within a musical practice, related to musicking, related to sound, related to listening, related to acoustic phenomena, etc.* ... It is a space of relations and an autonomous object unto itself, and within that musical space various specific practices articulate their own boundaries, as independent entities and also in relation to other practices. The phonogetic space is *about* music, and everything music contains; it is fundamentally articulated in spaces, and those spaces are by necessity also social, since as an art form, inter- and intra-personal communication are prerequisites.

The model for the concept of the phonogetic space also has its background in the philosophy of Graham Harman, whose *Object-Oriented Ontology* has provided several powerful correctives to thought since the time of Kant and has significant application in the arts. Harman follows in the steps of the contemporary movement of speculative realism,

whereby a flat ontology decentralizes thought from the human being, and tries to break the *correlationism* of Kant, namely the assumption that it is impossible to think a thought outside thought, therefore true reality underneath all appearances is unknowable. In few words, Harman's Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) provides the following model of the world²⁵: every *thing* is a distinct, autonomous object. There are real objects and sensual objects, and real qualities and sensual qualities. The real objects are the things below all experience that we cannot perceive directly (analogous to Kant's thing-in-itself), and the sensual objects are those which we come into contact with on a regular basis through our perception, only existing in relation to a real object.²⁶ There are also real and sensual qualities. Real qualities are those which give an object its distinct identity but which, like real objects, are not directly available to either the senses or the intellect, while sensual qualities are those specific and fluctuating qualities that appear to us in our perception whose mutability does not alter the identity of the object itself. Finally, combinations of real and sensual objects and qualities can yield surprising results: Harman argues these produce things like time, space, essence and *eidos* (the ideal formal property of a thing – roundness, for example).

²⁵ To be understood here as *everything in existence*, including the immaterial, material and fictional; a “churning, electrified whole” made up of a “galaxy of parts” Harman, *Tool Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysical Object*, 294.

²⁶ „When speaking of objects in their own right, let's speak of real objects. But when speaking instead of the realm in which objects have no inwardness but are nothing more than correlates of our experience, let's speak of sensual objects.” Harman, Object-Oriented Ontology, 78.

The Quadruple Object

FIGURE 8: The Four Tensions

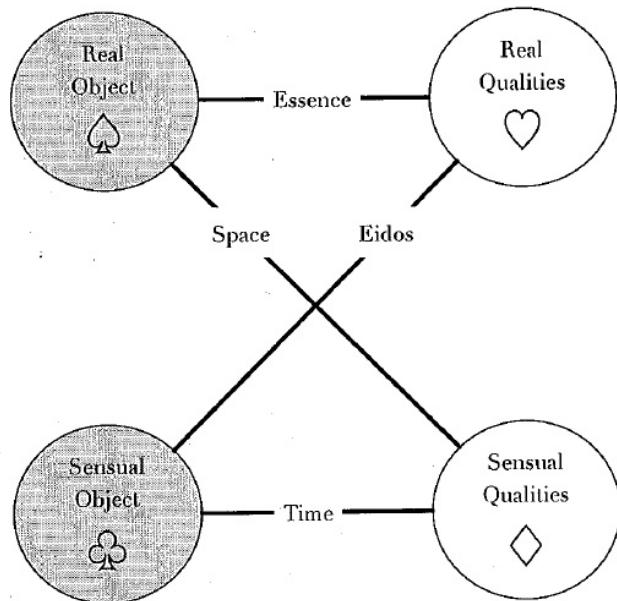


Figure 9: Graham Harman's quadruple object. Real and sensual objects and qualities combine to form things like essence, space, eidos, and time. We never have full access to the real.

This model of the world, a “dense and viscous universe stuffed absolutely full with entities”²⁷ where there is no primary material but “forms inside of forms”²⁸, each themselves their own, where a “causal relation between two [entities] is also a system which forms an entity,”²⁹ is also the model of the phonogetic space. I stick with the word ‘space’ not because of any physical property, but because it should be thought of as a zone of existence which distinguishes itself by being embedded in or connected to musical processes. This is not to say that *everything* is somehow connected to the phonogetic space. The artwork must end somewhere, or else it would be indistinguishable from the rest of the world. Rather, each instance of a musical work is itself a unique object which, like Harman’s objects, is paradoxically both a single entity *and* a compound of innumerable sub-entities.³⁰ As such, a musical work, having its own autonomous existence through

²⁷ Harman, Tool Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysical Object, 295.

²⁸ Ibid., 293.

²⁹ Ibid., 294.

³⁰ „The system that includes me and the hammer burrows down into itself, decomposing itself before our eyes in spite of its status as a single entity.” Ibid., 296.

being itself an object, activates various other musical and non-musical objects, and, by uniting them in a new work, brings them into the fold of the phonogetic space. In short, by virtue of being a musical process, which in itself centers around musical material such as sound or instruments and activities like concerts or listening, the musical work draws objects into the phonogetic space, even if those objects would not normally be considered musical.

Another central principle of Harman's OOO philosophy which is of significance to the phonogetic space is his stance towards relationality. Harman gives a counterpart to his object-based model of the world with a theory of knowledge. He states "ultimately there are just two ways of telling somebody what a thing is: you can tell them what it is made of, or tell them what it does."³¹ The latter type of knowledge is what Harman calls *overmining*, or only looking at "what the object does," its "current place in the total system of meaningful equipment"³², its *context*, or its *relation*. Harman criticizes this type of thinking as reductive of the object, since it removes the withdrawn interior in favor of the immanent exterior, effectively foregoing reality in favor of relationality, which is merely an anemic translation of the real.³³ He further points out that in recent decades, overmining in the form of relationality has enjoyed popularity in many disciplines, not the least philosophy and art,³⁴ to the extent that "the paradigm of 'contextuality' or 'relationality' has now been stamped into our minds to the point that it dominates every corner of our thinking."³⁵ With these remarks, much of my theory of the phonogetic space and my tracing of the development of the world-relation in art history would seem to be suspect – I have indeed devoted several pages to talking about the relational aesthetic in music and the visual arts. No need to worry: although Harman needs a strong defense against certain strains of postmodern thinking, his philosophy mainly asserts the interior of objects which, in his view, have been not properly investigated and in some cases flat-out rejected. In light of this, I have constructed the concept of the phonogetic space in a way that accounts for

³¹ Harman, Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything, 43.

³² Ibid.

³³ "In short, OOO follows a philosophically realist recipe for outflanking the relational presence of beings, which we have already termed the sensual realm." Ibid., 202.

³⁴ Harman embarks upon a lengthy critique of Jacques Derrida as emblematic of a postmodern position, where "we slip, slip, slip away horizontally into a multitude of other contexts, so that the thing itself not only never appears...but never exists at all," which is fundamentally opposed to the OOO proclivity to "descend vertically into a non-relational kingdom of things-in-themselves." Ibid., 203.

³⁵ Harman, Tool Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysical Object, 174.

both the exterior relationality *and* the interior autonomy of artworks. In our case, it is simply important for music to provide a solid case for relationality because of the historical dominance of absolute music and the constant resistance of music institutions to the new.

Once again, the phonogetic space is not *strictly* about sound-in-itself – it is *about* music. My reason for saying this is twofold: on the one hand, it is clear that even some of the newest, most *logocentric* (thus: external and relational) pieces of new music (one must only think of *Musik* by Trond Reinholdsten, where spoken moderation provides a discursive backdrop and overly-literal humoristic accompaniment to the music), *are* indeed musical works despite their blatant relationality and sometimes provocative aesthetic deconstruction, even when compared to the knights of the absolute (say, Georg Friedrich Haas' hugely expressive and pathetic microtonal constructions). In order to account for such vastly different aesthetic approaches, we must have a theoretical framework that accounts for both the extremely relational and the non-relational just the same.

The second reason is: this is the nature of the world. I think Harman is profoundly correct in his analysis of objects, their types, their behaviors, and the division of things into sensual and real. However, despite Harman's perceived 'dominance' of the relational and his antagonism towards 'antireal' philosophy, I claim it would be an incorrect interpretation to say that sensual objects are or relationality is 'false' and we should make a U-turn into promoting a hierarchy of a hidden real. This is simply the structure of the world! Mostly, we interact with sensual objects, and sometimes we can feel the subterranean pull of reality. As objects ourselves whose core is unknown to thought³⁶, who at the same time exist in a fabric of images, relations, language, concepts, and translations, we live constantly in a tension between interior and exterior, between autonomous and relational. To promote one over the other would be to deny some of the most important parts of existence.

There is one more vital aspect of OOO that must be introduced at this point before returning to the concept of the phonogetic space. For Harman, there is one possible way to indirectly access the real: through metaphor. For this reason, both aesthetics (especially as implemented in art) and philosophy are uniquely capable of accessing the real in a way that literal knowledge (as is most scientific knowledge) cannot. In a basic metaphor, like

³⁶ "...in introspection we also reduce ourselves to shadows or outlines: after all, there is no direct access to the noumenal self..." Harman, Object Oriented Ontology, 70.

'the cypress is like a ghost of the dead flame', formal similarities pull objects together, using an 'inessential' formal property to assert a new identity. The result is such:

"The two objects initially repel one another. As a result, we have 'the annihilation of what [cypress and flame] are as practical images. When they collide with one another their hard carapaces crack and the internal matter, in a molten state, acquires the softness of plasm, ready to receive a new form and structure.' In the case of a successful metaphor, we are able to experience a new entity..."³⁷

In other words, the impracticability of a cypress being like a flame liquidates the images, since it defies the bounds of each sensual object to make a treelike flame. The result is an image of cypress that is "deeper and more mysterious than can be summarized by listing flame-qualities".³⁸ Despite the fact that the flame-qualities themselves are known to us, it is just beyond our reach to concretely attach them to a tree. What we are given, then, is the shadow of an object that is neither cypress nor flame, and not able to be exhausted in literal terms. This is the structure of the tension between real objects and sensual qualities that metaphor can express, and it contains one more surprising conclusion: because the real object of 'cypress' or 'flamelike cypress' can never fully become present (the full interiority of an object lies outside thought), "there is nonetheless one real object that is never absent from our experience of art: namely, *we ourselves*".³⁹ Because it is inside our own experience that art takes place, and we are the only real object on the scene, we become the stand-in for the real object, or site of fusion for the metaphor that presents us with a shadow of a real object. For this very reason, Harman asserts that because aesthetics employs metaphor, and metaphor involves participation on the part of the beholder in substituting their self for the absent real object, *all art is theatrical*, amusingly citing Michael Fried's attempt in this direction.

³⁷ Harman, Object-Oriented Ontology, 73.

³⁸ Ibid., 81.

³⁹ Ibid., 83.

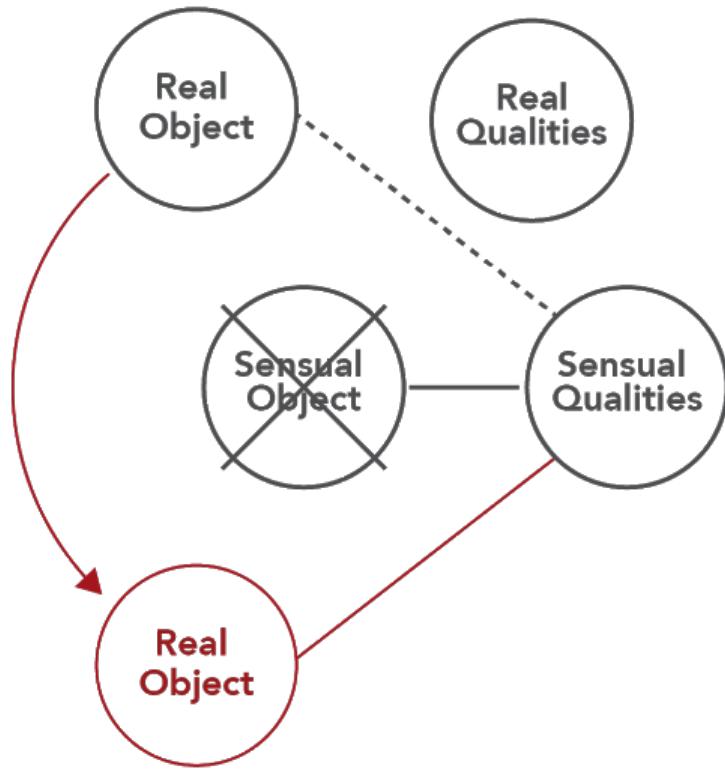


Figure 2.5: Harman, G. (2011). The quadruple object.

Winchester, U.K. Washington, USA: Zero Books.

Figure 10: A visualization of how a new real object which includes the subject (red) is created when in metaphor the combination of sensual qualities causes a sensual object to be canceled.



Figure 11: A possible illustration of the combination of the images of cypress and flame.

Returning to the phonogetic space, I assert again that the phonogetic space must be *about* music. Being *about* music entails an act of self-reflexive circling: the word ‘about’ has an auxiliary meaning of movement *around* something. In OOO terms, this would be a relation between two sensual objects (since real objects cannot directly interact), which, through existing as imperfect translations of their real selves, become *images* that are necessarily conceptual.⁴⁰ Yet in order to formally reproduce the tension between exterior and interior, real and sensual, that we live on a daily basis, and not swim in arbitrary relationality, we must also have a way to access the real through metaphor. Although these two paths may seem contrary, in that real objects are the opposite of the concepts that result from sensual objects, since they are not able to be exhausted in literal language, and relational art works primarily with concepts and reduces the interior of the artwork, these approaches can nevertheless be reconciled.

This is accomplished in that by being a zone of existence, the phonogetic space is configurable between various levels of interiority and exteriority. Through the appearance of

⁴⁰ Harman relates an Ortega quote to the same effect, that “nothing...can exist for us unless it becomes an image, a concept, an idea – unless, that is, it stops being what it is in order to become a shadow or an outline of itself.” Ibid., 69-70.

the unity of the work, things are *drawn in* to the phonogetic space. Thus, music may appear that is ‘only’ music, possessing a high level of interiority and very little exteriority. At the same time, musical material may otherwise be extremely referential and use the world-relation to point towards other objects outside of music, minimizing the inside in favor of the outside. Simply put, I acknowledge that it is perfectly possible to *not give things names*, to *minimize the world-relation* and employ them in musical composition alongside the conceptual and relational just the same, making a different absolute music possible that corresponds with the improbable depths of reality that are always merely skimmed by sensual qualities and objects.

Likewise, the process through which metaphor pairs sensual objects and qualities, comparing them and creating tension, effectively ‘breaking’ the object and allowing something deeper to shine through, so crucial to Harman’s indirect access to reality, can equally be performed with concepts as it can with ‘pure’ material. In fact, since according to OOO the universe is made up of ‘forms inside of forms’, the mechanism of metaphor can be applied to any media in art, and can work with any object, even the conceptual. This can appear at the external/conceptual level, like with Duchamp’s ready-mades, or the interior/subjective level, like with the aforementioned work of Georg Friedrich Haas.

Therefore, in order to unify the approach to music between the poles of exterior/relational/conceptual and interior/autonomous/absolute, the entire zone of the phonogenic space is conceived of as encapsulating *all possible musical objects*, turning around them as various instances of musical works are created. If it were not said to be *about* music, it could only be one branch of a specific formulation of music. Just the same as the phonograph makes a negative imprint of the acoustic waves it absorbs, the phonogetic space is a model of the world: it is both sensual (conceptual, literal, relational) and real (metaphorical, autonomous, beyond our grasp), and draws on diverse sources to reflect its milieu: videos, performance, sound, technology, symbols, etc. In its capacity to be configured between various levels of relationality and autonomy and ability to assimilate diverse materials and methods, the phonogetic space is a neutral and powerful conceptual tool well-suited to describe various musics at any point throughout history and in our present world, where a great many objects exist, all constantly held apart and cleaved together by sound and its surrounding human activities and perceptions.

However, there is still a problem: how can the phonogetic space yield fertile ground for compositional activity? If we jump back to Graham Harman's reading of the ready-mades as 'art-as-shovel,' we can see that in post-conceptual artmaking⁴¹, the various entities activated in the phonogetic space and their respective qualities (the balance of inside vs. outside, the degree of world-relation) form a constitution of 'music-as-_____' that forms the background of the work, or body of works. The composer's job is to thus construct this situation, then to 'discover' the latent properties through a series of pieces. One can then make such readings of composers' works like the following:

–Trond Reinholtzen presents us with a discursive object in which musical objects are embedded (music-as-discourse-about/through-music),

–Jennifer Walshe gives a musical-performative situation in which an eclectic collection of music and music-related objects appear with a loose poetic cohesion (music-as-poetic-performance),

–Johannes Kreidler shows a semantic/logical scheme in which music is partially transformed into and submerged within visual signs (music-as-acoustic-signifier),

–Simon-Steen Andersen a theatrical trompe l'oeil that mechanically and musically exhausts itself (music-as-technical-theater), and

–Clara Iannotta a traditional musical situation where sound-object are entities unto themselves that yield all other formal properties, with limited intervention from the composer (music-as-acoustic-objects).

One could debate on the particulars of my readings, but the point is to show that an artist's approach to music can be interpreted conceptually and metaphorically, no matter how diverse or unmusical it would seem, by viewing its overall formulation within the phonogetic space as a 'global' metaphor for music. The implication is that music is a *text* one can *read*, that each musical object, by being relational, conceptual, metaphorical and autonomous, can be looked at through various critical lenses applied to various levels of the structure of the work, yielding a particular interpretation out of a loose combination of materials. In conception, the task of the composer is to simply set up a fruitful system for interpretation. I will return to this idea in the conclusion.

⁴¹ What Joseph Kosuth would call 'art after philosophy' – and indeed his concept of art-as-proposition is very relevant to this point.

One final note on Graham Harman's OOO: his renewal of the case for the autonomy of objects decidedly rests on "excluding the outside of art" in favor of the "multiplicity of its interior"⁴², on the grounds that the "extra-aesthetic world is so often boring, depressing, and stupefyingly familiar"⁴³ that it defeats the purpose of art providing an alternative to actuality. In the same breath, he criticizes those who would claim that "neither beholder nor work can be cut off from a wider socio-political, biographical, linguistic, or psychological context,"⁴⁴ calling for critical judgement on "some widely familiar and suitably Left-leaning principle."⁴⁵ While Harman hits the nail on the head by pointing out that political critique in art often recycles cliché ideology without providing anything original, he downplays (naturally in pursuit of the interiority of objects) art's ability to serve as a mirror to the world, specifically, its social context. Although Bourriaud's relational aesthetic, as I claimed earlier, became a simple reproduction of consensus when it became detached from its original context and theory, this does not mean we should abandon art's ability to maintain an active connection with its immediate surroundings. To this end, "art's double character – its autonomy and *fait social*"⁴⁶ should not be forgotten.

⁴² Graham Harman, Art and Objects, 177.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 176.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, 229.

IV. The Social Object of Music

This is why I have constructed the concept of the phonogetic space, and undertaken an explication of contemporary metaphysics to explain it: I have a personal need to express my relationship to the world, specifically the social object, in these terms of autonomy and relationality, through the *double character of the artwork*. What Harman neglects in his theory of artwork in favor of the interiority of the object is precisely this: that "the process that transpires in artworks and is brought to a standstill in them, is...the same social process in which artworks are embedded."⁴⁷ Although the well-known critical philosophy of Theodor Adorno probably overplays the "immanence of society in the artwork,"⁴⁸ which he calls the "essential relation of art"⁴⁹ in order to consequently execute his critique of the social and ideological forces that gave rise to the horrors of the World Wars, it is no less relevant today to note that "social struggles and the relations of classes are imprinted on the structure of artworks."⁵⁰ Furthermore, one must also note that while Harman and Adorno differ greatly in philosophical methods (Harman being analytical-metaphysical and Adorno critical-dialectic), Adorno is also very careful to exhaustively point out that without the "autonomous artwork, there would be nothing external to reality's spell."⁵¹ Even for perhaps the most dogged proponent of the social content of artworks, autonomy is extremely important as to not simply reproduce the surrounding world.

What is, then, the ability of art's *double character* to relate to the social object? If we accept Harman's claim that an artwork is a "*compound*, one that always contains the human being as an essential ingredient,"⁵² and if we define the social object as another *compound*, a distinct real entity derived from not only other humans and the objects that facilitate their interactions, but further *compounds* that arise from the subject-subject and

⁴⁷ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 236.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 232.

⁴⁹ Ibid. Graham Harman would frown on this as a blatant breach of the OOO tenet that claims to knowledge of essence are not possible.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 234. Regardless of the similarity I show here, this quote makes extremely clear how different a definition of reality the two philosophers work in. Harman would say that in confusing actual, material existence with reality, Adorno is in a way an anti-realist.

⁵² Harman, *Art and Objects*, 44. This comment, strangely enough, brings Harman closer than expected to Bourriaud's insistence on intersubjective activity in art. I claim that Harman's main problem with Bourriaud's relational aesthetic is mostly the overblown claims to essence, such as "the essence of humankind is purely trans-individual, made up of bonds that link individuals together in social forms which are invariably historical" Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 18.

subject-object interactions that form in the course of social behavior in and around music, then we can interpret the double character of art as either *embracing* or *refusing* its social fact. Art's "social essence requires a double reflection on [it's] being-for-[itself] and on [its] relations to society."⁵³ By emphasizing the external character of a musical work, we can, through the world-relation, make explicit the social content of an artwork, and by maximizing the interior character of a musical work, we can in the same fashion make implicit the social content.

To this end, Adorno gives us food for thought, namely that "society appears in [artworks] all the more authentically the less it is the intended object,"⁵⁴ and "what is socially decisive in artworks is the content that becomes eloquent through the work's formal structures."⁵⁵ Though I would agree that any content is better expressed through form, Adorno's caveat is more directed towards art that depicts society in the most superficial way – socialist realism, for example⁵⁶. This is one of the advantages of the relational aesthetic: that by enacting *actual* social relations, it has found a way to both thematize and embed constructed social relations in the artwork, avoiding the problem of abstraction which Adorno was never able to escape.⁵⁷ Although I am also doubtful art can ever escape the process of social integration which neutralizes⁵⁸ even the most radical works of an era, at least with explicit themes one cannot mistake what one is seeing: an installation of Rirkkravit Tiravanija is still somehow an unmistakable social exchange, regardless of historical current and interpretation. I adopt this stance: in order for my art to not be mistaken, at least in the present, as decoration and prestige for the cultural elite, I seek to create works that push into the social arena from both ends: the implicit and explicit.

Returning to my own work: the constitution of the phonogetic space I propose for my work is "music-as-social-object." As I stated earlier, this is a music that points towards subject/subject and subject/object interactions and social behaviors in and around music,

⁵³ Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, 227.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 230.

⁵⁶ "The claim that the sculpture of a coal miner a priori says more...is by now echoed only where art is used for the purpose of 'forming opinion'..." Ibid.

⁵⁷ There is an extended passage on page 29 of Aesthetic Theory which critiques abstractness as casting art "back on the dimensionless point of pure subjectivity" which ultimately becomes "harmless."

⁵⁸ "Neutralization is the social price of aesthetic autonomy." Ibid., 228.

adopting Bourriaud's concept of the *social interstice* and applying it to the concert situation. In order to better define my formulation of the phonogetic space, I must briefly discuss the work and theory of the composer James Saunders, who, to my current knowledge, is the only composer writing and composing explicitly about the social object.

In his article "Group Behaviours as Music," Saunders outlines a theoretical framework for how 'behavioural-musical systems' set up game-like situations where the responsibility for compositional decision-making falls onto the players, a process which itself enacts various social hierarchies and encourages particular kinds of social behavior.⁵⁹ His research draws from social psychology, particularly models of heuristics and Forsyth's processes of group dynamics, which lists five distinct types of processes that occur within groups such as group formation, relations among members, leadership, individual actions within groups, collective decision making, and conflict. In importing concepts from social psychology into the field of music, Saunders gives examples of various pieces, including his own, which implement the relevant processes, very clearly showing the ways these concepts can be displayed within musical situations, and showing multiple strategies of implementation.

In a style that is perhaps typical of certain strains of research in music, the strategy implemented by Saunders is practically a verbatim translation of models of social psychology into compositional practice, seemingly with minimal commentary and interpretation on the part of the artist.⁶⁰ Although I find performing works by Saunders to be a perceptually rich experience where there is ample room for group dynamics to emerge and shape the piece, this point highlights the quite large aesthetic gap and artistic goals between Saunders and I: where Saunders quite literally imports scientific models into his pieces (in that sense he is *sonifying* group behaviors), producing what Dieter Mersch would refer to as a *stable object* (a reconstructive method produced from a model)⁶¹, I am

⁵⁹ James Saunders, "Group Behaviours as Music".

⁶⁰ At the end of his article "Group Behaviors as Music" Saunders writes one short sentence aimed at affecting positive social change in divisive times. Some compositions of his, like the piece *performing tasks they secretly believe do not really need to be performed* (2023) do include, in addition to its social modeling, a bit more content from the composer's imagination, in this case an amusing tape part of office sounds and generic stock music from the internet.

⁶¹ Dieter Mersch, Epistemologies of Aesthetics, 37. In Mersch's analysis of artistic research (which is indeed what Saunders engages in), he characterizes a certain paradigm of research very similar to 'technoscience', where producing objects from computer models means that "existences are not the decisive factor, but rather consistent forms". Naturally, group behaviors are not themselves as stable or consistent as tumor

not so much interested in faithfully reproducing scientific research in art as I am in creating social *metaphors* – using aesthetic means to indirectly arrive at the reality of the social object. I am creating music that *points toward the social object with my own subjective interpretation*: I construct, deconstruct, manipulate, exaggerate, negate, affirm, and confound, not simply reconstruct. In my works I seek to inject a certain amount of imagination, reflection, and madness.

Finally, I can arrive now at my construction of the social object within the phonogetic space. I am interested in social aspects which concern inclusion, exclusion, confrontation, conflict, and proximity, specifically using strategies of positive and negative ambiguity to produce conflict situations that seek to provoke critical reflection and pave the way to action in the world. This strategy is inherently a strategy of negation: by constructing situations that manufacture collision between individuals and groups, I seek to make visible the implicit social relations that underly every musical experience. I maintain that in an age of affirmation, where pain is to be avoided at all costs, it is ever more important to ‘run against the knife,’ that is, to create situations that create discomfort and conflict as a method of definition – of the self, of the collective, and of reality itself.

imaging (Mersch’s example), but the global metaphor of the art object produced by importing scientific models into an artwork indeed is.

V. IT'S NICE TO MEAT YOU

In the following pages I will discuss a composition of mine in detail. I will analyze aspects of the piece and give my own interpretation, as well as the background thought behind the composition. It is important to note that my interpretation should not be considered as a definitive interpretation of the work. Instead, it should be seen as illuminating the process through which I arrived at the consequence of the different parts and materials. Therefore, I will try to frame my interpretations as *possible readings* of the musical work. In the conclusion, I will discuss this approach more as support for my concept of artwork-as-text.

The work I will analyze to show my artistic implementation of the ideas discussed so far is the piece IT'S NICE 2 MEAT U from September 2021. The piece is scored for four performers, electronics, audience, and installation, and was conceived as a site-specific work for the ZeitRäume festival. I found myself reacting with and against the situation: the space I was given was a paddle-ball court in an old industrial warehouse, an area ‘upcycled’ to serve as a multipurpose creative space and after-hours sports arena. The curatorial concept also had a strong presence. The audience was to be led through the warehouses in groups, stopping at various stations to watch performances, all the while experiencing the architecture of the space. In the central hall where the paddle-ball court

was (where my piece was to take place) there was also to be a bar, a mobile pizza oven, and a hip lounge design concept.



Figure 12: A photo of the installation inside the paddle-ball court after one of the performances. The environment was designed to have an artificial, sterile quality to contrast with the dirt and meat.

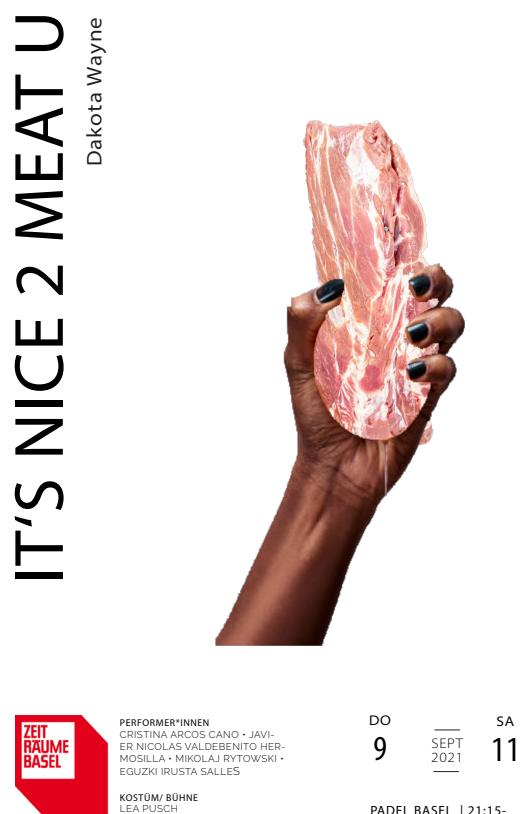


Figure 13: Poster from the premiere.



Figure 14: QR code link to the video of the performance. Text link [here](#).

I find these attempts at stylizing the hierarchies and rituals of the concert experience more often than not bring consumerism and art closer together, if not simply put a fashionable décor on the surface of the social fabric (as if we are to believe we are somehow ‘underground,’ ‘alternative,’ or ‘progressive’ at an event where a very popular and expensive gourmet pizza restaurant gives away ‘free’ oven-baked pizza). I had already observed this tendency years earlier during my time in New York, where as a student I made an ethnographic study of a contemporary music concert series performed exclusively in upscale restaurants. A simple survey of concert formats in the last 20 years would doubtless show the popularity of these kinds of approaches (perhaps a feeble echo of the fluxus loft concerts of the 1960s) where innovation in concert formats simply means a stylish do-it-yourself consumerism painted on top of the existing elitist and insulated art world of the bourgeoisie.

My reaction to the situation was the first step to composing the piece. Out of the abovementioned considerations emerged a network of positive and negative judgements: for example, I was very critical of the format, yet at the same time, the festival was extremely supportive and open to my ideas. The more involved I became in the project, the more I learned about the situation, and the more the bundle of positive and negative reactions grew. By incorporating positive or negative aspects of my reactions at various levels of the artwork, I build an attitude that is not purely negative or positive. Rather, since my reaction contains both positive *and* negative judgements, the character that emerges is *ambiguous*. Inside this ambiguity, however, either pole of positivity or negativity can at various points be stronger than the other, creating a trajectory towards one side of the

pole. This can be described by either *positive ambiguity* or *negative ambiguity*.

positive and negative ambiguity

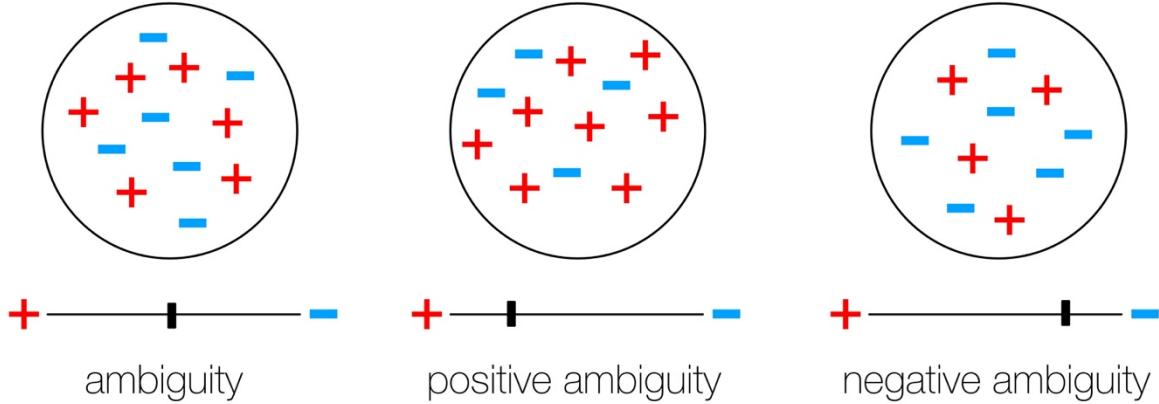


Figure 15: Positive value judgements (red plus sign) and negative value judgements (blue minus sign) exist in an artwork simultaneously. If there are more of one sign than the other, it tends towards positive or negative, despite the presence of the opposing sign.

In IT'S NICE 2 MEAT U, both positive and negative ambiguity are present at various levels of the work. At the structural level, I employed a negative ambiguity in my reaction to the situation of the audience. The curatorial concept had asked that my piece be performed twice in a row, with fifteen minutes in between for reset, to accommodate the fact that two audience groups would be led through the evening in parallel. Since I found the format of two performances with a short reset in between too constraining for my work at the time⁶², I decided to not make two performances of the same piece. Instead, I proposed to make one piece divided into two performances, so that neither audience group would get a full impression of the whole work. I also translated this social aspect spatially. For each audience group for each half of the piece, I divided the audience again in two parts, conceiving the paddle-ball court as a giant arena framed by transparent plexiglass. For each performance, the audience was given a choice: sit inside the court

⁶² The most recent large-scale piece I had made at that point was *Der Zwiebelkönig*, which included filling a room of an abandoned house with dirt, weeds, and onions.

and get a direct but perhaps dirty view of the performance, or sit on risers outside the court from a safe distance, only able to look through a small opening. I acted as the moderator of the composition-as-event, welcoming the audience and announcing the rules of the situation during each half in a polite yet sarcastic demeanor, requesting at each point that the audience leave behind donations or buy something at the merchandise table.

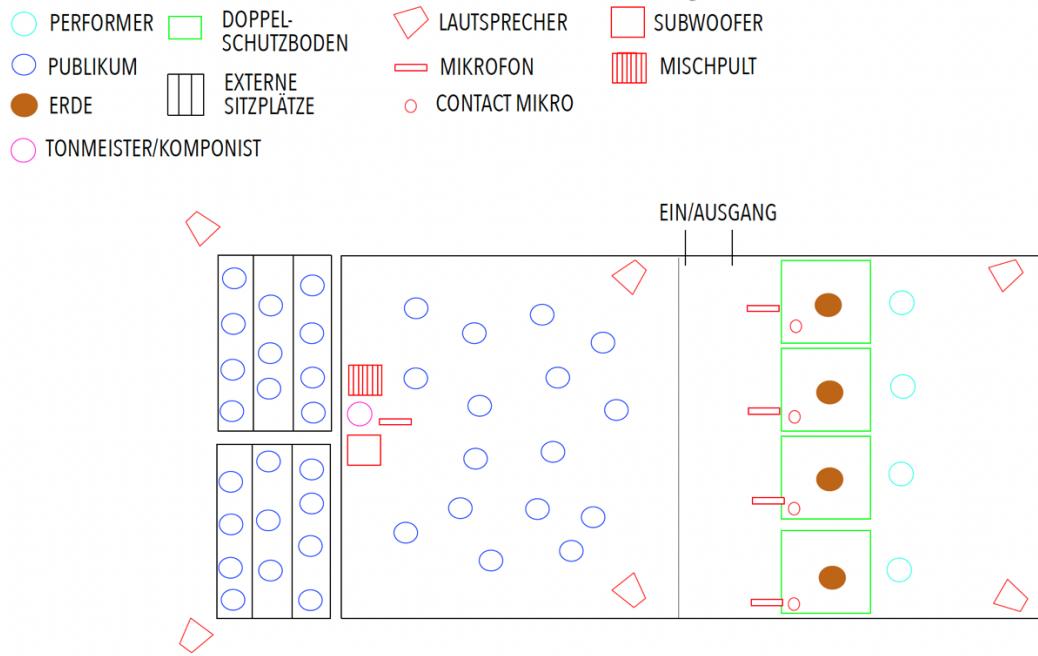


Figure 16: Floor plan of IT'S NICE 2 MEAT U showing the division of audience in the paddle-ball court. Half of the audience was sitting inside the court, while the other half was sitting on amphitheater seating outside, looking in through a small window. The audience was given a choice as to where they wanted to sit.

This is how I compose using the social object: by reacting to preexisting aspects of the social situation, reproducing and confounding them, I construct a parallel situation that contains the relations of the first, transformed into art from a network of value judgements. For example, just like how the actual event in which my composition was placed had a moderator who announced to the public the form of the evening, so too did mine. He provided a bit too much information, suggesting with a smirk that in order to receive the full impression, audience members should talk over their experience of the piece at a bar or restaurant after the performance. He warned in an amused tone that the audience members are free to leave the performance area at any time, and he implored the public to consider buying a handful of dirt for ten Swiss francs. Yet underneath this negative, sarcastic layer was a genuine need to explain things to the audience. The piece contains

raw meat, and a proper trigger warning was given by the moderator for the benefit of the queasy spectator. The division in groups was also explained so that the audience really *did* talk over the various impressions with each other to compare and find out what they missed. And the reminder that one may leave at any time was sincere: I made this explicit so people knew they really were supposed to leave if they felt it was too much. The point was not to subject the audience to discomfort in order to teach them a lesson, but to *display the boundary of discomfort itself in the context of performer-audience relations*. A certain level of earnest care towards the public was therefore necessary in order to build a 'safe space' for confrontation and possible conflict. For these reasons I would say that the overall presentation of the situation was of a positive ambiguity. Some negative aspects are apparent in the presentation, but the positive intention has more weight.

On the contrary, the division of the public created what I perceive as a negative ambiguity by taking a curatorial context I disproved of and working its social relations into the structure of the piece. The first division of the piece into two halves was directed at the curators, whose format was perhaps out of the ordinary for the average culture hawk in Basel, yet too easily reconcilable with art's function as slick social entertainment. By preventing one single audience group from seeing the whole work, I simply throw a wrench in the curators' plan. One could read this as a mere rebellious gesture, as if to say 'my art won't fit in your box!', yet it is more subversive than that: by withholding full access to each group and also teasing the existence of another hitherto unseen object, I enact a twofold disruption of the social fabric conceived as 'concert-as-group-tour'. Audience members, in order to fulfill their fetishistic desires to have full access to the work, must either, *from themselves outwards* disrupt the structure of the situation by simply skipping over to the second group (thereby missing the parallel performance they would have otherwise seen with their group), or *augment* the social relations by actively seeking out other opinions and experiences in between or after performances, effectively creating new authentic social roles and interactions not planned by the curators and *not directly enacted by myself*. It was also not important that the audience members understand the points I am critical of in the situation. The ambiguous position is mainly used here to generate material for the artwork, not primarily as a tool of critique. In a OOO sense, the artwork is not subordinated to social or political message, but remains an autonomous object unto itself. Furthermore, the ambiguous position is not *purely* critical! There is also an aspect in

which the social relations created by my disruption of the situation create new social interactions, not only break old ones. Despite this, the situation of the audience, in its subtle negation of the social roles of the concert format, could be understood tending towards negativity.

Besides these formal aspects that reflect, disrupt, and recontextualize the social object of 'concert-as-group-tour' or 'concert-as-moderated-pizza-lounge,' positive and negative ambiguity also finds its expression through the material itself. The most explicit content-based application of positive or negative ambiguity to the social object of music is the latter section of part II.⁶³ This sequence serves as the centerpiece of the whole work, through which everything is contextualized. Here, the boundary between performer and audience is severely disturbed, if not outright broken, when the performers, with oil on their near-naked bodies and their hands and arms covered in raw chicken meat fastened to them with clear plastic tape, wander around the public in the paddle-ball court, squishing meat directly in audience members' ears, dropping meat and dirt on the ground, and performing an 'almost-hug,' whereby a slow approach to a hug around the body of a spectator, being extremely careful to never touch them, renders explicit the border of comfortable proximity implicit in every social interaction, not the least those present in the concert situation.



Figure 17:Aa performer approaches an audience member for an 'almost-hug' at the end of part II.

⁶³ I will present my analysis in reverse since this is the order in which I composed the sections of the piece. What the involvement with one material yielded became the basis for the succeeding section.

Again, the approach is dual: it is on the one hand somewhat disgusting and certainly a bit uncomfortable for someone you don't know (not to mention someone wearing only flesh-colored underwear, covered in oil and dirt, with raw meat on their arms) to enter your personal space, without obvious prompt, and stay there for a non-negligible amount of time (the average 'almost-hug' lasted probably around a minute, depending on the reaction from audience member). If you're the type who prefers your social interactions with a high degree of alienation, perhaps it's even provocative that *your own reactions* come to the foreground. To this end, the form of the final section was devised to be a monolithic and repetitive action/interaction cycle, so that after a few minutes, the general material is absorbed, and what becomes interesting is the quality of the *autopoietic feedback loop*⁶⁴ that arises from the interaction between performer and audience. In other words, through the inversion of relations between performer and audience and by formal reduction, the *liveness* of the piece becomes present. In OOO terms, we can say that, by means of the external metaphor 'music-as-liveness,' a new *compound object* is created with its own distinct and real inner constellation of performer and audience.

On the other hand, despite the apparent negative aspects of disgust, discomfort, and provocation resulting from such material, the results of the interactions were extremely individual, ranging from funny, to touching, to awkward, to confrontational. They were neither planned nor rehearsed: by enacting a *performative setting*⁶⁵, where the focus was *liveness*, the actuality of the musical situation can be understood as coming to the foreground. In other words, by clearing out space *inside* the artwork (through formal reduction), the performer-audience compound object shines through, providing its own content in the form of candid and personal reactions, developing over time through the

⁶⁴ Here the Ästhetik des Performativen of Erika Fischer-Lichte comes into play. Although not directly concerned with social relations, Fischer-Lichte's theory of liveness, "die durch die leibliche Ko-Präsenz von Akteuren und Zuschauern konstituiert und von der autopoietischen feedback-Schleife erzeugt werden," is important to understand any artistic work that reaches outside of its inner-mediality and into situations, or performance. The term autopoietic feedback loop refers to the type of self-organizing, self-referential dynamic network that forms from the co-presence of performers and spectators. In the context of this piece, it can be understood as the quality of the behavior of the compound object formed by liveness. Fischer-Lichte, Ästhetik des Performativen, 115.

⁶⁵"...bei denen performativen Akten, mit denen in Aufführungen Körperlichkeit hervorgebracht wird, handelt es sich stets um Prozesse der Verkörperung im Sinne dieses Konzeptes, und zwar ganz gleich, ob mit ihnen zugleich auch eine fiktive Figur hervorgebracht wird..." Ibid., 154. This is a setting which, in contrast to the figurative (as in Fischer-Lichte's theory), by bringing forth the actual body of a performer, does not represent, but enacts, pointing to actual reality rather than a fictive one. A later theoretical work could tease out the tensions and agreements between such a theory of performative art and a OOO approach to a real reality, not just an actual one. This is for now out of the scope of my paper.

autopoietic feedback loop inherent to liveness. Again, despite the perceived surface negativity, what was created was a genuine and even intimate social object contextualized by sound.



Figure 15: A performer squishes meat in the ears of an audience member. Others look on with various reactions.



Figure 18: Some members of the audience hugged the performers back.



Figure 19: Performers were instructed to gently push the boundaries of the interaction. If an audience member, as depicted here, was showing signs of discomfort, they were instructed not to go further.



Figure 20: This audience member, however, was very receptive to the performer's actions.



Figure 21: Some interactions were of a gentler character.

As a counterweight to the focus on the interactive model described above, I inserted various musical aspects to ground the aesthetic experience as a subset of the phonogetic space and enhance the mixture of negative and positive ambiguity in the overall work. The entire part II features a series of field recordings organized and triggered through a statistical distribution algorithm. These include cars driving down a rainy street, a thunderstorm, wind, and ocean waves. Over the course of part II, the distributive weights of the algorithm play back the samples at different lengths, amplitudes, and in various

combinations – forming another type of loop that contrasts with the dynamic feedback of liveness. Indeed, the algorithmically generated concrete music provides a further avenue of meaning: since the algorithm, although self-regulating and self-referential, is completely determined, it could be read as a parallel or contrast to the dynamic social interaction caused by the piece. Is this to say that, like the algorithm, the social interactions enacted here are completely determined by the superstructure of the situation? Or is the opposite effect reached – that the juxtaposition renders clear how *unlike* autopoiesis is with a determinate algorithm? My interpretation tends towards the second, given the dynamism of the live situation in contrast.

Furthermore, the subjective quality of the concrete music is expressive. The field recordings of wet weather and wind, arranged in a constant distribution, impart a sense of melancholy to the situation through their topical emotionality yet understatement. Not only is this a metaphor that uses formal properties (statistical distribution pasted to the autopoietic process) to connect, in OOO terms, sensual qualities to the compound social object of liveness, but it is also my own earnest feeling that colors the interactions between meat-performer and audience. Despite the apparent surface of negation and provocation, the musical expression is authentic, enriching the polarity rhizome and undermining a reading of the situation as purely negative. I would therefore read this layering of positive and negative as ultimately one of a positive ambiguity. The negative surface of disgust and provocation gives way to interactions with audience members, whose varying interactions are the serious focus of this section of the piece, colored by the melancholy field recordings in the background. I argue that this careful contact with the audience and honest expression in sound create a real intimacy, reinforcing an impression of a positive ambiguity. Due to the negative exterior and the marked presence of confrontational, provocative material and situations, however, I would not go so far as to call this attitude sincere, as that implies a *purely positive* or affirmative attitude, which does not do justice to my involvement with strategies of negation.

The same positive ambiguity also could also be read from the first section of part II, where the performers undertake symbolic and performative actions that result in a distinctive sound profile. After a short ‘reprise’ of some gestures from part I (to which we will turn in a moment), the performers stand up from their earlier station with instruments

and dirt, and walk like ‘space birds’⁶⁶ to the front row of audience. There, they kneel down, produce a knife from underneath the plastic covering on the ground, use the knife to ‘bow’ their arms, poke holes in the tape on their arms, squeeze the meat out of the holes in the tape, and then use scissors to cut off exposed pieces of the meat, letting it fall onto the small Styrofoam tables placed at the front row of audience. Again, the appearance can be viewed as negative in its symbolism: the combination of sudden proximity, the echo of a musical gesture, the act of cutting flesh – all this could be understood as containing a rejection of distance, of a normative claim to music, of the flesh-body (through making incisions).



Figure 22: The performers, after ‘bowing’ their arms with kitchen knives, begin to cut holes in the plastic and squeeze out the chicken meat.

⁶⁶ A few subtle references to ‘space birds’ and ‘ghost chickens’ are strewn throughout the piece, suggesting symbolic connections to the chicken meat on the performers’ arms. This is seen in the way the performers walk to the audience, and the soft, high pitched, ‘ah’ sound they are instructed to occasionally make while moving about the audience.



Figure 23: Performers cut off pieces of meat from their arms using scissors.

The sequence is just the same accompanied by the ever-present melancholy of the concrete music, but more importantly, all these actions create a distinct sonic profile. Because the arms are wrapped in plastic, nearly every gesture produces a crinkling noise, which then becomes decorated with the gentle, metallic sound of scissor cuts. This concrete action-based noise profile is similar to ASMR, where quite often everyday sounds are exploited for their own sonic properties. Alongside the expressiveness given by the field recordings, the sonic profile created by the sound-actions, like in ASMR, can be seen to create a strange, fetishistic attraction towards the otherwise repulsive actions. The beginning of part II, directly before the opening up of the autopoietic feedback loop and foregrounding of liveness of the end, by giving the negative content a sort of perverse acoustic interest, compliments the strategy of positive ambiguity used on the material in section II at the internal level of the artwork, contrasting with the negative ambiguity of the situation at the external level. Depending on the interpreter, perhaps in this section neither the positive nor negative pole is strong enough to pull the whole impression towards positive or negative, creating a true ambiguity of material.

There is a final aspect to discuss in part II of IT'S NICE 2 MEAT U that complements the focus on performer and audience and heightens the sense of ambiguity. Until now the role of the composer in the actual performance has only been briefly mentioned. Normally, the composer works day and night behind closed doors to produce a blueprint that is then

executed by musicians for an audience, only appearing at the end of the performance to take their bow before their admiring public. Often, the composer is understood to ‘bare their soul,’ in the sense that their composition is frequently seen as a direct stand-in for their aesthetic values, expressive intent, personality, or even psychological state. In this way, one can view the performance of a composition as an exposition of the ‘blood, sweat, and tears’ that constitute the creative process. I took this quite literally. My role was to sit in the paddle-ball court at the mixing desk during the concert, and to act as the moderator, announcing to the public the situation and providing information and directives. I felt, however, that I could not place myself in the scene, so to speak, without becoming a part of it. I would be very critical of the aloof composer, who, from the safety of their desk or studio, holds themselves apart from the actuality of the concert situation.

For these reasons, I found it consequent to treat also myself as a flesh-body, albeit one who, in the metaphor described above, offers some part of themselves as the expressive sustenance for the benefit of the audience. At the end of part II, sitting directly in front of the viewing window and thus in direct view of the outside audience, I cut my hand with a knife so it begins to noticeably bleed. I then take on the role of moderator again, announcing a ‘finale’ with all the reminders given at the beginning, and walk out of the paddle-ball court to the seating of the outside audience. There, I hold out my bloody hand in a gesture reminiscent of one expecting a handshake, and say “It’s nice to meet you,” several times. While doing this, I try to smile genuinely, and sprinkle in other positive phrases in German and English, like “Don’t worry,” and “Wir schaffen es.” I make direct eye contact with audience members. After a few minutes, I sit down in the outside audience, pull bandages from my pocket and bandage my hand. I join in on watching the continuing action inside the court, and eventually ask to be brought sausages, which I eat heartily with ketchup.

Here I attempted to construct the most painfully ambiguous situation of the piece: I literally offer my blood to the audience, but do so with a gentle, sensitive, and encouraging demeanor. Not only can this be viewed as a reference to struggles with depression, but also as a metaphor for the situation of the concert: the artist painfully gives of their body so the audience can fulfill their fetishistic desire to watch and find catharsis, encapsulated in a highly institutionalized, consumeristic superstructure that reinforces and hardens the roles between composer, performer, and audience and their separation from each other. Yet I

attempted to convey, in my undertaking of the cutting, the speaking, and the actions that follow, a positive emotional quality. In my construction of the complex entanglement of positive and negative values inherent to ambiguity, I cannot be completely pessimistic or negative about the situation. In the end, I participate in the superstructure of the concert because I genuinely love making art and have a real need to share what I make, regardless of how at times it can feel like an alienating self-mutilation. In this reading, I would encourage an interpretation of the role of the composer as bringing a positive ambiguity to bear on the situation.

In summary, part II of IT'S NICE 2 MEAT U, by pairing positive intention with negative presentation, can be seen to create a positive ambiguity, focusing on flesh-bodies and their corresponding roles of performer, composer, and audience, using interactive contact mechanisms alongside literal and metaphorical sonic expression that pull networks of interaction of meaning into the phonogetic space. Part I, in contrast, employs a different strategy, focusing on the flesh-body of sound, presenting a deconstructed and ironic musical situation to which part II serves as a balance. The relation between the two parts could be understood as forming a *macrostructural subversion* between the intended negativity and intended positivity of the first and second part respectively. Part I appears as a continuous, scored musical work, an impression that is supported by the fact that the performers read notation and listen to a click-track through headphones, as well as a linear continuity of material. Structurally, it can be interpreted as affirming the musical situation: the traditional divide between performer and audience is maintained, as well as the aforementioned mechanism of performing from a score. Instruments are also present, although these are laid horizontally in dirt strewn on the ground, and one of the 'instruments' is a shovel. Here begins the negative intention: Throughout part I, a reproduction of a traditional musical situation and the structure of musical material (score, metronome track, instruments) is undermined by the *negation of musical material itself*.

As discussed earlier with Duchamp, a refusal, negation or reduction of the inner-musical content of the work clears out space for other things to shine through, in this case the extra-musical content of the situation (curatorial concept, concert format), preparing the second part, whereby a formal reduction gives way to the inner-musical object of liveness. It must be stated at this point that the liveness arrived at in part II is not a general

one – it is the social object of the live performance situation within music, not the fluxus-era expanded awareness of perception, space, material, or poetics that was used to negate traditional media and methods of art in favor of ‘life’. It is rather a liveness of the autopoietic feedback loop that comes from the co-presence of performer and spectator, one that in this case creates a network of intersubjective reactions and interactions. As I see it, the main difference from the anti-art activities of the 1960s is not merely the abandonment of the need for anti-art, but the structural manipulation of social relations as *the goal of composition*, through methods of dissolution, augmentation, and reversal of social formats, and the foregrounding of the interaction between performer, composer, and audience as a necessary result of liveness.

Liveness is not only created from the autopoietic feedback loop, but it is also constituted through the “leibliche Ko-Präsenz von Akteuren und Zuschauern,”⁶⁷ as Erika Fischer-Lichte asserts. Co-presence on the one hand involves people and bodies being together (something already accomplished in any live situation, and indeed also thematized in part II), but more significantly involves an experience of presence as an autonomous phenomenon. As the symbolic and sonic involvement with body and flesh was already displayed in the beginning of part II with the closing of proximity and the cutting of the meat-arms, in order to complete the explication of the concept of liveness, part I was conceived to deal with presence – specifically the presence of sound as it is received by the body.

In her text *Ästhetik des Performativen*, Erika Fischer-Lichte describes presence as first and foremost an *intensive*⁶⁸ experience of the present moment.⁶⁹ According to Fischer-Lichte, this is created through the ‘phänomenaler Leib’⁷⁰ (English: phenomenal body-animate) of the actor, which traditionally is subsumed to the ‘semiotischer Körper’ (semiotic body), which takes upon it a fictional figure foreign to the actual body of the actor. The *phenomenal body-animate*, as one that creates energy through its life-force and

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ “Präsenz ereignet sich für [die Zuschauer] als eine intensive Erfahrung von Gegenwart” Ibid., 166.

⁶⁹ “Was die Zuschauer in einer Aufführung sehen und hören, ist in diesem Sinne immer gegenwärtig” Ibid., 161. It’s important to note that in German, the distinction between the concept of presence and the present as a temporal unit is much clearer than in English.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 166. In German, the words Körper and Leib express a distinction not found in the common English translation of both to ‘body’. Leib refers to a body animated with life, while Körper is strictly the material body without life.

not psychological processes of catharsis or identification through its figuration, is thus performative and not expressive.⁷¹ Fischer-Lichte's analysis of presence continues on to show the ways the phenomenal body animate not only has always stuck out from underneath the semiotic body of traditional theater, but also how in the latter half of the 20th century artists in theater and the visual arts have thematized presence, isolating and opposing it from the figuration of representation. One could therefore read the focus on presence as a reduction, refusal, or negation of representative strategies in art – certainly taking the example of John Cage illustrates how a negation of musical material, therefore a refusal of figuration, can be understood to render the *phenomenal body-animate of sound* explicit, creating an intensive experience of present-time. This was my strategy for part I of IT'S NICE 2 MEAT U: to forge further musical connections with the liveness embedded in the interactive autopoiesis of part II, I sought to enact a negation of musical material that largely *refused figuration*, which would in its place leave the *presence of sound* to emerge. Just as presence in Fischer-Lichte's theory reveals the phenomenal body-animate of the actor, I sought in turn to reveal the phenomenal body-animate of sound, thus arriving at a type of 'flesh-body' of sound. My goal was, by an experience of presence, to call attention to the *actual situation* in which music takes place rather than draw the listener into a fictional parallel world. This can also be viewed, as in the earlier discussion on the world-relation, as an *emptying out of the inner, figurative content* of the artwork, leaving only bridges of meaning outward. The piece does not, however, become only relational: rather, the structural employment of the autopoietic feedback loop can be said to turn external relation into internal content, employing a metaphor of music-as-social-object that, per OOO, takes the sensual qualities, derived from the social object, of the flesh-body, of disgust and melancholy, of intimacy and being watched, and applies them to the real object of music.

My enactment of presence in part I began firstly by negating sound as a traditional musical phenomenon, viewing it as empty of conceptual, historical, or expressive content. The instruments were treated as characterless objects, laid on the ground in a row of dirt⁷²

⁷¹ Diese Fähigkeit zur Präsenz... „wurde vielmehr durch Prozesse der Verkörperung erzeugt, mit denen der Schauspieler nicht seinen semiotischen Körper, sondern seinen phänomenalen Leib auf spezifische Weise hervorbrachte“, and „Präsenz ist keine expressive, sondern eine rein performative Qualität.“ Ibid., 165.

⁷² A symbolism which hinted not only at the raw materiality of the instrument (itself a presence-focused view), but also at burial, hinting at death, decay, or a return to the earth.

and – alongside with a shovel – were tapped on and otherwise used as *resonant bodies*. This approach was designed to merely create sonic energy rather than traditional musical ideas, a step towards an aesthetics of presence. There was a corresponding macrostructure enacted: *i*) the performers first used only their meat-arms (with the plastic sound-profile created by every impulse), *ii*) only used their hands to touch the instrument-objects (which resulted in a huge and space-filling reverb, as well as samples of bird sounds), *iii*) enacted a reduced ‘playing’ on the instruments (pushing the levers of the saxophone, plucking the violin, tapping the snare drum and shovel), and *iv*) another, more body-focused performative ‘playing’ that shifted the focus of the material from the raw materiality of sound and instruments to that of objects like dirt, meat, and bodies.

These four stages of playing were also accompanied by three interludes of electronic sounds, and one long pause of over a minute. The first interlude *a*) sampled the instrument-touching reverb from *ii*), creating a formless reverb loop and then making a large playback rate sweep out of audible range, the second interlude *b*) played back combinations of low sine tones from a subwoofer which, in the large space, created perceptible pressure waves that swept over the audience. Interlude *b*) also featured *ba*) a long silence of over a minute, which, after the roughly 2 minutes of low sine waves, was a heavy contrast, and *bb*) which right after the long pause created a shockingly loud playback rate sweep downwards out of perceptible range. The final interlude *c*), after *iii*), was another low-high playback rate sweep using a sample of dropping dirt on the violin, which ended as a concrete sample to blend with the actual entrance of dropping dirt on the violin at section *iv*).

Every one of these materials – the electronic interludes, the silence, and the instrumental sections – was conceived as pointing to the phenomenal body-animate of sound: through non-figurative treatment they generate sonic energy that is intended not only to create an intensive experience of the present moment, but also to focus on the *phenomenal body-animate of the listener*, thereby revealing qualities of the listener’s own perception. While composing, I identified four categories of presence perception enacted by this material: *presence of sound*, *presence of space*, *presence of perception*, and *presence of body*. The sections *i*) - *iv*) do not correspond directly to these categories. Each material rather serves multiple categories at the same time.

The score starts with an arm choreography in four voices, beginning in unison with raising, lowering, and extending one arm, then doing the same with the second arm. The group is split into two pairs as more material is added among variations of the beginning material: snapping fingers, hitting the chest and face, and ending with softly singing. To accompany the new material which deviates further and further away from the simple extensions and retractions of the arm and wrist of the first few bars, the counterpoint becomes more diverse, the unison beginning ending with the two groups divided into two further sub-layers.

This canonic process of arm choreography could be read as either as making explicit the purely technical body mechanics looming in every musical presentation, or abstracting and extending the common musical moment of arm extension that accompanies almost every act of instrumental playing. On another level, however, by a neutral (non-expressive and non-representative) movement of arms, a particular energy is generated that, without much illustrative or fictive character, can be seen to simply call to attention the quality of arm movements, the properties of the arms, and the individuality of the players (such an unstandardized material inadvertently reveals individual differences).

Furthermore, in the same way that the actions in the beginning of part II, by means of the plastic tape, generated their own specific noise profile, so too here does every impulse generate a corresponding noise that renders the rhythmic structure of the score audible. Although the score of section *j*) can be considered 'musically silent' in the sense that no instruments are played, no tones are produced, and sound is not utilized as an illustrative means, the sound the arm-actions produce, as well as the sounds of the other actions (snapping, hitting the chest, the sound of the arms falling to the legs, etc.), by virtue of being thoroughly concrete, are also not musically expressive in the traditional sense, and thus negate the condition of traditional musical material, producing instead a condition that can be understood to reveal the *presence of sound*. In the aesthetics of presence, the energy generated from the arm-actions can be viewed as calling attention to sound-as-itself and the situation of this sound; that they are small and rather 'empty' is also important – the emptiness contains negatively a subtle hint to the spatial actuality that

later becomes explicit.

IT'S NICE 2 MEAT U

$\text{♩} = 54$

dakota wayne

MODERATOR CUES BEGINNING OF CLICK TRACK

Violin:

- Bar 1: snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist, rotate hand, palm open, h. to right side, hand limp, stiff and straight wrist and hand, flop down again, l.h. to left sidey, palm out, fingers tight, snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist.
- Bar 2: snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist, rotate hand, palm open, h. to right side, hand limp, stiff and straight wrist and hand, flop down again, l.h. to left sidey, palm out, fingers tight, snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist.
- Bar 3: snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist, rotate hand, palm open, h. to right side, hand limp, stiff and straight wrist and hand, flop down again, l.h. to left sidey, palm out, fingers tight, snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist.
- Bar 4: snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist, rotate hand, palm open, h. to right side, hand limp, stiff and straight wrist and hand, flop down again, l.h. to left sidey, palm out, fingers tight, snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist.

Shovel:

- Bar 1: snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist, rotate hand, palm open, h. to right side, hand limp, stiff and straight wrist and hand, flop down again, l.h. to left sidey, palm out, fingers tight, snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist.
- Bar 2: snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist, rotate hand, palm open, h. to right side, hand limp, stiff and straight wrist and hand, flop down again, l.h. to left sidey, palm out, fingers tight, snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist.
- Bar 3: snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist, rotate hand, palm open, h. to right side, hand limp, stiff and straight wrist and hand, flop down again, l.h. to left sidey, palm out, fingers tight, snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist.
- Bar 4: snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist, rotate hand, palm open, h. to right side, hand limp, stiff and straight wrist and hand, flop down again, l.h. to left sidey, palm out, fingers tight, snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist.

Sax:

- Bar 1: snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist, rotate hand, palm open, h. to right side, hand limp, stiff and straight wrist and hand, flop down again, l.h. to left sidey, palm out, fingers tight, snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist.
- Bar 2: snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist, rotate hand, palm open, h. to right side, hand limp, stiff and straight wrist and hand, flop down again, l.h. to left sidey, palm out, fingers tight, snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist.
- Bar 3: snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist, rotate hand, palm open, h. to right side, hand limp, stiff and straight wrist and hand, flop down again, l.h. to left sidey, palm out, fingers tight, snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist.
- Bar 4: snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist, rotate hand, palm open, h. to right side, hand limp, stiff and straight wrist and hand, flop down again, l.h. to left sidey, palm out, fingers tight, snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist.

Snare:

- Bar 1: snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist, rotate hand, palm open, h. to right side, hand limp, stiff and straight wrist and hand, flop down again, l.h. to left sidey, palm out, fingers tight, snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist.
- Bar 2: snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist, rotate hand, palm open, h. to right side, hand limp, stiff and straight wrist and hand, flop down again, l.h. to left sidey, palm out, fingers tight, snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist.
- Bar 3: snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist, rotate hand, palm open, h. to right side, hand limp, stiff and straight wrist and hand, flop down again, l.h. to left sidey, palm out, fingers tight, snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist.
- Bar 4: snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist, rotate hand, palm open, h. to right side, hand limp, stiff and straight wrist and hand, flop down again, l.h. to left sidey, palm out, fingers tight, snap to claw, raise arm, straighten wrist.

Figure 24: Opening bars of the score, beginning with the meat-arms performing sound-actions in unison.

21

Violin:

Shovel:

Sax:

Snare:

hold arm position

straight arm, limp wrist

Figure 25: Splintering of unison texture towards the end of i).

Section *ii*) follows, and is briefly interrupted by interlude *a*). From bar 33, the arms first make contact with the instrument-bodies, resulting in four large reverbs projected from the six speakers in the hall which resound outwards at each touch of the hand. Each time a hand drops down to touch an instrument, another raises up in preparation, creating a continuous chain of *drop-raise-drop-raise*. The hands alternate, as do the zones of contact on the instruments, each of which is divided into 3 or 4 sections that have differing resonant properties. Each player is also alternated, creating chains like *abcd*, *cbad*, *cdab*, etc., which are interrupted by a unison at bar 43, whereby the first interlude *a*) starts. The interlude plays a sample of reverb that, in a granulator, keeps the same spectral properties but jumbles it formally (by chopping the sample into an arbitrary number of ‘grains’ that are played back at a randomized start point), thereby neutralising the ‘natural’ spatial trajectory of the ‘artificial’ reverb, substituting a low-to-high playback rate sweep that leaves audible range. Section *ii*) finishes with four more bars after the interlude that go back to unison counterpoint, remembering a few gestures of the first section, while adding samples of birdsong that are triggered at every reverberation.



Figure 26: Beginning of section *ii*).

There are multiple aspects to observe at this point: firstly, that the reverb of each instrument is unique, and is produced from the contact microphone rather than diaphragm microphones. In this way, the reverbs are the result of an internal surface (a resonating solid) given a virtual space (DSP comb-filter reverb), projected in the actual space (the warehouse in which the paddle-ball court is located). Hence, we are dealing with a layering of *virtual* and *actual*. The actual resonances of instruments are fed into a virtual space, which is in turn fed into the actual space of the warehouse. This simultaneity of *actual* and *virtual* results from each contact with the players' hands, and is also found in the coming interlude. In addition, the poles of actual and virtual are those which underly the tension created in negating musical material in a musical work. If we read concrete 'sound-as-it-is' as sound that is actual, not only for-itself, but also constituted by and referring to the moment and conditions in which the work finds itself (a high degree of world-relation), and therefore *present*, this type of sound is opposed to *musical sound*, which by definition contains a metaphor or anthropomorphism of 'sound-as-something-else', representing moods or characters and building abstract 'out-of-this-world' structures. I assert that both the abstract and figurative implementations of sound are *not actual* and therefore *point elsewhere than the immediate physical conditions in which the work finds itself*.

My point is that this dichotomy of actual and virtual can be seen as a consequence of the artistic involvement with presence. To make presence explicit, one must negate the musical material, which, in an artwork, is a paradox. The artwork constitutes an act of removal or differentiation from the world – otherwise it would be indistinguishable as such – and therefore always is other than the rest of the world: it is an autonomous object of art (in this case of the zone of existence of the phonogetic space). I simply try to make this paradox audible in section *ii*), whereby in every iteration of actual sound, conceived as pointing to the presence of sound, there is also the seed of virtuality that is taken to point elsewhere. Similarly, interlude *a*) takes this virtuality of reverb and adds a qualitative leap: the spatial trajectory is jumbled by granulation and put through a rising sweep. The low-to-high sweep can not only be understood as an interruption by an extended virtuality of sound that furthers the relationship between virtual and actual – it can rather be understood as *articulating the presence of space harmonically* and thus constituting a *translation of the presence of space into harmonic terms*. By sweeping through nearly all entire audible frequencies (as is really done by the later low-high figure of interlude *c*), it

takes the reverb tail and drags it through an expansive frequency spectrum, articulated horizontally. A bolder interpretation could even claim that because some of the peak moments of virtuality in the piece sweep a frequency spectrum through granular synthesis and playback rate automation, this material could be seen as pointing towards the *virtuality of the harmonic space itself*. In any case, the isolated use of huge reverbs, projected through six loudspeakers simultaneously, far outsizing the actions used to trigger them, generate enough sonic energy that, without accompanying figuration, can be seen as a presence of space that just the same points to the virtuality of the figurative musical space as it does to the actual space it is projected in. A similar reason is attributed to the sudden appearance of the manipulated bird samples at the end of *ii*). The birdsong could be read as a reference to a proto-musical material (inhabiting a space that has some, but not many traditionally musical qualities), thus as a sort of ancestor of the virtuality that arises from human contact with instruments, which has a similar half-formed quality as the ‘understated’ material in section *iii*).

In section *iii*) my development of the aesthetics of presence continues. Here, the most characteristic *strictly musical* material of the piece appears as a five-and-a-half beat cell that repeats six times in variation before undergoing two short process of development (bars 71-78 and 79-91). The cell is formed out of a 9- or 10-note tapping figure in 16th note-values, whereby alternating fingers tap on alternating resonant zones of the instruments, followed by an 11, 12, or 13-note tapped crescendo from pianissimo on the snare drum, always accompanied by rubbing noises and rhythmic impulses given by the other two instruments. Each instrument besides the snare drum changes roles at least

once.

The musical score for bar 55 is as follows:

- Violin:** Playing two eighth-note pairs per measure. The first pair is labeled "knock body of violin with fist". Measures are marked with time signatures $\frac{2}{4}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{1}{8}$, and $\frac{2}{4}$.
- Shovel:** Playing continuous noise by rubbing the wood of the handle with hand. Measures are marked with time signatures $\frac{2}{4}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{1}{8}$, and $\frac{2}{4}$.
- Saxophone:** Tapping on keys with fingers, alternating between hands. Precise key is unimportant; numbers denote finger. Measures are marked with time signatures $\frac{2}{4}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{1}{8}$, and $\frac{2}{4}$.
- Snare:** Tapping on the skin of the drum with fingers, alternating between hands. Measure is marked with time signature $\frac{2}{4}$.

Performance instructions include:

- "knock body of violin with fist"
- "rub wood of handle with hand, continuous noise"
- "vocal fry 'its'"
- "tap on keys of saxophone with fingers, alternate between fingers of each hand, precise key is unimportant; numbers denote finger"
- "tap on skin of drum with fingers, alternating between fingers of each hand"

Dynamic markings: $\text{J} = 102$, H , 16 , 55 , PP .

Figure 27: Characteristic ‘tapping’ music that is repeated in variation throughout section iii).

The form of the gesture is indeed characteristic, albeit understated. No artful or fantastical manipulation of sound takes place. The very same kind of presence-affirming material from sections *i) – ii)* is used (tapping, plucking, and rubbing that interact from simple contact with the hands), this time not only foregrounding the presence of sound itself but the *presence of the instrument-body*. For this reason, the rigidity and repetition of the cell, in its constant variation between voices, can be seen as revealing the individuality of the instruments that always breaks through, despite the reduced material and mechanism of playing. It also this very treatment of the instruments that shines another light on the opposition of actual and virtual in the discussion of liveness and presence. We could say that, in the face of the potential of sonic wealth that can be created by these instruments (with the exception, naturally, of the shovel, which serves a symbolic purpose seen mainly at the end of part I), the ‘voices’ of the instruments are *negated*, in that they are basically totally ignored. Again, this is a strategy of expressing presence – yet for the first time in the piece, the sounds are arranged in a figure that does produce some musical qualities. Here in bar 55, as in the later repetitions, there are musical aspects such as

sonic blending (the underlying noise produced by rubbing the shovel that produces the ‘halo of sound’ that gives the material a characteristic spectrum), a rhythmic pulse creating motion (the knocking sound on the violin), a ‘theme’ (the finger tapping on the saxophone that is heard first), and an anticipation (the tapping on the snare which answers the first tapping, and, paired with a crescendo, creates motion into the next cell). That the sounds are mostly ‘small’ noises gives the whole passage an empty, skeletal quality, but nevertheless a distinct, yet understated pairing of sound and motion, audible form and anticipation occurs, which can be seen as giving rise to a corresponding virtuality.

The virtuality of section *iii*) is further musicalized formally: later passages contain fragmentation of the cell first presented at bar 55 (at bar 71) and certain unmistakably musically dramatic events occur, such as the fortissimo tapping figures like those at bar 83. The effect created by these sections, enhanced by the brief return of the cell at 92, gives rise to a further musicalization at the formal level (theme, development, reprise) that can be easily recognized as typical of music from the tradition. The formally music-similar treatment of materials that were conceived to show a *presence of sound* can be understood as a further type of virtualization. Similar to the way that sound projection in the hall with artificial reverb from actual instrumental spaces created a structural layering of actual-virtual-actual, in this model the same structural layering can be *translated onto the*

formal dimension.

22 **J**

71 **3**
4

shovel

sax

snare

3
4

3

Figure 28: Fragmentation of the cell.

26 **L**

83

violin

shovel

sax

snare

ff

ff

ff

ff

3

Figure 29: Musical events like this one bring more character to the tapping cell.

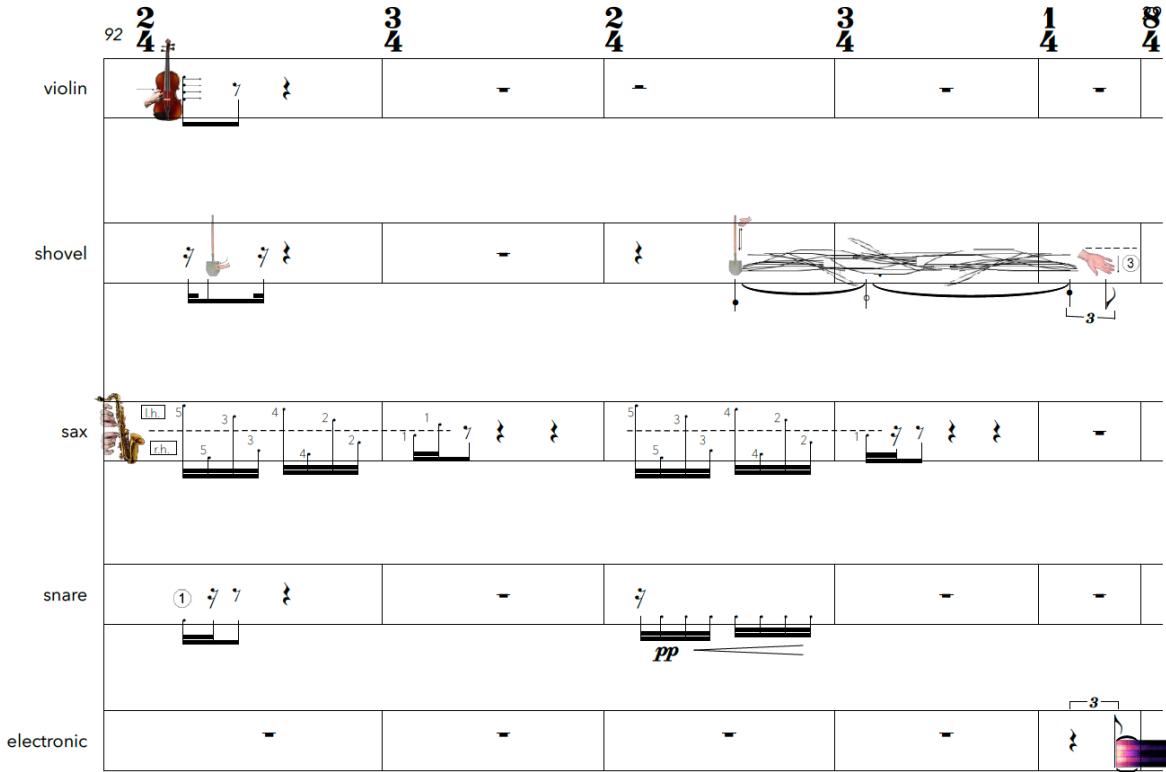


Figure 30: Return of the tapping figure towards the end of section iii). Here it is fit into a different metric structure than the one at the beginning of the section.

While the structure of the opposition of virtual and actual in section ii) was interpreted as one that suppressed the virtuality by sandwiching it between layers of actuality, in section iii) the virtuality can be seen as being ‘amplified’ as it climbs upwards towards the level of form. The individual sound units are completely actual, the cell figure is somewhat, yet minimally musicalized, and the formal layer contains enough of a musicalization to be reminiscent of musical structures from the tradition of music. Although not as completely virtual as the electronic frequency sweeps since here it is comprised primarily of actual sounds, the virtuality nonetheless appears, and amplified through form from its skeletal base, appears to us as a shadow that follows the actuality, only apprehensible at higher structural layers.

The appearance of the most musical (though perhaps not the most virtual) material is then followed by perhaps the most actual material. Interlude b) and ba) comprise of longer segments of unbroken time (roughly two and one minutes respectively), and both can be understood as throwing attention on the *presence of sound, presence of perception, presence of body, and presence of space* – all simultaneously. Interlude b)

features various intervals of low sine tones between 40 and 60 Hz, which, projected from a subwoofer at high amplitudes in such a large space, create physically perceptible air pressure waves that woosh around the hall, in addition to the felt vibrations through the floor and from some mild rattling of metal scaffolding. This material is one that sits on the boundary of our ears, brains, and bodies: it is so low that it is nearly out of hearing, the waves are so long that depending on where one sits, one receives a different impression. It is so deep and loud that often times it is better felt and heard, and this enormous sonic energy at such lengths creates airwaves such that the echoes practically become gusts of wind. These low sine tones fill up the space, move around the space almost at the rate of rhythm, and by doing so articulate not only the space, but the boundaries of our bodies and our hearing as well as the form of sound itself. This is conceived as the *material of presence* that brings together all aspects of presence in the phonogetic space which constitute the live experience of music, presented as the *consequence of extended composition of presence that resulted a suppressed and then spectral virtuality*. It is as if, through a dialectical tension with virtuality, the strategies of *affirmation of presence* had to become more extreme to maintain their vitality over the course of the piece. Virtuality can be said to nevertheless be marginally present: the phenomenon of presence at interlude b) is indeed built out of sine tones, a sound that is paradoxically immanent (in that all sounds can be reduced to combinations of sine tones), yet not meaningfully actual (that in nature is never found in its exposed form, needing to be extracted first). We can then see that even here, virtuality looms.

The conclusion to the material at interlude b) was to create silence. Interlude ba) is a stark contrast to the constant throbbing of the sine tone combinations, whereby the *material of presence*, through an act of negation of sound (silencing), finds its full consequence. This minute-long pause that fills the space can be read as exposing the sounds of the room and the situation inhabiting it, straining our perception, making us pay attention to that straining, making us perceive the faint sounds of the other bodies around us, and allowing room for the physical and psychological negative image of the deep throbbing of the previous section to fade. By creating a situation of intense listening that focuses on space and sound (through its intended absence), the presence of both our perception and our bodies as the site of this perception is revealed, interpreting the consequence of presence as absence, as negation. In contrast to Cage's 4'33", which

implements a total absence-as-presence through its non-usage of the piano and thereby presents nothing-as-something – an ‘elevation’ of the banal –, my strategy of dialectical and thus formal treatment of presence could be understood as a *hole in the middle of the artwork*. Conceived as the formal consequence of the need for increasing actuality in the face of the immanent shadow of virtuality, the negation of sound coinciding with the fulfillment of an aesthetics of presence appears as a blind spot in the work, an empty moment. As I have argued in previous sections of my paper, this precise moment – historically as well as locally in this piece – is where the social object appears; the increasing rejection of musical material in the service of presence clears the way for the compound object of the social situation. In this way, *the entirety of IT'S NICE 2 MEAT U can be viewed as an explication of liveness through the development of presence and its consequence in the social object of music.*

After interludes *b*) and *ba*) the silence is cut by a violent noise created from another granulation and playback rate manipulation of a sample of dropping dirt on the shovel (the very same to appear at the end of interlude *c*). This ‘jump scare’ of interlude *bb*) is another drive at the presence of perception, making visible a basic function of our attention: the propensity to be startled by a loud sound. It also wrenches the listener back out of the ‘pure presence’ created by the null point of interlude *ba*), throwing us again into virtuality as the granulator sweeps the rate high-to-low out of audible range and section *iv*) begins.

Section *iv*)’s novelty is to introduce new material. Here, the musicians make various performative actions that brings other parts of their body into contact with the instrument: rubbing one’s hair on the snare drum, licking the reed of the saxophone, biting the handle of the shovel, dropping meat and dirt onto the instruments, rubbing meat on the instruments, and shoveling dirt. The section is split by the appearance of interlude *c*), which mainly functions like interlude *a*), the primary difference being that it makes a smooth transition from a granulated frequency sweep to a recording of dirt being dropped on the shovel, which is then blended with the actual dropping of dirt on the shovel. Section *iv*) continues freely afterwards and the actions progress in their absurdity (sprinkling dirt on head, throwing dirt at the wall, holding meat over the mouth, throwing meat towards the public, and finally burying the violin under a pile of dirt), before being finally interrupted by the moderator, who kicks the audience out and turns on ‘smooth jazz,’ to bridge the transition to part II.

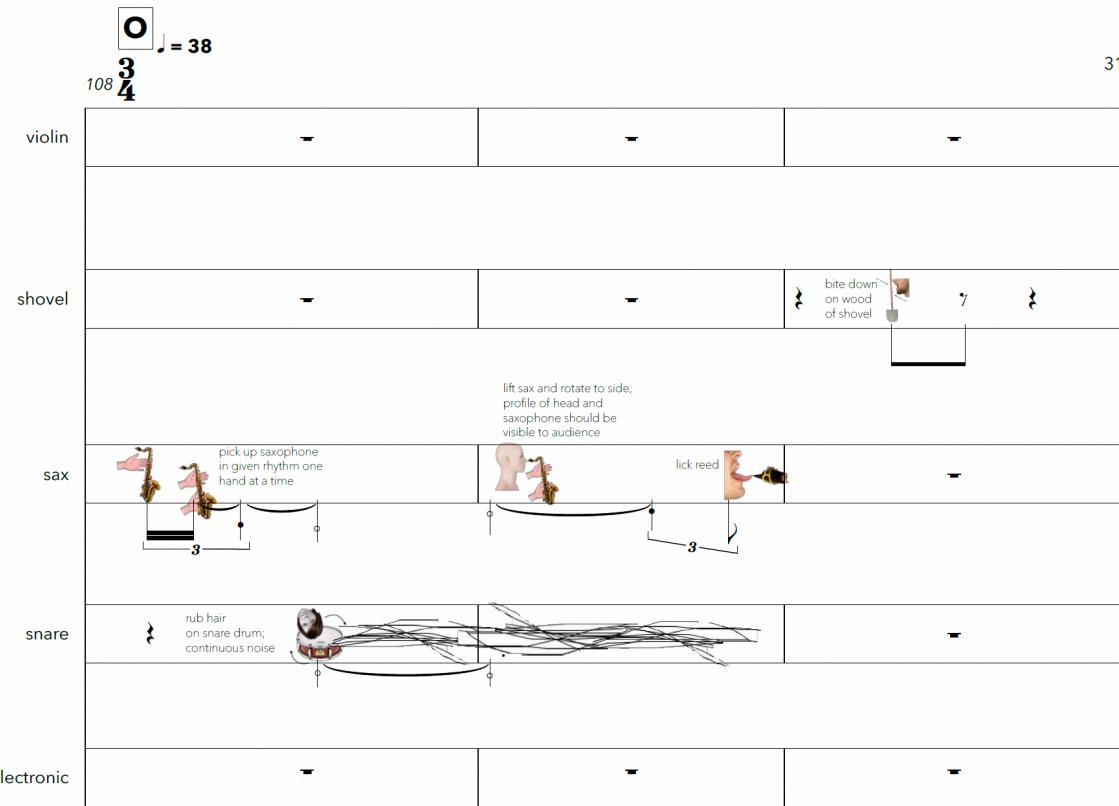


Figure 31: An example of the performative material that appears at section iv).

The point at which section iv) ends is the point at which part I began. The immanence of the social surroundings presses in on the work – the moderator's amplified voice suddenly interrupts the performance to announce the end of part I – and the cycle of ambiguity is completed: part I, while affirming a musical situation (thus a positive presentation), contains musical material that focuses on *negation* (a main strategy of an aesthetics of presence), lending the section what I perceive as a negative ambiguity. Furthermore, the connection between social and musical situation can be read from the focus on the actuality of bodies, both human and object. The various semi-theatrical (rather performative, since they do not create distinct figures or characters on the phenomenal body-animate of the musicians) actions undertaken in section iv), in my conception, do not only point to the presence of sound through their liminal acoustic properties or call attention to the presence of the bodies of the performers as they generate bodily energy. More than this they can be understood to highlight the presence of various objects (in the everyday sense!) that inhabit the performance space: first an extension of the objecthood of the instruments (licking, biting, dropping), then a collision between the instruments and the other objects – the meat and the dirt. After such a long

time concentrating on ‘pure presence’ as a self-contained phenomenon reflected through the negation of musical material, the performative actions with meat and dirt, not merely bringing a strange humor into play that enriches the ambiguity of part I, can be viewed as producing a presence that leads the attention not only back to actuality from the specter of virtuality in sections *ii*) and *iii*), but also up and outwards from the inner structure of presence concluded in interludes *b*) and *ba*).

A formal trajectory of the aesthetics of presence could thus be traced: in section *i*) sonic and bodily presence that leads us *into the materials* by virtue of their reduction, in section *ii*) a structural tension of suppressed virtuality that appears sandwiched between sonic and spatial presence, in section *iii*) a spectral *musicality* that is elaborated outwards from the skeletal material to the formal level, expanding the dialectic of virtual-actual, and in section *iv*) a performativity, triggered by the nullification of interlude *ba*), that can be seen as *transposing the opposition of virtual-actual onto internal-external*. Indeed, one of the most salient *sonic* events of the end of part I is the gradient from virtual to actual given by interlude *c*), where the virtuality of the granulator gesture slowly spins out to reveal the sound of dirt dropping on the shovel. With this, the duality established earlier in the piece is dissolved, as the entire spectrum of virtual-actual (just as the entire frequency spectrum) is surfed, landing on a concrete sound. However, this concrete sound is first heard only as a recording, indeed itself only a digital (virtual) reproduction of the actual. Although moments later the actual action of dropping dirt on the shovel begins, this subtle sleight of hand shifts the relationship of actual-virtual: in the transition from the virtual abstract transformation of a concrete sound action (the granulator sweep), to a recording of a concrete sound action (another type of actual-virtual-actual sandwich), to the actual sound action, it can be said that the virtuality of actuality itself is revealed, turning the whole dialectics of presence on its head. In other words, by projecting a recording of the action directly before the action takes place and making no great contrast between the two, we are invited to compare the ways in which actuality might be virtual; the method of transition and conclusion of this comparison are the same: both are amplified and thus contain an artificial and technological acoustic expansion that can be understood to constitute a virtuality.

This is further reflected in the material. No longer are the sounds in the score tiny and almost *anacoustic*. From bar 121 to the end there is the near-constant gesture of

dropping dirt on an instrument, which through amplification is projected to artificially large dimensions. In combination with the slow tempo and high acoustic detail (the constant falling of pieces of earth and small stones onto the metal, wood, or skin of the instruments creates a sonically rich texture), this material does not receive formal musical qualities, but *acoustic musical qualities*. It becomes *beautiful*, and although the action itself is contextualized within a performative context of non-figuration, we could say *it receives a virtuality for its own inner self*. The sound-in-itself is treated for its aesthetic properties, which point to more than simply actual conditions, instead pointing to figurative qualities. In this way, the treatment of virtuality can be understood as *inward* in section *iv*). In the OOO sense, we can say that a metaphor is performed, not on the structural level of the artwork, but directly on the material itself. Perhaps one could then say – dirt is beautiful!

34

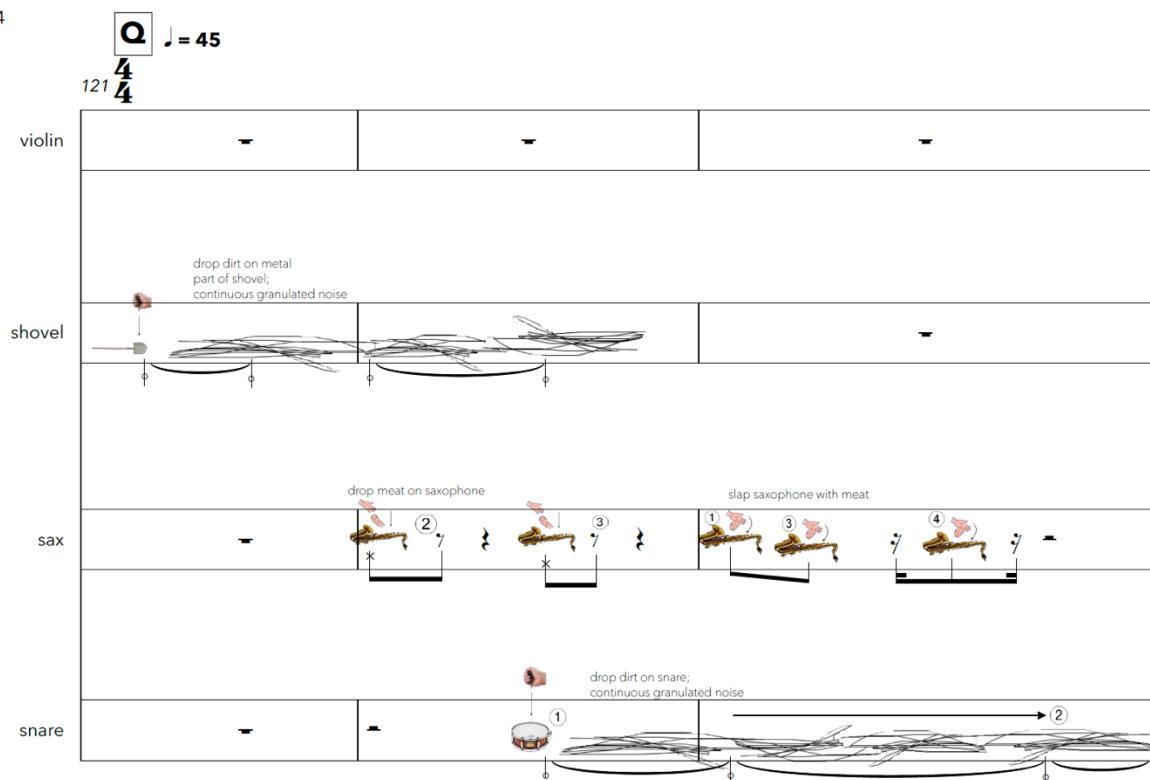


Figure 32: From bar 121 to the end the dropping of dirt is nearly constant.

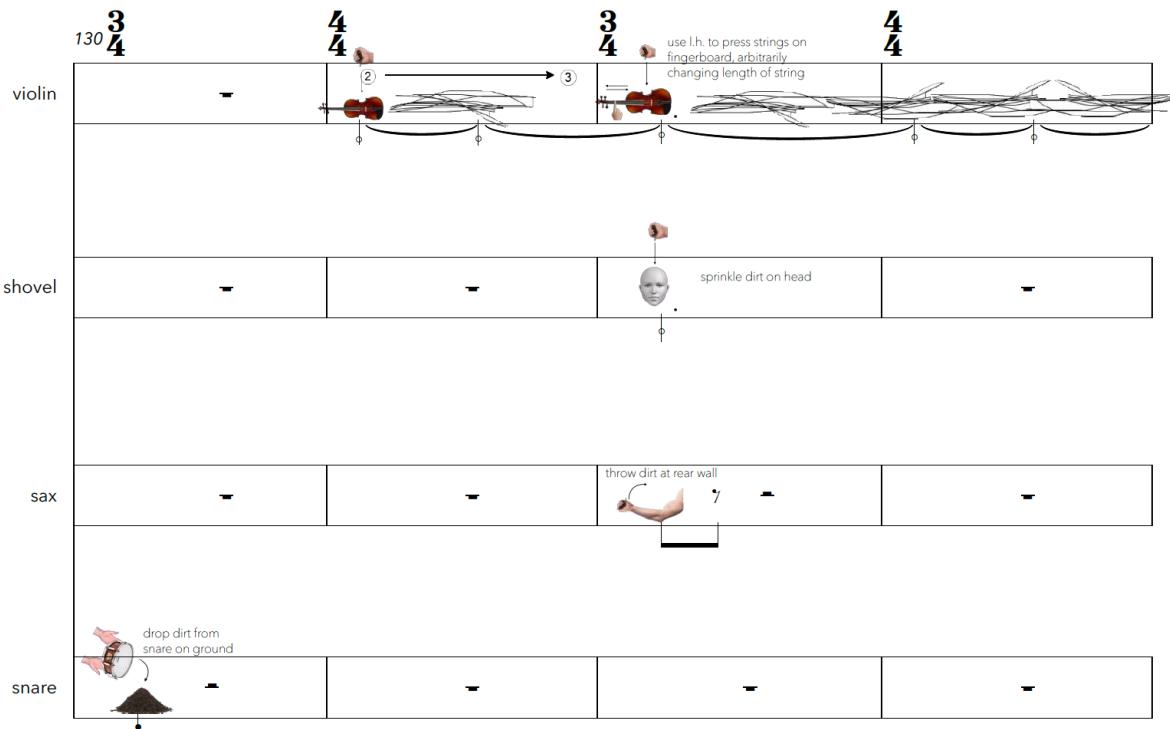


Figure 33: Dropping the dirt is eventually passed to the violin, which takes a 'dirt solo'.

The reversal of virtuality from a structure outside of sound (that of the shadow of the musical in the form of section *iii*) to being present in the sound itself, unsuppressed (as it was with the actual-virtual-actual construction of reverb in section *ii*) is accompanied by the most relational (or external) material in the piece so far. The performative actions undertaken on dirt and meat and instruments by the performers (licking, biting, throwing, shoveling, etc.), by way of being performative, are taken to generate actuality by calling attention to the actual (non-metaphorical) qualities of the objects in question. We can conclude that in section *iv*), while the virtual, figurative, or metaphorical qualities can be seen as driven inward to being an inner property of sound ('dropping-dirt-as-beauty'), here the actual, performative, literal qualities are driven outwards to being an outer property of sound ('dropping-dirt-as-dropping'). The purpose of the reversal is not only to further illustrate that any artwork, simply by being an artwork, is a separation from the world and therefore is *not actual*. Instead, it is to continue the consequence of an aesthetics of presence; the nullification of the musical material is not enough. Far past the nullification of interlude *ba*) comes a *reciprocal relation of the form of presence*. Whereas the hole created by *ba*) is understood to suppress all virtuality in favor of actuality, section *iv*) does

not simply do the opposite, but takes the assumed opposition of actual and virtual and collapses it, a possible conclusion thereof being not only that *a truly consequent aesthetics of presence is impossible due to the immanence of virtuality*, but more so that *through collapsing the inner opposition of actual and virtual inside presence, the focus is thrown again back outwards into the relational*. The dropping of dirt on the shovel here is viewed as becoming both figurative in its awarded aesthetic qualities and at the same time literal in its performativity, which despite its inner beauty can still be said to show outwardly an actual relation between body and object. Paradoxically, rather than a complete reduction of the inner figuration of the artwork, like in interlude *ba*) where a negation of musical material is conceived to lead to an increased awareness of the inhabitants of the space, here a modest *re-figuration* leads us back outwards. The appreciable qualities of the acoustic richness of dirt-dropping can be said to not provide enough figuration to justify a total exclusion of the exterior of the artwork – I claim it is *not a complete music on its own* that would draw in the listener through its inner richness. This *understatement*, like Fried's notion of theatricality in minimalist sculpture, is understood to render the material *objectlike*, which, paired with the performative actions, would point towards the actuality, hence presence and eventually liveness, of the bodies and materials on hand.

In this way, part I of IT'S NICE 2 MEAT U is conceived to trace an aesthetics of presence that reveals a dichotomy of actual-virtual which in turn paradoxically collapses, leading back outwards to the social object that becomes the focus of part II. Throughout the entire piece, the connection between the bodies of performer, composer, instrument and audience, and materials of sound, dirt, and meat, are contextualized through the symbol of the flesh. Human bodies are a type of flesh and animal flesh is worn on the arms of the performers. The skin of these flesh-arms is viewed as producing presence just the same as the skin (or surface) of the instruments. Dirt produces flesh and flesh returns back to dirt just the same as space propagates vibrations which dissipate back into space. In this two-part explication of liveness that begins with presence, its inner tensions, and its consequence, and ends with the autopoietic feedback loop that arises from the co-presence of bodies, contextualization of flesh provides one single image that links together sound, objects, and people, and furthermore, by thematizing our *reaction to flesh* through focusing on perception and interaction, points towards how we treat the flesh of

ourselves and others. For it is through our own flesh and the ‘flesh of the world’ that we interact with things, and by doing so, delineate the boundaries of our selves.⁷³

⁷³ “Es ist das ‚Fleisch‘, durch das der Körper immer schon mit der Welt verbunden ist.“ Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen*, 141.

VI. Conclusion

IT'S NICE 2 MEAT U can be seen as an ambiguous reaction to the social object and the liveness it produces in alternating modes of negative and positive ambiguity, corresponding to part I and part II respectively. Negative ambiguity is employed in part I in order to critique an aesthetics of presence while showing its consequence in the actuality of the social condition, while positive ambiguity is employed in part II to produce genuine intimacy and reveal the personal boundaries that it requires. In hindsight, however, I do have some reservations about my method. Although I assert that the exposition of presence in part I, in its structural employment and ambiguous attitude, updates relevant historical tendencies (fluxus, Cage, performance art), from my current standpoint it seems to be perhaps too reductive to musical material. To accompany Graham Harman's theory of *overmining*, he also explicates a theory of *undermining*, whereby an object is reduced to what it is made of, excluding both the external, relative side, and the third, irreducible, substantial existence of the object.⁷⁴ As a sort of undermining, refusing figuration, or negating musical material, is akin to *reducing sound to pure physical phenomena*, whose primary meaning would be its own presence. Harman even argues that "presence fails because it is merely a translation of an absent real object that can never appear...without becoming something other than it really is,"⁷⁵ framing presence as a mere reliance on the sensual at the expense of the real. Although I am steadfast in my devotion to musical works that point at the conditions of actuality (I have, since my reading of OOO, stopped using the term real to oppose the virtual, figurative world of the artwork) as a method of probing the social object of music, I admit that my concept and implementation of presence in IT'S NICE 2 MEAT U, especially in part I, borders on excessively reductive to musical material.

I believe, however, this reduction comes mainly from a strict adherence to an aesthetics of presence, and not from my overall approach to making artworks. To this end, I must clarify a few further aspects of my approach to composition. Firstly, I will discuss my usage of *flat metaphors*. As I described earlier, Graham Harman's ontology of real-sensual

⁷⁴ "...an object is more than its pieces and less than its effects." Harman, Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything. 53.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 201.

makes an enemy of literalism, whereby the indescribable richness of the real object, which can only be experienced subjectively, is turned into a poor approximation through literal language. The word ‘tree’ does nothing to get at the true inwardness of ‘being-tree.’ For this reason, Harman is very critical of presence, which he claims fails due to constant withdrawal of real objects. While Harman leaves his critique of presence to a few pages in a discussion of Derrida, I think there is more to be said about the matter.

In Erika Fischer-Lichte’s concept of presence, she also makes an intriguing comparison to Walter Benjamin’s concept of the *aura* – an “einmalige Erscheinung einer Ferne, so nah sie sein mag,”⁷⁶ a phenomena which „entzieht es sich jeglicher Annäherung.”⁷⁷ She asserts that presence, unlike the aura (which always keeps its distance despite every attempt at coming near) is an intensive experience of the present moment. At the same time, she uses Benjamin’s famous example again to claim that in the way Benjamin portrays aura, the aura is ‘breathed,’ by which she means physically taken in by the body.⁷⁸ For Fischer-Lichte, this ‘breathing’ through which the aura is sensed is the same mechanism by which presence functions, since both aura and presence are in fact sensed *through the body*, calling both aura and presence “unterschiedliche Aspekte und Momente desselben Prozesses,”⁷⁹ where through experiencing the usual as unusual, the spectator is transformed. Meanwhile, there is an important difference Fischer-Lichte outlines between the two: the aura refers to the ‘Moment der Entrückung,’⁸⁰ and presence the ‘Auffälligwerden des Gewöhnlichen.’ (English: the making-noticeable of the ordinary). If aura is the moment where the indescribable is transported away into another sphere, and presence is usual things *coming into* our attention, I argue that both presence and aura have to do with the *felt proximity of things*. Aura is a perceived distance *despite* any appearance of proximity, while presence is an unmediated experience of the here and now, a perceived closeness *despite the real distance*.

This yields curious results when viewed against the OOO perspective of reality. The experience of aura as described above can be now seen as the moment in which the

⁷⁶ Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, 18.

⁷⁷ Fischer-Lichte, Ästhetik des Performativens. 166.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 167.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 173

⁸⁰ Ibid. The word ‘entrückung’ is normally translated as rapture, but I assert that here it is to be understood quite literally as the displacement of something from an ‘earthly’ sphere to a ‘heavenly’ one.

withdrawal of real objects is felt, in relief to the nearness of the corresponding sensual objects. On the other hand, presence can now be seen as an intensive experience of sensual objects, in relief to the already-withdrawn real. This does not necessarily mean that with presence the real disappears, as Harman's dismissal might lead one to assume. Rather, if aura and presence are linked to the same process, both exist in the world in alternation, and thus indirect experiences of the real and direct experiences of the sensual perforate our perception as our attention shifts from withdrawal to elsewhere to the here-and-nowness of the present moment.

This here-and-nowness that constitutes presence has one more important quality. As being an intensive experience of the present moment, it has the special property of being both inside and outside temporality.⁸¹ I claim that this duality of time that comes from being intensively present constitutes a paradox that *suspends time within time*. We experience presence nonetheless as subjects bound to temporal perception, but through confounding a sense of past and expectation of future that comes from focusing on the here-and-now we can be said to *negate our experience of time* while still remaining within its bounds. My argument is to then say that through suspending time within time, a sense of atemporal temporality is created. In other words, the changing sensual objects that are disclosed to us appear to be momentarily outside of time, and thus *more real*. Similarly, the immutable real objects that are always withheld and only sensed through their absence appear then to be at a closer temporality to the sensual. This phenomenon can be understood to be the simultaneous experience of near and far: by focusing on the present moment and thus suspending time, the sensual comes closer to the real, which appears to us as an experience of the *totality of the object*. The gap between real and sensual inherent to all things is not dissolved, but rather brought into close perceptual play, creating a continuity that, through focus on the sensual, gives us another type of indirect access to the real. In contrast to Harman's metaphors, where sensual objects are melted together and thus 'broken', with presence the sensual objects are negated by an experience of an opposite temporality. In both cases, I maintain, an implicit real can be indirectly sensed through cracks in the surface. Unlike metaphor, however, the sensual

⁸¹ To support this Fischer-Lichte relates a quote from Hans-Thies Lehmann: "...Präsenz ist ein 'unzeitiger', nämlich zugleich innerhalb und außerhalb des Zeitverlaufs angesiedelter Bewußtseins-Prozeß" Lehmann, Hans-Thies „Die Gegenwart des Theaters“, 13.

remains intact, elongated through a continuous present, thus remaining on the scene. For this reason, I say that presence reveals a totality in which real and sensual are both in play, mimicking the nature of the world that contains both surface appearances and deep entities.

I claim this is same process employed in the use of *flat metaphors*. In IT'S NICE 2 MEAT U, there is a seeming literalism at play: the title mentions meat and the performers have meat on their arms. However, this is not the type of literalism that is the enemy of OOO. Unlike the nonfigurative, explicit language that would try to make a claim to reality against which Harman positions himself (that presence is an experience of the primary reality), with the flat metaphor a tautology is created ("IT'S NICE 2 MEAT U is about meat and a 'meeting' between composer, performer, and audience") that, when combined with the sensory content of the work, creates sonic, visual, kinetic, and emotional energy that can be seen to generate a sort of presence, creating in my view a paradox of distance and closeness, of depth and surface. I perceive the flat metaphor to be both near and far, and therefore possessing a special quality that points not only to the dichotomy of actual-virtual, but also to the nature of reality itself. In other words, by creating such a literal, on-the-nose metaphor of 'meet-as-meat' the gap between real and sensual becomes apparent: while the meat is present in name and image, but also absent in its inward-I, a metaphor in the OOO sense is performed by giving the real object of the social situation the sensual qualities associated with meat and meetings.

This is where I will conclude the aesthetics of presence: in order to deal with problems of reduction, yet still avoid excluding the actual conditions of the artwork, I employ the flat metaphor, which through being outwardly flat, opens up a complex layering of real-sensual, actual-virtual, that not only shows the limit of the figurative in art, but also expresses the structure of the world as I perceive it. Ultimately, we live our lives interfacing with the sensual world! Full contact with the real is (for now) impossible. By glimpsing bits, we can find firm footing, but mostly we have to make do.

My overall approach to composition can be thusly summarized: by embracing the world-relation and viewing music as part of the phonogetic space, I allow myself to compose *constructed situations*, whereby forming the relation between composer, performer, and audience results in the production of *social metaphors* at the external level of the artwork. These outward relations are then used to generate material for the inside of

the artwork. This is inherently an extra-medial approach, since the starting point for my work is a relation between myself and others in the world. In one sense, one could say that the inner content of the artwork is thus determined by these constructed situations. In a different sense, my works are acknowledging the external conditions of artistic production in order to have freedom from them. I would assert that in this way my inner-musical material is radically free.

With IT'S NICE 2 MEAT U, I aimed to express the paradox of liveness in the concert situation: that of the institution-backed specialization, which, although reinforcing distanced social roles and presenting a formidable technical apparatus, does reveal aspects of the presence of our listening and by proxy ourselves, and on the other hand, of an ambiguous social encounter, which can be simultaneously seen as a perverse 'oversharing' that gets too close for comfort, and equally as a genuine attempt at intimacy and contact with the other. This is what the formulation of the social object in this case shows: a thoroughly artificial situation mediated by institutions and the fetishistic need of the spectator that is by just the same completely genuine in the desire to see and be heard.

One final point: throughout this text, I have given extensive interpretations of my own work. This is not meant as a definitive guide as to how the piece should be experienced. I hope rather it will reveal my thought process and show the care and consequence of my artistic decisions. In fact, my own approach to meaning creation aspires to leave much to the listener. In the spirit of Susan Sontag's "Against Interpretation," I would suggest in this direction that an artwork must not be able to be clearly broken down into units of content, or yield one clear 'message.'⁸² Instead, I try to construct a network of meaning that draws the interpretant in, yielding fruitful yet distinct territory, depending on which lens of interpretation or particular lived experience one views or listens from.

This is similar to how I interpret Graham Harman's style in conveying his philosophy: to reflect the content that the real cannot be directly reached through plain language, he goes around the point, describing as clearly as he can mechanisms of interaction and

⁸² "Interpretation, based on the highly dubious theory that a work of art is composed of items of content, violates art. It makes art into an article for use, for arrangement into a mental scheme of categories." My own approach is not so hard-edged as Sontag's, but I appreciate the tenacious defense against the necessity for art to be easily interpretable. Sontag. *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. 101.

boundaries of delineation, but mainly through implication and figurative speech imparts an understanding of what the real actually *is*, that could be then in a concrete particular dredged by the individual interpretant. Thus, it is a more honest reflection of reality and the structure of the world to intentionally obscure certain things, to entertain a certain fuzziness in order to figuratively reach an impression of a whole meaning – which, in typical OOO fashion, is not exhausted through explicit, direct, or literal means. I am not championing vagueness. Instead, I try to set up in my works a clear focus and tension: a border zone between musical and performative situation, its temporality and material, that in its oscillation, constantly points towards the reality of and relation between social groups and individuals involved in the musical situation.

My conclusion is that each artwork and musical work is a sort of *text*, which has a content that it communicates through aesthetic and thus metaphorical means, regardless how rhizomatic, implicit, or flatly the content is displayed. Each artwork can be *read* in multiple ways by an interpreter, and each reading presupposes certain assumptions in its lens of interpretation. The meaning is never fully determined – the artist sets a relation of objects in the text to be interpreted, and the interpreter, through the lens of their own experience, draws out a particular meaning. The implication of this is that *interpretation takes effort*, and we should remind ourselves to go beyond our tastes in judging artworks. For judging is a part of meaning creation and in this relation between meaning and appraisal we decide which artworks live and die.

There is more to say, but I will leave with the following remark: IT'S NICE 2 MEAT U is just the beginning. In the future I seek to take the extra-musical approach to the social object and find more ways to apply it inner-musically. James Saunders' work does in this aspect constitute an important reference point in that it enacts actual social forms in the arrangement of players, despite my reservations at his tentative approach to metaphor. I also seek to develop the dichotomy of actual-virtual more (I've already applied this to a few pieces after IT'S NICE TO MEAT YOU) and further develop its relationship to an aesthetics of presence. Finally, and perhaps the greatest challenge, is to reconcile all of this with the tradition of instrumental music. What could social liveness mean when it is applied to piano playing? What kind of relations of actual-virtual would that produce? What is the autopoietic feedback loop of the orchestra? There is much to be done.

What has now been accomplished is a formulation of the fundaments of an extra-musical social approach implicit to music in the past. It remains to be seen what the full implications are for composition, the social situation of music, musical institutions, and musical material itself are. In the end, my drive towards the social object is not so much about society as a group as it is about the individual. By setting up situations that create confrontation and subvert behavioral norms, the focus can be said be on how the *individual in society* constitutes itself through its borders. This is a process of self-definition and self-expression.

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