

# Machinic propositions: Developing artistic ideas through conceptual deduction and improvisation

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July 24, 2018

## Introduction

One of the great promises of artistic research is the way in which it allows for an insight into the inner workings of artistic practices. Given an appropriate methodology, the researcher may tap into the processes that lead up to the artistic work or the performance. Although other research fields, such as art history, musicology, ethnography along with many others, have also shed light on these processes of artistic production, what makes artistic research both challenging and interesting is the double role played by researchers/artists exploring their own practices.

The particular focus in this paper is to discuss methods that have been developed in the duo *Mongrel*, the members of which, Anders Elberling and I, have worked together for several years on numerous intermedia projects.<sup>1</sup> I will attempt to show examples of the impact artistic methods may have on the way an artistic practice unfolds over time. In artistic research or research focused on artistic practices, it is not uncommon that the research also introduces a change both into the practice and in the artist/researcher. In fact, this may be seen as a feature of artistic research. In an article from 2013, Stefan Östersjö and I describe this change as one of the core values of artistic research and we argue:

[...] for the need to approach artistic research from an experimental perspective, not as a stylistic measure but as a quality in the artistic aims. A core value in artistic research is, as far as we know it from our own work, the possibility to amplify artistic processes that aim at creating a change in

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\*With acknowledgments to my colleague and friend Anders Elberling who has contributed immensely to this project.

<sup>1</sup>Our first artistic collaboration started in 2010.

one's own practice, a change that, when it is described and thoroughly documented, can effectively communicate new knowledge. (Frisk and Öster-  
sjö, 2013, p. 27)

That changes in the processes that lead up to an artistic work may change the outcome may not come as a surprise. What is remarkable, however, is rather the opposite. The extent to which the artistic *work* in Western culture is often still seen as an immutable object and the product of one single originator is striking. Even relatively distributed artistic practices such as film production is often referred to as the work of a director. The perspective of the originator is guiding the apprehension of, and also, to some extent, the understanding of the work of art. In this view it is the stage director at the theatre rather than the actor, and in the concert hall it is the composer of the music played by the symphony orchestra rather than the musicians that play it that is the point of reference, only mention two examples. For other fields, the configuration of the agents involved may be of a different kind, but the dominance of the view of the artwork as the result of one single originator is not to be mistaken, especially in music.

There is, however, several indications that this view is slowly changing. In 2005, with reference to Lydia Goehr's important work *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* Georgina Born theorized the changing ontology of music to open up for "an approach that incorporates understandings of the social, technological and temporal dimensions of music" (Born, 2005, p. 8). She points to several important aspects of this development relating to, among other things, the destabilizing effect that music in itself may have on common dualisms such as those between subject and object, and production and reception, and through the analysis of three different examples of digital creativity she continues:

The aim is to show how we can use these tools to conceptualize changing forms of musical creativity, which themselves evidence new music ontologies that became ascendant over the course of the twentieth century. Taking three examples in which music is engaged with digital technologies and which evidence new kinds of creative process, I develop concepts of relayed creativity and of the provisional work. Throughout, key motifs are mediation, creativity, and the negotiation of difference.

These perspectives reveal music to be a medium that makes mutable some of the central dualisms of Western metaphysics: the separation of subject from object, authentic from artificial, present from past, individual from collectivity. Routinely, as I have indicated, music forms hybrids and transitions between these 'pure' states. In the face of such complexities, it is unhelpful to divide the study of music itself from the study of its social, technological and temporal forms. (Born, 2005, p. 8)

This resonates well with some of the ideas proposed in this paper. Through artistic practice and consistent artistic methodology, the rigid conceptualization of music as an object rather than an activity may be questioned.

## Mongrel

In the duo *Mongrel*, the overarching ambition is to critically examine the nature of the relationship between auditory and visual elements in intermedia works. Our works have been performed in the United Kingdom, Denmark, Sweden, Belgium, Germany, and Vietnam. Our most recent project, *Machinic propositions*, is simultaneously an artistic project and an attempt to critically examine Deleuze and Guattari's theorems of de-territorialization as found in chapter seven and ten of their seminal work *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980). The output has taken a few different shapes and has been using different kinds of media such as text, live performance and fixed media format. Like much of our other works *Machinic propositions* is part of the attempt to counteract the predominance of one medium over the other, in particular, video over audio, which is not to say that we do not necessarily strive for their integration into one another. Instead the ambition is to allow one to become the other under certain conditions, comparable to what is described by Deleuze as "not an exchange, but 'a confidence with no possible interlocutor' [...]; in short, a conversation" (Deleuze and Parnet, 2006 (1977), p. 2. The quotation contains an unspecified reference.).

Furthermore, there are parallels between the way we work, and the idea, put forward by Deleuze, of style as the ability to "stammer in one's own language" (Deleuze and Parnet, 2006 (1977), p. 3). Our working process is, like any other artistic process, situated in our personal conditions and flaws but in *Machinic Propositions* we specifically use them to gain access to the ability to stutter in language while avoiding it in speech, metaphorically speaking (See Deleuze and Parnet, 2006 (1977)). Among other things, in practice we weave in Elberling's dyslexia and use his misreading of the text as concrete material in the process allowing new meanings to rise from the mistakes.

Different modes of synchronization between sound and video, and the wish to compose their relations have become central to our work. There are, however, many points of entry. With his highly influential work in electro acoustic music Michel Chion has written extensively about sound in film. In his book *Audio-Vision. Sound on Screen* he describes two different ways in which music in film can evoke particular emotions in relation to what is seen on screen. The first, *empathetic music* is closely linked to the events in the film. It follows the same rhythm and pacing, is phrased along with the actions and is coded as being happy or sad along with the plot on screen. A rather different approach is when music is juxtaposed onto of a film scene and serves as a backdrop that intensifies emotion in a manner that may "exhibit conspicuous indifference to the situ-

ation” (Chion, 1994, p. 8). Examples of *anempathetic music*, as he calls this latter type include “musical bits from player pianos, celestas, music boxes, and dance bands, whose studied frivolity and naivete reinforce the individual emotion of the character and of the spectator, even as the music pretends not to notice them” (Chion, 1994, p. 8).

In the project *Machinic propositions*, we instead look at the relation between the two media as a system of de/re-territorialization as described by Deleuze and Guattari (1980). In this way we were able to depart from the empathetic/anempathetic view proposed by Chion and attempt to detach both sound and image from their highly defined modes of engagement. Following this we then examine the ways in which the actual relations may be re-established within our systems of working, using a range of approaches. Another way through which we experiment with these topics is to change roles in the work and performance situation. When I as a musician have to surrender the control of the music to Elberling, primarily a video artist, and he does the same to me the relations and the attitudes towards the material are bound to change. This is to some extent a question of creating usable interfaces for one another, but the actual situation also changes our respective understanding of the practice that we are engaged in consistent with our core ambition to deconstruct the relationship between sound and image.

Concerning the theorems of deterritorialization there are some interesting and immediate observations that may be done relating both to the challenges in combining audio and video as well as to our particular practice. For instance theorem two quite literally has some bearing on the factual reality of digital sound and image: “The fastest of two elements or movements of deterritorialization is not necessarily the most intense or most deterritorialized.” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980, p. 193) The update rate of digital audio and video is in the region of 1764/1,<sup>2</sup> yet video is commonly the dominant medium in this relation (though audio has its advantages sometimes) which possibly points to the relevance of this particular theorem in our work.

Our practice, as will be further described below, as many other practices, is perhaps to be likened to a rhizome, a network of ideas that is, in the beginning, spread out on a plane, not randomly, but unorganized. The nodes representing these ideas are highly distributed in both space and time. Eventually, through the work processes and the conceptual development, a folding of this space is taking place, and virtual wormholes are created between nodes that in the beginning may have been located far from each other but which now become connected. This is to some extent a self-organizing process that finds some resonance in *A Thousand Plateaus*. In the opening chapter, by reference to Rosenstiehl and Petitot (1974), Deleuze and Guattari comment that to:

these centered systems, the authors contrast acentered systems, finite networks of automata in which communication runs from any neighbor to

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<sup>2</sup>This obviously depends on the sample rate and the frame rate respectively.

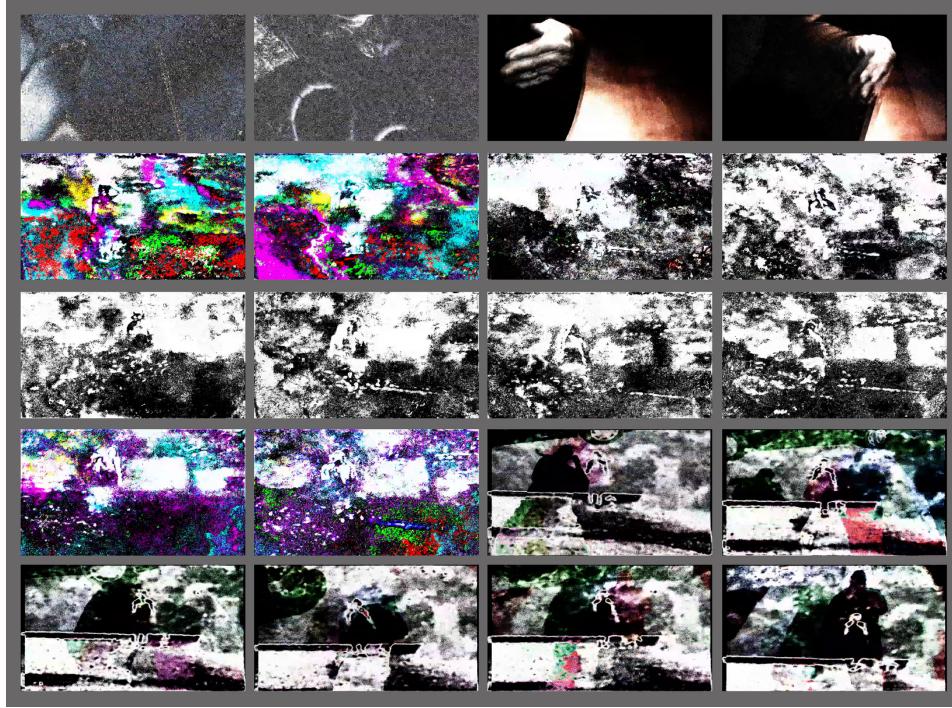


Figure 1: Excerpts from *Elle a dansé, Il se tourna*

any other, the stems or channels do not preexist, and all individuals are interchangeable, defined only by their state at a given moment—such that the local operations are coordinated and the final, global result synchronized without a central agency. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980, p. 19)

However, before continuing the discussion on the methods we use I will return to some of the work that proceeded *Machinic Propositions*. In 2014-2015 we started a project called *The Image Illiterates* with the outspoken intention to explore the possible relations between audio and video in the kind of audio/visual work that we are interested in. The project was a result of observations we did in 2013 while working on the video installation *Elle a dansé, Il se tourna* (see Figure ) concerning audio/video synchronization.

In a preliminary conclusion of *The Image Illiterates*<sup>3</sup> in March 2015, we wrote in our work diary that:

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<sup>3</sup>The project was first presented publicly at the symposium *Tacit or Loud: where is the knowledge in art?* in Malmö, November 28 - December 3, 2014 (<http://www.teatrweimar.se/tacitorloud/find.htm>)

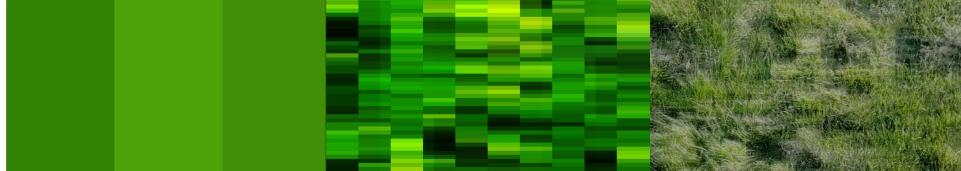


Figure 2: Screen dumps from the opening of *Machinic propositions*. The video is continuously processed from very low resolution to very high matched by a similar alteration of the audio.

to work on modes of synchronization is possible, but at the same time it is impossible to draw any general conclusions from the work we have done so far: whatever knowledge comes out of this becomes useless in other contexts. Sound and image are essentially different, they operate in different dimensions. What we uncovered, however, was that the solution lies rather in the attempt to move away from trying to synchronize the perception of sound and video, and instead focus on common processes that bind the elements together. (*project diary, translated from Swedish by the author, March 11, 2015*)

What we point to here is what we felt was a necessity of a development from temporal synchronization between individual elements in the video and audio respectively towards a more process-oriented approach to synchronization. In the different version that we have hitherto produced of *Machinic Propositions* an example of this may be found. The opening two and a half minutes features a transformation of both audio and video from very noisy sound and pixelated video to smooth sound and image. This is a very simple transformation that in effect merely increases the resolution of both media in parallel (see Figure 2). In this segment there is not much temporal synchronization on the level of events, instead, we delegate the synchronization to the process. The result is that sound and image are woven together, not as one, but in dialogue: both speak the same 'language' but use different 'words'.

What we also discovered in the project *The Image Illiterates* was the asset of focusing our attention on the artistic process and the result as a whole rather than on the idea that one is leading to the other. The most important empirical data in this project are the improvisations we did together. Departing from a sketch or a rough framework, we went on to set up a small set of instruments independently of each other that we could play. Then we improvised together, generating material in real time after which we spent much time analyzing what we had achieved. Feedback between these instruments, that is, data fed from one instrument in the audio domain to another instrument in the video domain and vice versa was also an important aspect. The outcome of the improvisation

was often satisfactory on the level of the integration of the different materials, and in the sound and video interaction specifically, but with relatively few post-improvisation manipulations the result was significantly improved in nearly all cases compared to those where we had tried to structurally synchronize the events in the improvisation. This aspect of the work is discussed in more detail below.

Artistic work is to a large extent a practice that takes place in a material reality, even if the perception of such actions may approach the virtual.<sup>4</sup> In music, the practice often needs time to develop—although some processes are better developed out of time. Nevertheless, the way Deleuze and Guattari talk about the rhizome as “a map and not a tracing” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980, p. 13) is, at least for the work method we have developed, both a fitting description and a useful mode with which to further develop our processes. Mapping the patterns we are creating, our individual as well as each other’s, is a process that may be seen as the attempt to reduce the number of possibilities in our project, while at the same time attempt to increase the number of possible connections. As can be seen in the short excerpt from our work journal we had already started moving in this direction and it was about this time that the idea of doing a project on the theorems of deterritorialization first materialized.

Through the theorems of *A Thousand Plateaus* we began to work out an abstract intermedial work trying to maintain a critical attitude towards the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari specifically and the very notion of using philosophy as the input to artistic processes. With the use of the theory we further developed our conceptual tools, and more specifically, the way we use our senses *see* and *hear* in the way we tackle the theory participates in creating a zone of relative freedom that can provide possibilities for a new understanding of what we do as artists and researchers.

### Conceptual deduction

Our artistic method is one where narrative and improvisation play central roles. It has grown out of our thinking about contemporary media and our attempts to critically examine both our own pro-technical approach, and the hypermedia landscape we act and live in. The method has been developed based on our artistic ideas, the needs of the projects we engage in, and the conditions of our respective practices. Our process is slow and meticulous. The work on *Machinic propositions* began in 2015 and is likely to continue for another few years. In other words, the actual artwork only materializes at the very end of a relatively long process of interaction, and after that, it may continue to develop through numerous iterations. However, the work in itself in terms of a resulting performance is in this context less important than the process to the point where there

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<sup>4</sup>According to Deleuze’s definition of the virtual, however, artistic practice the way we see it may perhaps be virtual in essence (See e.g. Deleuze, 1988).

is almost a reversal of the two terms: the work is the process and the work is simply one out many possible parts of the process.

The method of conceptual deduction may be related to a variety of contexts and may primarily be associated with scientific research and systematic inquiry perhaps not commonly referenced in the context of artistic research. In Monrad Rrenban's book on the early works of Walter Benjamin, he writes that "Benjamin suggests the practice of philosophy is not the conceptual deduction (deduction into concepts) of research but is also somewhat distinct from the metaphorical determinateness [...] in the artwork" (Rrenban, 2005, p. 117). For us, however, both the metaphorical determinateness and the conceptual deductions are part of the formative movement towards a performance. In *Mongrel* we are using it freely, and mainly as a tool to reason our way through the constructive phases of our artistic practice. In some ways this is not so different from using improvisation as a method as improvisation may also be concerned with creating models that contribute to bringing negotiation of the material forward. Hence, it is a process in which we align and synchronize the general ambition of the work and, perhaps most importantly, it brings differences in our respective aesthetics to the surface in a way that is useful to us. We may start with an existing story, a fictional character or a philosophical text, but we may end up with something quite different. Being as it is artistic practice, the goal of the method is not necessarily to gather information – although this could very well be one of the results. Instead, it is about creating a performative platform that we share and that we later use to guide the development of material for our works.

It is a time-consuming process the strength of which is not always evident in the practice and it can lead to the kind of pivotal moments where the entire structure needs to be rethought. As was mentioned, the basic premise of the method, the way we use it, is that we start with a general story or concept that we explore together. For the work *Elle a dansé – Il se tourna* (Frisk and Elberling, 2013) we explored the legend of *Orpheus and Eurydice*<sup>5</sup>. Through a process in which we studied various interpretations of the legend, dissected its parts, applied different perspectives on it and, more than anything, discussed it with each other, we slowly created a framework that served as a virtual space for our collaboration. This conceptual framing (Olofsson, 2018, p.199-201) goes beyond a mere collection of relevant references and its primary goal is to provide us with conceptual tools, and a language with which we are able to negotiate the creative processes.

In *Elle a dansé – Il se tourna* we ended up constructing the piece upon only one single scene in the legend of *Orpheus and Eurydice*: the moment where Orpheus rises from Hades with the promise that Eurydice would be brought back to life provided he would not look back before he had returned into the real world. In the last minute before coming out into the sunlight he loses his faith and turns around to make sure that

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<sup>5</sup>*Elle a dansé – Il se tourna* was commissioned for the project *Go to hell* and was premiered in Stockholm in October 2013.

Eurydice was still there. The process that led us to the decision of working with only this isolated part of the story was informed by conceptual deduction but also by the particular conditions for our practices as well as technical considerations. In other words, it is rarely one method or one single aspect of a methodology that provides all of the necessary material, but the different methods used makes it possible for many different, and sometimes unexpected, aspects of the practice to surface.

We use the same method on the theorems of deterritorialization by Deleuze and Guattari in *Machinic propositions*. For example, it was theorem two (was cited above) that led to the idea of applying a simultaneous process of resolution increase of both sound and video. In the beginning it was mostly an experiment if the theory actually held true, if the speed of the elements is not a deterritorializing factor.

### Intermediality

For a preliminary discussion on the challenges concerning the way we use different media in our work, I will use the theoretical framework developed by Elleström (2010). This paper is not the place for an in-depth analysis of all the different facets of the broad field of media studies and the introduction here is just a scratch on the surface to allow for a discussion on the different strategies we have developed in *Mongrel*.

Elleström states that broadly, “media may be understood as communicative tools constituted by related features. All media are multimodal and intermedial in the sense that they are composed of multiple basic features and are understood only in relation to other types of media” (Elleström, 2014). Both of the two primary media we work with in *Mongrel*, ‘video’ and ‘music’, are *qualified media* signified by the fact that they are “characterized by historical, cultural, social, aesthetic and communicative facets” (Elleström, 2010, p. 5). Different kinds of media are commonly both very different from each other while at the same time they may exhibit great similarities, and for this reason “intermediality must be understood as a bridge between medial differences that is founded on medial similarities” (Elleström, 2010, p. 12).

As is pointed out by Christina Ljungberg “intermediality also displays degrees of self-referentiality” (Ljungberg, 2010, p. 88) and this aestheticized quality is both an asset and a problem for us. The moving image on the screen has become such an icon in and of itself in the Western culture. The general spectator is so accustomed to sound and image being one unified, or qualified, medium to the point where it gets difficult to challenge this unity. Since one of our objectives in *Mongrel* was to critically examine the relation between audio and video it became necessary to address the fact that film, as in moving image and sound, is commonly understood as one discrete medium, or art form. Or, as Elleström puts it, “there is a strong tendency towards treating a medium as a medium, or an art form as one form of art, only when certain qualitative aspects can be identified” (p. 25). In a manner of speaking, the film component consumes the music

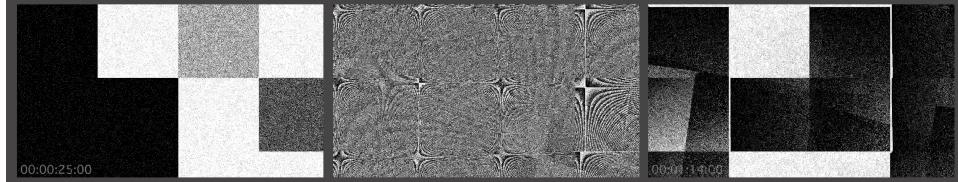


Figure 3: Screen dumps from a studio improvisation by Mongrel.

and constructs a single aggregate that encompasses both mediums. We were, however, interested in treating them separately only to reconstruct, and to some extent shape, their intermedial relation in the performance or in the composition of the material onto a fixed media format.

But also, another factor that contributes “to the self-referentiality of digital art is the emphasis artists put on the very process involved in producing art by more or less smoothly integrating the various media into an intermedial whole” (Ljungberg, 2010, p. 90) which is directly related to how we use our narrative method. It is through the relentless restructuring of the conceptual framework, and the significant choices that we make based on the conceptual deduction, that we attempt to model the conditions for intermediality.

In our work the construction of intermediality between sound and image is achieved in a number of ways. The ways in which the material is conceptualized and aesthetized, laid out and composed, and negotiated and performed contribute to intermedial bridges being created. In *Mongrel* I primarily work with ‘my’ medium, sound, but I am responsible for composing the nodes that allow the intermedial connections to the video to materialize. By composing the music with an inherent interactive potential that Elberling may pick up, the intermediality of the two mediums may be explored. In other words, working with the sound themselves, the way they are structured and with the way they may, or may not, interface with the visual medium, allows me to contribute to the perception of sound and video as two parts intermedially connected rather than sound and video combined into one discrete medium.

## Performativity

In the performing arts - and probably in most artistic and creative activities - there is a distinction between the processes that lead up to a performance and the perception and results of the performance. This is not to say that they are isolated from each other, nor that they do not overlap in several important ways, but rather to point at the difference in the way the artistic practice is perceived in these two modalities. As was mentioned above in *Mongrel* we have often noted the specific difference between how we perceive

what we do while improvising, and how we perceive it listening back to it: within the practice, in the play mode, the results have a slightly different meaning than what they have in an analytical mode, outside of the performative practice. This is not so surprising in itself, after all, there is a logic that belongs to performance and a different kind of logic that comes with listening. There are however two observations that I would like to make here and that both have been important in our work. The first is related to the way performance, or performativity, affects the context, and the second relates to the different general qualities that performances and compositions exploit. The former is discussed in the following and the latter in the next section.

In a concert of instrumental music, I as a listener become a part of the performance although, in contrast to, say, performance art and more experimental performative genres, in a traditional concert space some effort is made to separate the listener from the performance. This is achieved both through the physical design of the space (such as a high stage), as well as through social means (e.g. particular rituals in the concert form). Nevertheless, the physicality of the performance is more often than not a constituent aspect of the perception of a concert, and looking at performativity in this way, as something which goes beyond the activities of the performer alone, has opened up for a new aesthetics and new ways in which performativity may be understood. In her book *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics* Erika Fischer-Lichte describes this as the performative turn:

The dissolution of boundaries in the arts, repeatedly proclaimed and observed by artists, art critics, scholars of art, and philosophers, can be defined as a performative turn. Be it art, music, literature, or theatre, the creative process tends to be realized in and as performance. Instead of creating works of art, artists increasingly produce events which involve not just themselves but also the observers, listeners, and spectators. Thus, the conditions for art production and reception changed in a crucial aspect. The pivotal point of these processes is no longer the work of art, detached from and independent of its creator and recipient, which arises as an object from the activities of the creator-subject and is entrusted to the perception and interpretation of the recipient-subject. Instead, we are dealing with an event, set in motion and terminated by the actions of all the subjects involved – artists and spectators. (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 23)

The performative turn has no doubt contributed to the development of artistic research. Haseman (2006) in his manifesto for performative research he raises concern about the development of qualitative research methodologies as a heading that encapsulates everything that is not quantitative research. He suggests a third category:

Accepting the concern of traditional qualitative researchers about the ‘performance turn’, it is possible to argue that a third methodological distinc-

tion is emerging. This third category is aligned with many of the values of qualitative research, but is nonetheless distinct from it. The principal distinction between this third category and the qualitative and quantitative categories is found in the way it chooses to express its findings. (Haseman, 2006, p. 102)

In performative research, the practice that the performance is part of is an integral part of the research object and not an optional activity that generates the material for research. Following this the practice and its performative qualities are not merely freeing the artistic researcher from the structures of quantitative or qualitative research, it genuinely presents a novel approach “that holds that practice is the principal research activity — rather than only the practice of performance — and sees the material outcomes of practice as all-important representations of research findings in their own right” (Haseman, 2006, p. 103).

Kathrin Busch (2009) makes a similar claim in her overview of the characteristics of artistic research as an emerging poetics of knowledge. Art and theory, she claims, are two distinct practices, yet highly interrelated and interdependent in a system of transferences: “In this constellation, philosophy neither brings the arts to the point nor does art sensualize philosophical truths; philosophy serves a knowledge-based artistic practice as a point of reference, similar, conversely, to how art might affect theoretical practice.” (Busch, 2009, p. 1) In a critique not only of the natural sciences but of a traditional view of knowledge production itself, she argues for a holistic view in which the separation of the creation of the objects from their representations, the performance from the object and the act of performing from the act of listening is avoided. Busch continues:

In other words, in view of a steadily growing knowledge imperative, it is necessary to recall the theoreticians who refuse to restrict themselves to functioning as suppliers of knowledge, who view knowledge itself with great skepticism, and who see even their own theories as an inherent practice of knowledge criticism. On the basis of such skepticism about basing art on science that idealizes academic standards, an *art or a poetics of knowledge* can emerge that questions the actual construct of the sciences. (Busch, 2009, p. 5).

In this context, experimental research methods and artistic experimentation are interchangeable and complementary. They are both part of artistic practices, also practices that are contextualized as artistic research, and, as was mentioned above, this experimental attitude should be at the core of the artistic research practice (Frisk and Östersjö, 2013, p. 42). The experimental attitude in artistic research is, by all means, to be regarded an asset but may contribute to the fact that it is less apt at arriving at a specific result in terms of its knowledge production than what other kinds of research are. Or, as put by Busch

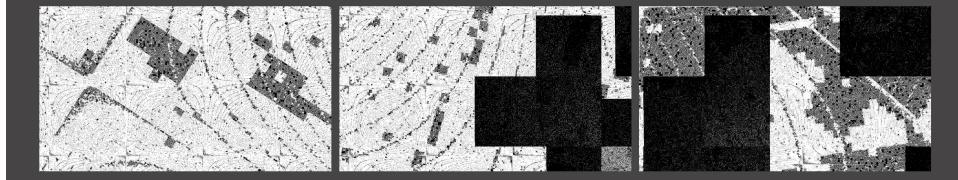


Figure 4: Screen dumps from an improvisation by *Mongrel*.

(2009) “it must be emphasized that knowledge generated through art cannot as easily be brought to a precise point, as might be implied by the phrase ‘art as science’ ” (p. 5). In this sense artistic research provides an alternative method that engages with knowledge as practice and practice as knowledge.

The performative turn opened up not only for the social understanding of performance but also for its political dimension and Judy Butler’s work is of course central. Her 1988 essay *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution* is obviously concerned with gender acts and not artistic performance, and the urgency of the topics she is discussing is quite different from those of artistic practice, but this social dimension of also artistic performance is one way in which the transformative potential of artistic research may be constituted: “If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style” (Butler, 1988, p. 520). Similarly, if the ground for the traditional work identity is to be found in the repetition of romantic ideas about artistic practice, then the possibility for a performative transformation should be found in novel approaches, experimentation and in a different kind of repeating that breaks with the very idea of style. In this configuration there is a possibility for all the different kinds of agents involved in artistic practice, in the widest sense also including audiences, to become part in the formation of the artwork.

## Composition

If the performance is the structuring of an event entangled with the performer and the listener, perhaps a preliminary definition of a composition, presumably mainly valid in the context of this paper, is the organization of material in preparation for a performance. The particular situation described above where we in *Mongrel* would improvise in the studio in order to generate material brings the differences between the logic of performance and that of composition.

If we imagine that a live performance of an instrumental improvisation is recorded and the recording is played back. Provided that the listener has some contextual knowl-

edge, such as of the instruments played or the musical genre, the performativity may to some extent be reenacted<sup>6</sup> and the perception of the music is that it is still primarily a performance, albeit a recorded one. However, when the improvisation is done mainly by electronic means it may not have a specific signifier with the result that the performative reenactment may not take place or be difficult to invigorate. This is the observation we did in *Mongrel*: our improvisations had a very different logic to them when performed than when listened to as if the performativity of the improvisation was not encoded in the recording. As a consequence, and as a consequence of also other reasons, we heard these improvisations as compositions. Our assessment of the improvisations was generally more positive based on our impressions during the performance than when we listened back to them. This discrepancy between what it 'feels like' in performance and what it sounds like listening back to it is consistent with my experience ever since I started playing. What was striking in this case, however, was that only very little had to be altered in order to 'fix' the issues we had with the improvisation. A few edits, primarily concerning the timing of events and the temporal synchronization between the audio and the video was all that was needed in order for the expression in the performance to work as a non-performative piece, that is, a fixed media playback, or a composition. This also meant that the improvisation changed nature when it was recorded, from a performance to an improvisation becoming a composition. It is not uncommon that recordings of performances are edited prior to release on CD for example, but one of the points that may be made here is that the editing we did was mainly concerned with the intermedial relations between the sound and the video rather than the individual parts.

The differences in the perception of the performance that are tied to the position of the perceiver have some resonance in the difference between an actual performance and the preparation for a performance. The distinction between the preparatory activities and the performative stage is more prominent in some fields of practice than others. In musical composition, for example, the work of the composer is often very different in nature from the work of the musicians. A field in which these differences are often discussed is in the field of game development or within the practice of constructing novel interfaces for musical expression, or the design of software instruments. These practices are related to ours in more than one way and we often design interfaces on which we can play the pieces we compose. In our practice these interfaces are controllers of the digital signal processing of audio and video but also interfaces to the other medium: from sound to image or vice versa. For example, an interface that controls the pitch of some synthesis algorithm may simultaneously control a visual filter in the video, or, as in the example given above, one controller may simultaneously control parameters in both

<sup>6</sup>There is some evidence to the fact that the physical experience of playing music effectively makes a difference for the listening. Neurological studies have shown that musicians respond physically when listening to music (Bangert and Altenmüller, 2003; Overy and Molnar-Szakacs, 2009, See e.g.).

sound and image. This approach is modeled on the necessity to construct contexts for interaction both between the different kinds of materials that we engage with, but also in order to bridge the borders between the mediums involved in the work. However, the requirements that shape an interface in the stage of composition may be somewhat different from the needs proposed in the context of performance. This is discussed by Nilsson (2011) who points to the inherent aspect of research and experimentation in the development of new instruments, as well as to the specific interaction between the two phases:

As a point of departure, there is a mutual relation between activities at design time and activities at play time. In order to improve and to refine an instrument under development, analysis and evaluation of the perceived experience in play time became the basis for further activity at design time, which was followed by new experiments in play time, and so on. In other words, in the reciprocal action between activities at design time and play time an instrument gradually takes shape. (Nilsson, 2011, p. 25)

Even though the different processes overlap to a great extent, for the performer the difference between design time and play time may be perceived as fairly definite. In the organization of the material something that appears perfectly logical may turn out quite different in performance, and the repercussions of this perceptual difference are quite real and sometimes unpredictable. The difference may be described as the distinction between a constructive phase and an interpretative, once theorized and specified semiotically by Jean Molino (1990) as the esthetic and the poetic phases (See also Frisk and Östersjö, 2006). In this model, both the producer and the receiver are involved in complex processes that are far more convoluted than a simple act of communication between two nodes. As a performer, I can even be in both of these symbolic forms at the same time and most musical improvisers have probably at some point practiced the ability to evaluate and reflect upon that which one is currently playing at the same time as one is playing. It is the ability to listen to oneself with a critical ear as if one is located outside of oneself while at the same time performing: respond objectively to one's subjective playing. The key aspect here is listening in the broad sense of the word, and specifically, the ability to listen to oneself as well as to listen to the other.

Before moving on to the topic of listening, I will briefly return to the notion of performativity. Barbara Bolt, in a comment to Fischer-Lichte (2008) reminds us of the fact that the actual listener/performer relation is disrupted through the performative turn:

In this performative turn, the nature of the relationship between subject and object, observer and observed and artist and audience has been refigured to create a dynamic and transformative event. There is no separation

between the production and work, and the audience becomes part of the work. (Bolt, 2009, p. 2)

Molino's model is definitely structured around the idea of a separation between the listener and the performer and the actual object in this communicative transaction is in some way independent of these processes (referred to as it is as the *neutral* level). Through performance, the relations between play time and design time, as well as the separation between construction and interpretation are being destabilized. This points to the necessity of using experience and practice from the phase of play time in the process of design time, and the method that allows for the seamless transition between the different stages is listening.

Briefly mentioned earlier in the context of developing ones ability to listen to oneself as if one is located outside of oneself, the invitation to *listen* to the other should not reduce the importance of listening to oneself. When we listen, what is it we allow ourselves to be influenced by, and what part of our own expression, if any, should remain untouched by our listening? How do we resonate to the other and how do we respond to resonance?<sup>7</sup> There are no general wrongs or rights in listening, only intuition and sensibility and at some point, there may be a demand for absolute and unconditioned control, and at another, it may be necessary to completely give in to the wish of the other. An ethics of listening may guide an ethics of artistic research. The romantically constituted and mythical artistic self is not always useful in a research context and the dismantling of its mysterious nature is an important, and perhaps even necessary activity in artistic research.<sup>8</sup>

## Discussion

As was discussed above even without an audience in a studio improvisation, the difference between the modes of perception in different stages of the artistic practice may come into play quite noticeably. I find it remarkable how different a given improvisation may feel depending on the listening context, but whether or not this finding may be generalized and applied to other fields or studies is very difficult to state. However, this is somewhat of an ill posed question. **That a given result is a finding with a high degree of specificity is clearly not to say that they are uninteresting, nor is the fact that one mode of knowledge production is not compatible with another not a reason to dismiss it, as was alluded to by Busch (2009) above.** Also unique and individually situated knowledge is of interest in artistic research given that the methods are relevant to the context. Artistic approaches, on the other hand, may be easier to generalize and the continuous

<sup>7</sup>Resonance is a key word in Nancy and Mandell (2007) book on listening.

<sup>8</sup>The meaning and impact of the self as a central activity in artistic research is further discussed in Frisk (2014).

iterations of practice-reflection feedback loops and, along with them, the theory-method interactions that may surface as a result, are among some of the most interesting aspects of artistic research to me. These may involve transgressing the borders between preparation and performance, between design time and play time and, between different media. In these border crossings, there is an opening for a radical and experimental research practice that has social as well as political connotations.

For the musician to go beyond the purely musical realm and consider, for example, the interactive potential in the sociopolitical realm, or the differences between the modes of listening to the development of material, and the complimentary listening to the result of the same process may be second nature. Partly, artistic research is the attempt to extract the implications of the knowledge development in those and similar processes, collect the data that may be acquired, and then go back and develop the musical possibilities as well as attempting to apply the results also outside of the field of artistic practices. In this sense artistic research is transformative. It opens up new perspectives on the roles of the various agents in the field of performance such as the audience and the cultural and social contexts. Even though the history of art practice is full of examples of practitioners that have worked in this very manner, and as a consequence, this aspect of artistic research is not unique or new, the transformative aspect of artistic research is continuously moving the borders of what is possible. Whereas in the visual arts, “from the 1960s onward, the creation and shaping of experiences have increasingly become an integral part of the artwork’s conception” (Hantelmann, 2014) in music the conceptual phases of the production of the work has to some extent remained hidden from the listener. The performative aspect of musical and, as is our case, intermedial works has some bearing here and along with it is the question concerning the relation of the ‘liveness’ of improvisations such as those that we perform that are mainly done with digital instruments? This question could be reformulated into one that has some urgency in digital media today: How can the performative and gestural qualities be promoted in the digital realm?

The romantic and still influential idea that especially music has intrinsic values that go beyond whatever social or political frameworks it is otherwise bound to have been challenged many times but is still prevailing. In the interaction between the value of music as a pure value - if it at all exists - and the various socially, including commercially, and politically constituted environments and structures in which the music is produced, the identity of the music, or that of the performer, is not always clear-cut and it is difficult to see why it should be. This is somewhat in contrast to the radical commodification of music that began in the 19th century, developed during the 20th century, and which continues to reach new high points beyond anything probably even a Marxist music sociologist such as Theodor Adorno may have anticipated (see e.g. Adorno, 1976). The exact configuration of this development is different from genre to genre but one common denominator is the view upon music, or artistic practice broadly, as a process that leads to

a specified and well framed result which is not, as I have tried to argue throughout this paper, not always the case in artistic practice. But, if the professional music scene rests on a commodified view upon music there is a corresponding commodification of knowledge production (Busch, 2009, p. 2) hence, the introduction of artistic research into the curricula of higher education in the arts is not necessarily itself a solution. Many artistic practices or acts of listening are performative and this performativity appears to be useful in questioning existing knowledge or it may participate in creating new knowledge, but only if the interrelations between that art practice and the economic and political forces that influences it are properly understood. My hopes for a future development of artistic research practices, both within higher education and in the art field itself are that the complexity of the various configurations of the acts of performance, composition and listening are continuously explored and reframed, and that the methodological development that is a result of these studies will be further evolved in interdisciplinary contexts.

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