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INSAM Journal of Contemporary Music, Art and Technology is an international peer reviewed journal dealing with topical issues in contemporary art music, visual and performing arts, and technology. The journal encourages interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches and innovative views on these subjects, aiming to create a platform for communicating new ideas and theoretical and artistic impulses.

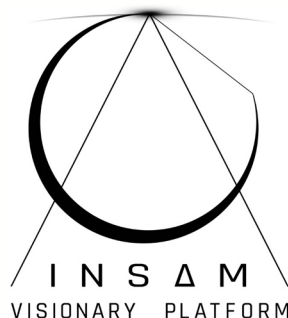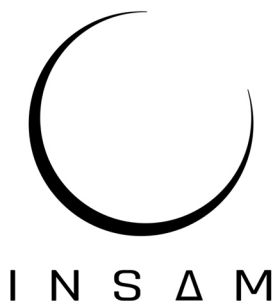*INSAM Journal* is published semi-annually (July and December) in open access electronic form and it can be found on the following address: https://insam-institute.com/insam-journal/

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EDITOR'S FOREWORD

We have before us the sixth issue of *INSAM Journal of Contemporary Music, Art and Technology*. This is the second issue in a row dedicated to the global crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. After the overwhelming response from all over the world to the call for papers and provocative inspections that ensued, here we wanted to discuss the ways in which technology shapes and enables work in the areas of music, arts, humanities, and the education process, this time inviting our collaborators to discuss the shortcomings and struggles of the working processes in these fields.

The main theme, "Music, Art and Humanities in the Time of Global Crisis", expanded from the Main Theme section into the interviews as well. This time, we have had the great pleasure of speaking with vocal and sound artist Thea Soti (interview by Bojana Radovanović), as well as receiving an interview with Esther Marié Pauw and Pierre-Henri Wicomb conducted by Visser Liebenberg. In these pieces authors directly shed light on their creative and artistic processes during these times.

In the Main Theme section, there are six articles written by authors from Ireland, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Portugal, and Serbia. Wolfgang Marx writes about a series of twenty short music theatre pieces, *20 Shots of Opera*, written in December 2020. João Ricardo explores the possibilities of audiovisual essays as a novel tool in discussion, criticism, and commentary of contemporary opera. In her paper, Smiljka Jovanović discusses the issue of metamodernism – which she deems "the dominant cultural logic of the 21st century" – in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. Aaron Michael Mulligan investigates the neoliberal notion of freedom of speech as an unregulated field with stark consequences on social media behavior and artists' web-based practices. Composer Ray Evanoff and pianist Kate Ledger write about their transatlantic collaboration and their working process on the artistic project Give in the context of global crisis. Finally, by analyzing the importance of the digital art market for artists in Serbia, Jelena Novaković shows us the importance of an artist's digital marketing strategy as a way to attract an audience in a contemporary context.

Ethnomusicologist Maja Radivojević's review of Marija Vitas' award-winning audio-visual work Sephardim – The Thread of The Mediterranean concludes this issue.

On behalf of the INSAM Editorial team, I would like to warmly thank our authors for their insights and contributions, our reviewers for their diligent work, and, of course, our proofreader, Anthony McLean. Thank you all for uncovering pressing and current themes in music and art world.

<div align="right">
In Belgrade, July 9, 2021,
Bojana Radovanović,
Editor-in-Chief
</div>

(INTER)VIEWS

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CHALLENGING THE HUMAN EXPRESSION IN A DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT:
Interview with Thea Soti[1]

Current global predicaments shape not only the conditions in which artists are expected to create and perform their work, but also pierce into their very creative process. To explore this issue further, we have had a conversation with Thea Soti, a "new-age vocalist", experimental performance and sound artist.[2] She is mainly researching in the areas of improvisation, electroacoustic compositions and performative arts, focusing on the voice. In her works, Soti gives space to current socio-political issues, modern representation of the female body, beauty myths, collective fear, brutality or extreme psychological states, boundaries of language.

We have discussed some themes that are persistent in Soti's artistic endeavors in the last several years such as the relationship between human and posthuman, voice in a digital context, as well as her most recent projects such as VØICES, Live Solo Sets series, and the White Series. Live Solo Sets and the White Series were directly influenced and, in a way, inspired by the Covid-19 pandemic, thus giving the opportunity for Thea Soti to explore the ways of (artistic) existing in digital and technological contemporary world.

MULTISKINNED
by Thea Soti, Nefeli Papadimouli, Youssef Chebbi

A lot of your recent work dives deep into the question of what it means to be human. Could you explain to us your understanding of the relation between voice and a human?

Ironically, the more I have worked with machines (digital or analog effects), the more I became aware of what the human voice really is without them. Back then, when I was mostly using my acoustic voice in free-improvised setups, I might have just been too close to it. The more I started adding effects to the voice, twisting and manipulating it, processing, altering it both live or in the studio, the more conscious I became about what the real human aspect of the voice was. It sounds contradictory, but exactly the loss of its naturalness underlined its original, naked character. It is not only about how it sounds. It is about imperfection and fragility. For example, a human-made loop (a repetitive phrase) is never going to sound like a computer-generated sample, even if made out of human voice. Whenever I can hear that a voice almost breaks, reaches its limits, it is the most human to me. A computer-generated voice could never have this effect. Furthermore, it is also the distance between the point of creation and the reception. When I sing acoustically, you are closer to the source of the voice. Even if it is just a recording and a not live experience, you can hear that the sound is produced in a way that is closer to your own experience, how you also use your own voice in everyday life. This helps you to relate and thus generates an instant confidential togetherness. In contrast to this, when you hear a digitally processed voice, you lose this proximity and maybe a level of the "humanity" of the voice also disappears. I call it "human warmth". It is obviously a digital signal and it has cold, computer-generated characteristics. Just think of the voice of a web translator, the navigator in the car or Siri. For me, the biggest challenge is how to

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balance this proximity of the human voice in digital contexts, how to play with it, stretch its limits. This is what nowadays my solo sets or audio-visual pieces deal with and work around – how far can we operate with and within digital environments and still keep the legacy of the human character of the voice.

In your opinion and experience, how does the voice represent a body and its identities?

I used to work at a radio station, when I was younger. It was a super small local station in Hajdukovo, Vojvodina. I was 15 or 16 and was reading the classified ads and the news. Regardless of the topic or program, I was fascinated by the thought that hundreds of people can hear my voice, I can tell them "good morning" but they never see my face or body. I still think, it is magic. That was my first experience separating the body from voice. Unconsciously, of course. Later, I got my own radio show and I was given the possibility to do interviews on air, receive calls from the listeners, etc. I found it so amazing to carry out human communication with this "limited" exposure. This fascination probably accompanied me all along the way, even when I started using my voice in more music-based settings. I often wonder, how would we perceive each other, if we didn´t have bodies or couldn´t see but only hear each other. You hear a voice and you think you can tell so much, male or female, approximate age, maybe race or geographical affiliation, origin (based on language and accent), level of education, personal character, mood, approach to the conversation partner or situation, and so on – just to mention a few elements. I get more excited though, if we separate these things from each other and try to challenge these deeply embedded expectations and beliefs. My solo research also deals with this topic: how to challenge and re-interpret identities through decontextualizing the human voice. What if you see me (a female vocalist) with a voice pitched down on stage and it doesn´t fit your imagined looks or character. What if I use "artificial avatar languages" but you don´t see a robot, but a human? Can I challenge your daily micro-stereotypes and discriminative behavior by showing you that your systems aren´t always working?

What is intriguing and provocative for you in the relation between voice and modern technology?

The human voice is so diverse, rich and full of possibilities on its own that you would never have to reach out to live electronics, sampling or digitalization and you would still never run out of innovative ideas. On the other hand, for me personally, starting to process the voice and indulge into digital environments, was both an aesthetical and conceptual decision. I always make an effort to stay

in touch with the "here and now", because I do believe that an honest dialogue can only be established if we decide to stay connected to the people of the street and current happenings. In our technology-infused world, where we hear robotic sounds, AI assistants, Siri is talking to us, I felt a strong need to react and explore this further. I am intrigued by the challenge to investigate various artistic solutions, expressions and methods on how to integrate modern technology and my way of working with the voice.

Compared to human/humanism, can you define what posthuman means to you in a contemporary context?

Initially, posthuman refers to something that is beyond human, that expands the traditional possibilities of our humanly world and blurs the boundaries between technology, imaginary and human. In my case, I use the computer to extend my sound world. Even though the majority of my work is based upon improvisation or composition with my voice, the computer plays a huge role in it, both as a technical factor (digital working space and sets of tools, effects) but also as an improviser. I use a lot of randomized tools where the choices are made by the computer. This way the machine takes over a new role and also extends my human possibilities. This is a game between controllable and uncontrollable, but also composed and randomized. And if we carry on with this example, we can definitely see that this restructures not only my conventional work flow, but also the creative process: I compose, I improvise and I even sing differently. If I know I have a huge reverb on my voice with a randomized glitch delay, I will definitely use my voice differently, as if it was "just" a simply amplified natural, pure voice. In a further contemporary cultural reference, this way of working with the voice also reflects upon many other phenomena that are part of our daily lives: constant change of personalities, virtual presence, filtering our photos, IG filters (natural or avatar-like), etc. In my opinion, this is rooted in a kind of modern-day escapism. Everybody wants to find another "me", another life, another reality. Through our present technology, it is also (almost) possible. I have this sensation that if I extend my voice through machines, I feel closer to the reality that we are currently experiencing.

What, then, can make a voice posthuman? Can anything? Or does the voice remain human in the posthuman environment?

This is the main question of my solo works. So I tend to answer this question with further questions. When does the human voice lose its human touch? If I create a synthesizer-sounding live effect with my voice, can you tell the difference, if it's a digital instrument or a human voice with digital effects? How will the

human expression be challenged in a digital environment? Does the legacy of using a human voice ever disappear? I think the topic is immensely interesting and questions not only the human voice in a musical context but even in a larger context our human being as a whole. How long do we feel comfortable listening to Siri? Can we get attached to an AI voice? Can we cry at a machine-generated (fake) folksong? Where does our imagination and a computer-based new reality end? Playing and experimenting with these thoughts and elements are the main topic of my current work in very different formats.

What is your technological basis for Live Solo Sets 2020? What are the elements of the performance, except your voice?

I am mainly working with precisely crafted and designed sets of Ableton Live. As I am quite an impatient person, I wanted to be able to create instantly, so I decided to work with Ableton as I find it very user-friendly and fast to learn. Even though, I am very much intrigued by the endless possibilities of other programs, such as Max Msp or Supercollider. My solo sets are very different from each other. I usually create a whole concept for every single set. This could be based on a specific topic or sound aesthetics, but even a technical setup. Sometimes, I exclusively use my voice as a musical element and create everything through live processing. Other times, I do prepare and create complex instrumental environments (select and prepare synths and / or drum sounds). In one of my sets, I used a lot of pre-recorded samples created by field recordings, home recordings of everyday objects or news snippets. I also work with text-based environments: for a Budapest-based gallery presenting a show for contemporary jewelry, I exquisitely created a story-telling set in the Hungarian language with a sound poem written by me. For the Melbourne-based session, I am reflecting on the topic of "Black Lives Matter" as back then in 2020, it was the loudest topic screaming out of the media.

What is the sound material you were using in these sets?

I started recording these home-made solo sets as the pandemic hit the world. I was asked to do some streaming concerts for different digital festivals. First, I didn´t want to do it, but then it was so much fun and such a good challenge, that I decided to record at least one live set per month – for myself. The sets are consciously built upon my voice, but sometimes I choose to integrate digital instruments, play the keyboard, prepare live recordings or pre-recorded materials, often field recordings. I enjoy creating these sessions. It is like designing artificial environments and making rules for the sound. I know what kind of elements are at my disposal and I can use them to generate a set any time with this material, which

then will always turn out to be very different yet super similar – as the elements and tools are defined. It is like a fun new way of composing. It will carry my personal note made by the decisions beforehand, yet leave the space to combine the elements freely in the moment. Thus it stays fresh and improvised, yet inside of a composed frame. I feel always challenged to balance these two ends. Even back then, when I was working with only acoustic instruments, this used to be a big topic. Especially when writing for orchestras or larger setups.

How do you manipulate the initial idea and sound, both in your vocal interpretation and technologically?

I think, it works similarly as in a live improvisational setup with real musicians. It is reaction and interaction. I sing, then I manipulate my singing. Then the sound that I created manipulates my singing, so I react to myself again, but differently. So it works both ways. Interacting with machines does exist on this level, too. Regarding the interpretation, funnily, I sometimes become a character through this process, as I don´t even recognize my own voice anymore. I often play with this feeling triggered by the danger of not exactly knowing how the computer will make me sound. It is a thrill.

How do Live Solo Sets differ from the VØICES series? Both projects center voice and include technology. Are they situated on the same line of self- and posthuman discovery?

I think, they only differ in chronology. VØICES was my very first initiative to do concerts, also uniting the process with a kind of research character, where I was allowed to experiment, try out different things and invite collaborators. The solo sets carry on this idea to dig deeper and explore vocal possibilities, but as collaborations were not possible last year, I concentrated myself on my solo. VØICES was also created with the idea to interconnect various art scenes, encourage collaborations between different cities and disciplines. In Budapest, I created a huge performance concert with a choreographed, self-trained free-improvising choir, video installation and a live band. In Helsinki, I re-worked the piece for a huge underground tunnel and a different constellation of participating musicians. In the Cologne Edition, I wrote a new-age opera performance for 11 solo voices, featuring my favorite vocalists of the town. VØICES always tried to integrate space and movement, too. My solo sets are mostly static and aiming to function as mini concerts. Even though I started exploring the idea of connecting the "solo sets" with something else and this is how I came up with the White Series (audiovisual miniatures) or with my poetry installation "Waiting For My Feet To Dry", both conceived during my artistic residency in Paris.

Your voice is also one of the crucial elements in the White Series. Short commentary in description boxes give us snippets of your thought process. Can you elaborate on the basic idea of this series? What would you like to escape and what do you fear (or just acknowledge, as in White Flood's "The most essential element of human life can also kill us")?

First, it just started with experimentation by connecting my sound environment with visual elements. I wanted to do research around that without too much thinking or planning. As this all happened during the complete lockdown in Paris, I just took the camera and filmed myself. Sometimes, I filmed specific ideas to the sound, sometimes I sang to the images. Soon, I realized that all the images were kind of white or using shades of white. I collected the pieces into a series, as I found that they resonate with each other even beyond their color. They also don´t have a beginning or ending really, but they are intertwined in topic and aesthetics likewise. They are pieces of a big whiteness, confusion, floating, something untouchable, an indescribable experience that I was going through. I felt totally losing control of what was happening around me. I guess, everybody did. So I just let the camera move in my hand without control. For example, if you observe the piece called "Overwhite", this is very strongly present. Later, it evolved into something more organized and conceptualized. For example, the piece I created as a commission for

ON – Neue Musik Köln (Office for Contemporary Music in Cologne), was already based on a mini-study about futuristic soundscapes and an avatar-guided initiation process. This way the video and the sound were scripted as a video performance. I decided to create these electronic compositions by only using my own voice. Of course, it is processed and recycled all the way through, but still everything you hear, comes out of my body. "The White Series" is somehow a huge contradiction: the human voice is manipulated into something that doesn´t even sound human anymore, yet you are ought to feel the human touch, the warmth of a living body in the sounds and the images. It´s like the color white: They say, white collects all the colors, yet for me, it is undoubtedly the most colorless phenomenon, it is not even a color, it´s a complex and yet simple mood.

What is the role of voice in uncovering or exploring the "futuristic initiation rites", "virtual parallel realities" and "isolated civilizations on the edge of human and non-human"? Can the voice here be – analogues to our breath that keeps us alive – the one element that keeps us human?

In my video performance "White Entering", I aimed to explore the idea, how it would feel like if we arrived into a parallel universe. We didn´t speak the language or recognize the sounds, thus being forced to re-define our whole communication system. The audiovisual miniature gives us an absurd world where this alien or avatar sings a folk song that is obviously a way of communicating. The avatar presents a (symbolic) movement that this new being also tries to learn to do by simple repetition – just like we learn to walk or talk as a child. I was interested in the experiment creating artificial universes through creating artificial sounds, languages, folksongs. It is like going backwards into a futuristic heritage of non-existing worlds. Can I build up a futuristic universe with its "history" based in the present through manipulating my voice? That was my main question. I don´t know if it is the breath that keeps us alive or the capability to learn and adjust to different communication methods. Language, singing, speaking are all simple means of communication. We don´t have to professionalize in speaking or singing to be able to communicate. We just learn it as a child. This naturalness of the human voice and that of the language carries all the beauties and – I am more than sure – all the solutions to the world. The question is, when we grow up, can we still remember and consciously use our voice for communication, exchange, learning, extending realities by not only speaking, but also listening and understanding. "White Entering" stands for this, too: the readiness for re-structuring realities, opening ourselves up to new concepts, understanding new languages, going against stereotypes and beliefs, entering new worlds through staying curious, adventurous, hungry. The video presents only a symbolic story in form of a micro-study, but hopefully its statement manages to resonate longer than the four minutes.

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CHALLENGES AND COMPLEXITIES OF VIRTUAL ARTISTIC SOUND IMPROVISATION

Lockdown regulations and protocols in South Africa (and globally) brought challenges for the arts industry to turn to online platforms for artistic engagement and interaction. Esther Marié Pauw and Pierre-Henri Wicomb, associates of the Africa Open Institute for Music Research and Innovation, saw this challenge as an opportunity to engage with online, virtual sound improvisation. This interview, with Pauw and Wicomb, is focused on understanding the process of working with sound improvisation via online platforms while aiming to record the sound improvisation sessions for creative output purposes. The Africa Open Improvising[1] group exists locally and virtually as an endogenous organism[2] that creates sound knowledge from within the virtual online platform.

1　For more information about the Africa Open Improvising group, please see the SoundCloud page that includes various artists (and their instruments) that formed part of the online improvisation project https://soundcloud.com/user-610733588.

2　Endogenous in this interview comes from the work of Arturo Escobar in "Latin America at a Crossroads". In my own PhD thesis, I propose that endogenous suggests organic systems of vibrancies that are biological and potentially activist for their capacity to bring change to sound and sounding practice (Liebenberg, "Artistic Experimentation through decolonial sound projects for clarinet").

How did the process of online improvisation start and develop to its current structure and what were the initial technological challenges?

Pauw: We did quite an amount of practical research looking into ways of improvising online but my first process of practical experimenting was with Garth Erasmus.[3] We recorded individual sound samples with our cell phones and shared it with each other to play and re-record on existing sound. The more Garth and I explored, the more particular we got about the sound quality of our sound samples. Most of my work with Garth was with sound and not visuals. This was almost six weeks into lockdown, and I hadn't been able to see any of the usual improvisers. We then scheduled our first online improvisation session through the online platform Zoom to see if we could play together virtually from our individual locations. Working with Zoom was difficult. We found that Zoom cuts out sound in different ways. For us to keep track of what was happening during an online play session, our trial sessions had an order of playing where Pierre-Henri would start, then I would play, and then Garth, and so on to include all the other improvisers that were part of this project. This helped to play 'together' but we still couldn't hear the familiar specific sounds from each other.

Wicomb: We couldn't figure out why Zoom was cutting out different frequencies. It has something to do with the attack of sound that grabs the attention of the microphone and then over rules other sounds that have mutually been sustained through the online meeting. My piano attack sound and the hammer mechanism is a strong sound just like any other percussive instrument. The flute, clarinet and saxophone can have a piercing sound that is also heard immediately, but if the notes are then sustained, it fades away quickly. We could see each other play but not hear the sound that was coming from the visual impression. I like to think we had to anticipate what the other person would play without knowing really what they are doing. I hosted most of the meetings through Zoom and recorded the meetings so that we have the meeting sound as an audio file. When I listened to it, I noticed that a lot of the sound went missing during this early phase, so we just went back to playing more freely without the order of playing.

Pauw: The first couple of online improvisation sessions loaded on to Soundcloud are called 'trial online play' and you can really hear how each sound heard through the online platform functions like a refresher button on a website's home screen. It was in this initial stage of the project that Stellenbosch University made research funding available for innovative projects in respective artistic disciplines. Through the Africa Open Institute, we successfully applied for a portion of the funding

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3   For more details about the multifaceted artist Garth Erasmus, visit https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garth_Erasmus.

made available from Stellenbosch University. I then consulted with Pierre-Henri to asked him what sort of recording device he uses for his own work. He suggested we purchase a couple of ZOOM H6 portable recording devices for fellow improvisers to record their individual sound, while being tuned in on the live virtual play session on Zoom. Recording our individual sounds posed a different problem to find 'unity' to create a final sound file of each session. We then created a method that would assist the collation of multiple individual sounding tracks that, if edited together, can sound like the actual improvisation session we had virtually on Zoom, or even better. We needed to have an indication of when the actual improvisation session started. This goes slightly against the idea that free improvisation is an open-ended form of engagement, but we had to adjust. What we would do then is start our recording devices, turn back to the online Zoom meeting and have a countdown of '1,2,3, clap (hands)' that served as a beacon for Pierre-Henri when he received the individual tracks from each improvisation session.

Wicomb: The beacon helped when working with the individual tracks and also revealed how the online improvisation made it difficult for each of us to hear what the other person is doing. Most of the improvisers used headphones to tune into the Zoom meeting, while others didn't. The ZOOM H6 recording device is so sensitive to sound, the sound of one person's track would include another person's track creating a ghosting sound effect if they didn't use headphones. The sound effect creates a three-dimensional experience when one person's sound travels across another person's track or sometimes two people's tracks. I then cannot pull the different tracks over one another because of that ghosting sound delay, regardless of what it sounds like, so the countdown beacon really did help with lining up the tracks 'correctly'.

When it came to editing the different tracks together, what did that process look like, or was it left to its original sounding form without adjustments?

Wicomb: With every improvisation session that we had, I slowly came to realize that I am spending more and more time collating the individual tracks to one sound file that we uploaded to the Africa Improvising Soundcloud page. In the case of my own instrument, the piano was sometimes very loud, so I did adjust the sound balance on Ableton to be less aggressive to the rest of the improvisers. That was one of the ways to incorporate a textural aspect to the general sound. Another was to change the reverb of every soundtrack to share the same acoustics of a small room. I sometimes worked towards selecting a chamber group setting by placing the instruments within different acoustic regions to build a stereo image for the final tracks. It became a poetical process, but I never tampered with the individual soundtracks of the instrumentalists because every person knows their sound very well. I don't want to change that. In some of the tracks there would be some distortion depending on how close the microphone was placed to the instrument,

and also the clash of frequencies with other frequencies is something I made softer in volume.

In terms of the future of online improvisation, was there a difference in improvising together when the group met again for the first live play?

Pauw: There was a big amount of joy in working and doing real live improvisation again, and also how experimental we could be with interacting with one another. On the virtual platform, I think we really struggled to let silence play a bigger role in the improvisation sessions. I remember Pierre-Henri encouraged us to play more aggressively online. Then we started to play face-to-face again and the idea of silence gave the improvisation sessions a much bigger space to work with contrasting sounds, silence, our reaction time to sound and dynamics. Online play really taught us to recognize each other's voices even better than we did before and it brought a different form of interaction with free improvisation. There is a different form of creativity involved with online play.

Wicomb: Online play does create a different pursuit for creativity and creating art. When we were challenged with not being able to play face-to-face anymore, different ideas and new forms of creativities found their way and were discovered through sound. It is very exciting to create new things through sound and be creatively challenged in that way. In the long-term, this project really brings a big change to include fellow improvisors from any location and space to join our online improvisation sessions, on top of the face-to-face improvisation sessions that we can do in our immediate context and surroundings.

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Main Theme:

Music, Art, and Humanities
in the Time of
Global Crisis

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(DIS-)EMBODIED VOICES AND DIGITAL LIVENESS: MUSIC THEATRE IN LOCKDOWN

Abstract: *20 Shots of Opera*, released in December 2020, is a series of twenty short pieces of music theatre between five and eight minutes long. They were created and produced in just a few months. What makes the pieces special is that they were conceived to be produced under pandemic conditions and with purely an online reception in mind. This has affected details of the recording process as well as directorial concepts such as the use of animation or superimposition of pictures. This article will analyze how selected Shots engage with these conditions, look at different types of how the voices are used and assess the specific aesthetic circumstances of digital reception, as well as discussing other specific challenges and opportunities of creating music theatre in times of Covid-19.

Keywords: Music theatre, contemporary music, virtual opera, pandemic, music and Covid-19, Irish new music, music in lockdown, digital liveness, embodied voices, 20 Shots of Opera

Introduction

We do not know, and cannot predict, the long-term cultural implications of the social-distancing response to Covid-19. However, we argue that it may act as a cultural propagation catalyst with the potential to spread cultural outputs around the globe faster than ever before. This could have a profound long-term influence on cultural-aesthetic expressions. (Lee, Baker and Haywood 2020)

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These lines, published in a blog post entitled "Coronavirus, the cultural catalyst" in May 2020, can almost be regarded as a truism – yet they still need to be said given that many focus on the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. This negative impact certainly is enormous, not least due to the "precarity of our cultural labour force" resulting in widespread "pandemic insolvency" (Tsoulakis, Fitzgibbon 2020). Yet it has become obvious that the continuing lockdowns, the closure of music venues and the inability of musicians to connect with their audiences in the traditional ways have also led to the development of new ways to perform and reach listeners, as well as a renewed focus of modes of production and distribution that were already tested occasionally in the past, but not pursued to a larger extent until now. Chris Parsons, director of the early music ensemble Eburacum Baroque, explains that the "unprecedented global situation has opened our eyes to a whole new range of ideas that we will be able to use in the years to come [...] I think there are overriding positives" (Parsons 2020, 403). Lee, Baker and Haywood state that the "wave of creativity and online sharing that is now occurring as a direct result of the Covid-19 pandemic is unprecedented." If this was true in May 2020 it applies even more so today. The blog authors mainly focus on one aspect of this development, namely everyone's expanded ability to access music from remote regions and cultures: "Greater interest in online music sharing exposes little-known musical micro-cultures hitherto to a larger, newer and geographically more dispersed audience giving cultural diversity a whole new level of expression." (Lee, Baker and Haywood 2020). However, there are other ways in which musical creativity is adapting to this brave, new and exclusively digital world. These include works reacting to the pandemic situation in terms of content such as Finnish National Opera's *Covid fan tutte*, a shortened version of Mozart's *Così fan tutte* with a new Finnish text satirizing politicians' and artists' reactions to Covid-19 (Swed 2020). *We can be heroes*, an event produced between June and August 2021 in Frankfurt/Main and described as both opera and exhibition by its creators, invites individual visitors to go through seven different spaces over the course of an hour, encountering operatic installations requiring participatory reception along the way (We can be heroes 2021). The visitors become part of the action, thus dissolving the fourth wall. While operatic events engaging with individual visitors were occasionally produced before the pandemic as well (in Ireland, Evangelia Rigaki's *The Pregnant Box* from 2014 comes to mind), the current social distancing regulations strongly incentivize the creation of artistic events that visitors can only access individually. An externally imposed restriction is thus being turned into an artistic opportunity. In a recent article for *Operawire*, Ona Jarmalavičiūtė outlines a wide range of conceptual responses to the crisis, including "opera as artificial intelligence", "opera as virtual reality", "opera as animation", "opera as feature film", "opera as musical", "opera as trance", "opera as music video", "opera as performance", "pandemic opera" (Jarmalavičiūtė's example for this is *Covid fan tutte*), "opera for non-singers", and "opera as a tour" (Jarmalavičiūtė 2021).

In this essay, I shall look at *20 Shots of Opera*, a recent Irish operatic project as an example of creating innovative musical works that were conceived for online presentation and can only exist digitally – or at least would work much less convincingly on a stage in front of a physical audience. A special focus will lie on the role of the voice in relation to the character and the body from which it stems, a concept increasingly discussed in opera studies in recent years, as well as the notion of "digital liveness". Jarmalavičiūtė classifies the *20 Shots* in her article as "opera as music video", a response to her claim that "[c]lassical opera can often appear simply too long." (Jarmalavičiūtė 2021) The screen-oriented production concept of this project may also support this categorization.

On December 17, 2020, Irish National Opera (INO) released *20 Shots of Opera*, a series of twenty short pieces of music theatre between five and eight minutes long (20 Shots of Opera 2020). At this stage Ireland found itself in a brief period between two lockdowns (the country's third lockdown at level 5 – the highest in the Irish response scheme – came into force on December 24). Yet even during this period the cultural sector remained broadly inaccessible – effectively, theatres, concert halls and cinemas had been closed almost continuously since March 2020. *20 Shots of Opera* represents a very specific and innovative reaction to these conditions. The pieces are fascinating examples of artistic responses to the pandemic with regard to concept and production while also posing interesting aesthetic questions about the use of voices and the reception of digital music theatre. The economic context is also of interest – being accessible free of charge the *Shots* don't generate any income while simultaneously reaching a much larger audience over a longer period of time.

Embodied and Digital Voices in Contemporary Opera

The performative turn of the 1990s was a reaction to the focus on texts (in music represented by the score) as the main object of research and source of knowledge. Music only comes to life in performance, and in opera the voice is the central focus of attention and carrier of meaning. The voice is a material product stemming from the singer's body as Michelle Duncan outlines: "The category of performativity opens up a space in which to interrogate acts of utterance as material events and to investigate the effects of those events. Simply put, a performative orientation potentially redirects the term 'utter' from its use as an adjective […] to a verb […]. The medium at work in opera performance […] is the carnal body, the *Urmedium* of the live speech act" (Duncan 2004, 289). Thus the voice's materiality, its embodied nature is now regarded as a central component in the creation of meaning; just analyzing the score is not sufficient to uncover the full potential of a musical utterance. Michael Halliwell regards the relationship between the abstract musical text and its actual realization through the voice as being akin to that of reason and

emotion as without the performance no emotion can be created or conveyed (Halliwell 2014, 257). D'aoust is supportive of this view: "while the recollection of an image of the body or of the voice to the mind's eye is a function of reason – which objectifies a particular subject's voice or body – listening or speaking are acts of embodiment and potential expressions of the affective unknown" (D'aoust 2012, 34). For Jelena Novak the voice-body relationship is not just a central aspect of the reception and analysis of recent opera but also a driving force in its creation (Novak 2012, 1). In all these contexts the voice appears "not only as a vehicle of linguistic meaning, but as a material, and performative, corporeal agent" (Novak 2012, 147).

Duncan distinguishes three types of voices that we can encounter in an opera. Firstly it can appear as a first-person utterance representing the views of the character uttering the words. Secondly there is "the voice that emanates from outside the subject, the voice that calls the subject into being. This appears as the voice of God, […] that names the individual as a subject of ideology, or the voice of the Other in Lacan that calls the subject into law" (Duncan 2004, 290). This voice does not just convey a person's views, it places that person in a function and position, providing information beyond the specific content of the utterance. The third type of voice has agency, something changes as a result of its utterance. It is "a multiplicitous voice that emanates as force. The force of a performative utterance has been interpreted as causing effect or injury according to the impact of its meaning and has thus been linked to power and to violence. […] The third type of voice can thus be heard as having two separate aspects: the voice that is constituted by matter and the voice that engenders material effect" (Duncan 2004, 290). We will encounter all three types of voices in the *20 Shots of Opera*.

Digitally produced opera – whether streamed live or watched later – creates an even more complex picture. Now voice and body are mediated through technology. This is particularly interesting if the digital realization is a conceptual part of an opera's genesis: "various forms of recording techniques, video, film, digital technology are used. […] That significantly changed both how opera looks and how it sounds […] technology not only enables the pieces, but becomes embedded into their concepts" (Novak 2012, 146). Novak discusses different types of "re-inventions" of the singing body in a number of operas from the 2010s, for example with regard to de-synchronization, an effect she calls "ventriloquism" (the voice not only emanates from the body but also in turn affects and changes it – this is related to Duncan's third type of voice), or gender and sex (Novak 2012).

Genesis and Production of the 20 Shots[2]

Irish National Opera is Ireland's largest provider of opera and music theatre, mainly funded by the Arts Council of Ireland. Since the country has no permanently operating opera house[3] INO organizes a number of performances per year in a broad range of venues – smaller productions travel across the country while larger ones take place in Dublin in either the Bord Gáis Energy Theatre or the Gaiety Theatre.

After performances of Bizet's *Carmen* in spring 2020 had to be postponed due to Covid-19, INO's production of Rossini's *William Tell* in November also fell victim to the pandemic (the production is now planned for 2022). When it became clear over the summer that live performances in a theatre would not be possible INO's leadership considered possible alternatives that could be pursued even during the pandemic. At this point only one sixth of the budget of *William Tell* had been committed, and it was possible to redirect the remaining funding to a new project. Over the summer the company had already created "Seraglio, the Mini-Series", a series of eight episodes in which the story of Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* is told by conductor Peter Whelan as narrator (and in the role of Bassa Selim) while the other protagonists present some of the opera's musical highlights from their respective homes (Seraglio, the Mini-Series 2020). While this was a condensed version of an existing opera, the new project should create new pieces and offer opportunities for as many Irish artists as possible as Fergus Sheil, Artistic Director of INO, pointed out:

> I wanted a project that would involve a huge array of Irish talent. Composers, writers, singers, instrumentalists, directors and designers. But one where everybody would work in small groups or on their own. Something that would be both small and large at the same time. Something that would be resilient as a project and not easily fall victim to the fluctuations of future circumstances. I think of it as a huge, collective act of creativity and defiance (INO 2020-21, Season Plans 2020).

The decision to commission many smaller pieces was taken not only in order to involve more artists, but also to ensure that if during the production process someone fell ill or had to self-isolate the other pieces would not be affected and

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3   There is an opera house (750 seats) in the South-Eastern town of Wexford, labelled National Opera House. However, it is not in permanent use; its main purpose is hosting the Wexford Festival Opera in October and November of each year. During the rest of the year there are only occasional operas, concerts and other events taking place there.

could continue to be rehearsed and recorded – essentially, the individual teams would form "pods" that could operate independently of each other. Hence different singers were engaged for each of the *Shots*. As it happened, only one singer had to self-isolate after contact with a positive Covid case during the production period; this is why Naomi Louisa O'Connell now features in two of the operas – she took over the part of the singer who had to drop out. Players of the RTÉ Concert Orchestra (the orchestra originally scheduled to accompany *William Tell*) were engaged to accompany the singers; due to scheduling problems some of the *Shots* were in the end accompanied by members of the Irish National Opera Symphony Orchestra. A final reason for a selection of short operas was that it would have been impossible for one or a few longer works to be completed within the extremely tight time-frame.[4]

The *Shots* were commissioned in July 2020, so there were only five months between the commissioning of the pieces and the premiere (given that the works were recorded in mid-November the composition process, the development of the directorial concepts and the rehearsals had to be completed in the even shorter time of just about four months). The composers and librettists could choose their sujets freely; the commissions asked for pieces of a length of between five and six minutes (in the end the pieces are between five and eight minutes long) for up to two singers and an ensemble of up to eleven players.

Despite being recorded on a stage (that of the Gaiety Theatre in Dublin) the *20 Shots* were produced not like filmed stage performances (such as those regularly broadcast by the Metropolitan Opera) but rather like operas filmed on location: The music was pre-recorded before the filming took place. Normally this is done to ensure the best possible quality of sound which cannot be achieved out on location, yet here this decision was enforced by the enhanced projection of aerosols during singing (as opposed to speaking). This meant the performers were not allowed to sing during the filming but had to mime their parts instead. This increased the difficulty of producing a convincing visual performance (except in the case of the two *Shots* realized as animations) – in "normal" circumstances the singers would certainly have sung during the filming process. This is an example of Novak's "ventriloquism", the voice emanating from the body and the recorded sound later affecting the body as it has to conform to it while acting during the visual recording.

The 20 pieces were written by different composers and librettists and cover a wide range of musical styles and topics (tragic, epic and comical in nature).

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4   The idea of writing short operas related to recent events and designed for screening is not new. For example, in 2010 the Dutch TV channel *De Wereld Draait Door* started commissioning a number of one-minute operas that were to engage with current political or societal events. Jelena Novak discusses five of them which were written by composer Michael van der Aa between 2010 and 2014 (Novak 2019, 102-109).

- *Mrs Streicher* (Music: Gerald Barry, Text: Ludwig van Beethoven)
  Commissioned by Timothy King and Mary Canning
- *Rupture* (Music & Text: Éna Brennan)
  Commissioned by Jean and Ian Flitcroft
- *Ghost Apples* (Music: Irene Buckley, Text: Jessica Traynor)
- *Glaoch* (Music: Linda Buckley, Text: Doireann Ní Ghríofa)
- *The Colour Green* (Music: Robert Coleman, Text: Mark Boyle)
- *Verballing* (Music: David Coonan, Text: Dylan Coburn Gray)
  Commissioned by Catherine and William Earley
- *Her Name* (Music: Alex Dowling, Text: Mark O'Halloran)
  Commissioned by Matthew Patrick Smyth
- *Through and Through* (Music & Text: Peter Fahey)
- *At a Loss* (Music & Text: Michael Gallen)
- *Erth upon Erth* (Music: Andrew Hamilton, Text: Anonymous)
- *Dichotomies of Lockdown* (Music & Text: Jenn Kirby)
- *The Patient Woman* (Music: Conor Linehan, Text: Louis Lovett)
  Commissioned by Gaby Smyth
- *A Message for Marty (or "The Ring")* (Music & Text: Conor Mitchell)
- *La Corbiére* (Music: Gráinne Mulvey, Text: Anne Le Marquand Hartigan)
- *The Wait* (Music: Emma O'Halloran, Text: Mark O'Halloran)
  Commissioned by Genesis
- *Close* (Music: Hannah Peel, Text: Stella Feehily)
  Commissioned by Stephen Loughman
- *Touch* (Music: Karen Power, Text: Ione)
- *The Gift* (Music: Evangelia Rigaki, Text: Marina Carr)
  Commissioned by Jean and Ian Flitcroft
- *Dust* (Music & Text: Benedict Schlepper-Connolly)
  Commissioned by Fedora
- *Libris Solar* (Music: Jennifer Walshe, Text: Jennifer Walshe/Alphonso Lingis)
  Commissioned by John Caldwell

The works are presented on the INO webpage in alphabetical order of composers, resulting in some of the internationally better-known names (Gerald Barry and Jennifer Walshe) framing the collection. All composers and performers are either Irish or based in Ireland. INO consciously decided to opt for gender balance in this project; there are ten female and ten male composers (while 21 out of the altogether 27 singers involved in the project are female; one of the six male ones is a boy soprano). In six cases the composers acted as their own librettists while one composer (Andrew Hamilton) set an anonymous, pre-existing text. INO grouped the operas according to four categories: "political" (4 entries), "life and death" (7),

"drama" (8) and "relationships" (5), with several works featuring in more than one category. Other categories could be envisaged – comedy, for example – yet the opera afficionado should best watch all of them anyway.

20 Shots of Opera are available online free of charge, so they don't generate any income for INO. It is well known that charging for performances on the internet where so many alternatives are available for free is still a very difficult business, so this was certainly the right decision. Between October and December 2020 INO organized three live-streamed concerts entitled "Mezzo Masterpieces" (featuring soloists and full orchestra) for which tickets were sold at a price of €15 (or €40 for the entire series), but while the viewers' financial contribution was welcome it didn't get close to making a serious contribution to the costs of the enterprise. Had the concerts been taking place before the pandemic it is virtually certain that far more tickets could have been sold to a face-to-face audience. There was, however, one additional financial contribution towards the *20 Shots* beyond the redirected budget of *William Tell*: INO managed to find several donors who commissioned altogether ten of the works. These are mainly private individuals yet also a few corporate companies; one couple even commissioned two of the *Shots*. Their contributions covered the fees for the composer and the librettist of the respective projects.

Let us now look at a few examples of the *20 Shots* to demonstrate the different ways in which they operate, particularly with regard to the different types of voice and the effect the digital realizations have on them.

Digital Reactions to Real-Life Problems

The four *Shots* briefly discussed in this section have been selected as examples of the ways in which many of the pieces creatively engage with different manifestations of voices and interactions between characters, yet also different types of digital production and dissemination. In *The Gift* the two protagonists find themselves in a situation of addressing each other yet not listening, which is emphasized by placing them in two different spaces and having one of them speak while the other sings. *Verballing* (realized as an animation) reduces the second protagonist to bodyless and voiceless text that is not even sung while *Rupture* has only one protagonist to begin with, yet this person has two voices battling inside her head. These three *Shots* also represent a variety of concepts with regard to the interaction of protagonists: *The Gift* juxtaposes a singer and a speaker, *Verballing* a singer and written lines on a screen, and *Rupture* two singing voices inside just one head. While neither of these works engage with our digital world with regard to their plots, the last example does exactly that: *Glaoch* focuses on issues of connectivity. These four *Shots* are realized in ways that would not work well (and sometimes not at all) if they were performed in front of a live audience.

The Gift, one of seven *Shots* classified as relating to "Life and Death", has a libretto by Marina Carr set to music by Evangelia Rigaki. It is a story about a dying father (Seán McGinley) who awaits the return of his estranged daughter (Doreen Curran) from a trip to Italy as he wants to see her one last time – perhaps achieve a reconciliation – before passing away. Their distance is indicated by the fact that they are designated as "woman" and "old man" in the score; we only learn about their relationship from their own words. The alternating lines of the two protagonists rarely address each other directly as they appear to be lost in thought, it's almost like a double monologue in which people in the same room avoid addressing each other. From the father we learn that his "ruthless" daughter cut him out of her life 30 years ago and that he misses her (and his grandchildren) terribly; he gives as a reason that "[s]he said I tried to take her down" while she comments in one of her few direct addresses to him "You wanted me back in your clutches. Only so many times a body can forgive". She makes it back in time to witness his passing. After his death he (rather than her) concludes the work with a Shakespearean reference (from *Cymbeline*) "At my funeral she said I loved dancing. Then she recited 'Fear no more the heat of the sun.'"

Director Jo Mangan positions the two protagonists in different spaces; they never appear together. The old man is placed in a rather sterile, entirely white environment, inside an upright bed with the camera turned on its side so that it initially appears as if he is lying in the bed (the score already asks for a "vertical bed") – his sudden move out of it (or on another occasion his apparent hovering in it) are quite striking. In reaction to the daughter mentioning a cross in a church in Sicily he stretches out his arms to appear as if crucified. She stands in a separate, much darker place (sometimes with two of the instrumentalists playing in the background) while on one occasion – when accusing the old man of a lack of strength – pretending to play a violin herself. In the middle of the piece they suddenly change places for a moment: when she accuses him to want her back in his clutches she suddenly finds herself in the bed (the position of the victim) while her father addresses the two players (who listen attentively without playing, even though we continue to hear the accompaniment): "Look at this ruthless daughter." Later the now deceased father speaks the final lines without being visible; instead our view is directed upwards to the Gaiety Theatre's chandelier. The piece does not ultimately clarify what the eponymous gift is – is it the father's staying alive until the daughter returns ("I waited to say goodbye because you asked me to"), or her decision to come back to him even though she does not really want to and appears to be happy once it is over ("He slips away, last duty done")?

Rigaki's music is inspired by one of the best-known musical compositions related to death, namely Mozart's *Requiem*. Her instrumental parts are full of allusions to that work. At the beginning the strings pick up on the "Introit's" pizzicato quavers alternating between low and high strings while simultaneously alluding

to the quasi-syncopated entries of the English horns and bassoons; elsewhere the melodic movement of the "Lacrimosa" is hinted at. Yet the music does not sound like Mozart, and particularly the vocal parts give it a unique flair. The daughter is set as a mezzo soprano while the father is a speaking role, performed by an actor. This indicates his weakness, but perhaps also his sincerity. Her last word (the end of the line "last duty done") is suddenly spoken, as if she now joins his level of communication.

Both characters' lines represent examples of Duncan's second types of voice – their words go beyond their immediate meaning, setting up context and explaining the overall situation to the audience. This impression is even stronger given that the two clearly do not convey information to each other. Both protagonists don't operate at the same aural level; interestingly it is the male protagonist who resorts to the more prosaic mode of pure speaking while the woman utilizes the much richer musical mode of expression. However, the woman's lines include many note repetitions; often the pitch rises or falls by step after a number of repeated pitches. The effect is that of semi-declamation with gradually increasing or decreasing degrees of intensity. Her part starts on middle C, moves up and at the end returns to it, as if a dramatic arc comes to a conclusion.

As produced *The Gift* would be much less effective on stage than it is on screen – it would be much more difficult to place the two protagonists in two different, completely separate spaces so that they are never seen at the same time if they had to be in front of a live audience. One could imagine the double monologue taking place in the style of the duet between Senta and the Dutchman in the second act of Wagner's opera (with the two being in the same room yet more or less ignoring each other's presence), yet it would certainly be less convincing – and the placement of the musicians in one person's space in particular would also not work well.

Alongside *The Colour Green*, *Verballing* (Libretto: Dylan Coburn Gray; Music: David Coonan) is one of two *Shots* produced as animations. A female trainee Garda (a member of the Irish police) named Amy finds herself in a highly Kafkaesque situation in which an unknown interrogator coaches her how to answer questions in court regarding an (either imagined or real) case, pointing out her procedural mistakes in handling it and goading her towards a phrasing of her answers that will not threaten the admission of her report and the outcome of the case. The interrogator has no name and does neither sing nor speak; his questions and comments only appear on the screen in written format (it is difficult to imagine the interrogator as being anything other than male while it is certainly no accident that the trainee Garda is female). The young woman is thus confronted with an anonymous, seemingly all-knowing power which acts in a highly paternalistic way that constantly belittles her. The interrogator's voice is another good example of Duncan's second type of voice which does not just convey information but simultaneously outlines the overall situation for us while also creating a clear power relationship. The reduction of the interrogator's voice to text on a screen is a very effective in-

dicator of the power imbalance between the protagonists. Amy's dialogue partner is an anonymous, abstract power that can't be addressed at an equal level; without a body it loses any personality and subjectivity – for D'aout a bodiless voice represents "authoritative knowledge" (D'aout 2012, 45). Amy, on the other hand, is not just the name of the character but also of the singer who premiered the role (Amy Ní Fhearraigh to whom *Verballing* is also dedicated), so we are meant to perceive her voice as not just that of the opera's character but also that of the performer – the interrogator's reduced corporeality is juxtaposed with a voice with the merged corporeality of fictional character *and* performer.

In each of five short acts the interrogator first confronts Amy with details of her report from the crime scene, only then getting her to admit that she had omitted some relevant detail, or had committed procedural errors in her handling of a suspect. Each time the audience learns a bit more about the case, including some surprising twists that let the situation appear in ever-new, unexpected lights. This is particularly embodied by the first lines of each act which repeat what was said before and then add to it, from "Dead man in his hall he says self-defense?" at the beginning to "Dead man self-defense questions statement refusal he thinks you think he's guilty and want to stitch him up?" in the last act. Throughout the opera Amy's responses to virtually anything put to her is a single word: "Yeah" (complemented by the occasional "ok", "ah" and "no"). She appears like a deer caught in the headlights who is getting ever more nervous and panicky. This is indicated by the way in which her monosyllabic answers grow from brief intersections to extended melismatic phrases with much chromatic movement, as well as the constantly rising pitch of her melodic line (from A^3 at the beginning to B^4 as her final note). Apart from Amy's constantly rising melodic line, Coonan's music indicates increasing insecurity and confusion through constantly changing time signatures, increasing tempo and hectic, often polyphonic movement (initially in the wind parts, later spreading to the other instruments). Brass chords announce new questions by the interrogator.

Amy's part is a prime example of words providing much more emotive content than factual information. Since she only produces single words and repeats them over and over what she sings is much less relevant to the audience than how she does it; the increased intensity and ever-rising pitches convey a much clearer message than the words as such. This piece makes very clear that the text alone only provides a small part of the meaning. That the interrogator's part is neither spoken nor sung does not contradict this – his part is meant to appear as unemotional, cold and perhaps even inhuman.

Like *The Gift*, in its animated form *Verballing* would also be much less effective on stage than on screen – the animation could be projected onto a backcloth or screen, yet a live performance on a stage would only really make sense if at least the singer would there in the flesh in front of it, rather than being part of the animation. The anonymous, only readable voice of the instructor in particular works in a much

more impressive way on screen than during a live performance when we would probably find it odd not to hear the words sung live. Overall director Caitríona McLaughlin presents us with a picture of Amy's mind much more than with the physical view of this "training exercise". Amy the Garda starts the scene in what looks like the backstage of a theatre before finding herself literally more and more in the spotlight, surrounded by darkness and appearing to sink into the ground as if it was quicksand in act three. In act four the animation seems to suggest something like a black hole surrounded by gravitational fields, before this circle transforms into Amy's gradually receding face in the final act – the body "shrinks" more and more, reducing it to the mouth from which the voice emanates. At the very end we are back in the backstage area and her ordeal seems to somehow have come to an end, yet the Kafkaesque nature of the entire procedure leaves the viewer doubting whether that is really the case.

Rupture (Éna Brennan, libretto and music) is another example of a plot that could not easily be realized on a stage. It consists of two characters designated as "woman" and "conscience" who have a dialogue inside the woman's mind with the woman dreaming of a bright future while the voice of her conscience continuously pours cold water onto her prospects ("Who in their right mind would give you mortgage approval?!", or "Who in their right mind would have a child with you?!"). Through wigs and make-up director Jo Mangan makes the singers Rachel Goode (woman) and Sarah Richmond (conscience) look as similar as possible so that their faces can be continuously superimposed onto each other, thus indicating their being different parts of the same person. The "woman" is a soprano, her subconscious overseer a mezzo soprano who occasionally imitates opening motifs of the woman's lines while elsewhere singing for moments in parallel thirds and sixths which in this context sound too harmonious to be true – they are another means to ridicule the woman's words. These two inner voices demonstrate aspects of the first and third of Duncan's voice types: they convey information while also showing how the woman reacts to her conscience's words: she hears them, struggles with them yet ultimately decides to overcome their challenge and stick to her original views. The singing voices are yet again female; in this case there is no non-female character whose voice could appear in a different way.

Again, *Rupture* would be impossible to do on a stage and would probably have been conceived differently to begin with had Brennan not been aware from the outset that this project was not destined for the stage but for digital realization.

The difficulty of maintaining human connections in the age of electronic communication is the topic of Linda Buckley's *Glaoch* (Irish for "Call"). Doireann Ní Ghríofa's Irish text reflects on today's connectivity issues – literally as well as metaphorically – as our cordless devices preclude a sense of closeness and keep "breaking up" our calls. Under Hugh O'Conor's direction the singers Sarah Shine and Gemma Ní Bhriain are shown trying to connect with each other on their mobile phones in many different locations (indoors and outdoors) over a long period of

time (they are wearing many different items of clothing). Occasionally we also see apparently archival photos of them together in past, better times, before the phone indicates a loss of connection or another incoming call. Buckley's music is dominated by slowly moving string chords heavy with harmonics, with matching vocal parts that seem to reflect more on the metaphoric meaning of loss than on the often hectical attempts to establish or re-establish a literal connection (with the exception of certain quick rhythmic unison string passages to be played "col legno, like mobile phone interferences"). Again, watching the two singers performing this piece live on a stage would not make sense (their appearance on mobile phone screens is crucial); encountering this reflection on the loss of closeness in the age of digital devices on a digital device is what makes it a most poignant experience. Once again the two singing voices are female. Their appearance here is mediated through the digital production in a special way: While we encounter all of the *Shots* in recorded format, of course, here the protagonists communicate with each other through digital devices, and this mode of communication is a central element of the plot. We can assume that they would not see each other while trying to connect; it is only the audience that gets to see them separately trying to reach each other. These two voices want to have agency yet remain unsuccessful at establishing the connection they are craving. In this case there are three levels of mediation: we are watching a recording, the recording consists of people trying to connect via a digital device, and finally we hear them both while they can't hear each other (a little bit like father and daughter in *The Gift*).

Aspects of Digital Liveness

When the *20 Shots of Opera* were premiered on December 17, 2020, this was of course not a "live" premiere in the "traditional" sense of the term given that the pieces had been recorded more than a month earlier. In the digital realm the "premiere" of a piece of music indicates the time at which it is made available to the public for the first time, without the need for it to be performed in real time. Philip Auslander has pointed out that "the word live is not used to define intrinsic, ontological properties of performance that set it apart from mediatized forms, but is actually a historically contingent term" (Auslander 2012, 3). Since we can now observe that the use and understanding of the term has changed over time a new, broader understanding of it has to be developed. Auslander suggests the following definition.

> some technological artifact – a computer, Website, network, or virtual entity – makes a claim on us, its audience, to be considered as live, a claim that is concretized as a demand in some aspect of

> the way it presents itself to us (by providing real-time response and interaction or an ongoing connection to others, for example). In order for liveness to occur, we, the audience, must accept the claim as binding upon us, take it seriously, and hold onto the object in our consciousness of it in such a way that it becomes live for us. In this analysis, liveness is neither a characteristic of the object nor an effect caused by some aspect of the object such as its medium, ability to respond in real time, or anthropomorphism. Rather, liveness is an interaction produced through our engagement with the object and our willingness to accept its claim (Auslander 2012, 9).

Auslander's text is from 2012 – what is the situation in 2021?[5] What are the claims websites make today, what the real-time responses, interactions or ongoing connection to others? A first step towards their creation would be giving a specific moment in time an event-character, for example by designating that moment as "Premiere", inviting interested people to register for it and displaying to those not (yet) signed up not only when it will take place but also that a certain number of people are currently waiting for it to begin – even if the event is still a few days away. Regular YouTube viewers will know these features well – they are used not just in the context of music but also of all sorts of other events including lectures, discussions, and documentaries. A good example of this technique is represented by OperaVision, a YouTube channel that releases new opera productions every Friday at 6pm (CET). There is no attempt to hide the fact that these productions have always been recorded weeks or months earlier (the recording date is provided in the commentary). After the premiere they remain available for a limited amount of time, usually between one and six months – yet OperaVision manages to attach to the premiere the mantle of a special event, much preferable to watching the recording at a later stage. The channel does this not only by using the features described above, it also releases several clips whetting potential viewers' appetites during the days before a premiere: usually a trailer, an interview with one or several members of the creative team (director, conductor, sometimes one or more singers) and a behind-the-scenes look at the rehearsals. But YouTube's most ingenious way of creating real-time responses, interactions and ongoing connections to others is the live chat that is available only during the premiere. In it the viewers can express their reactions, exchange views and – perhaps most importantly – ask questions about the production. There is always a representative of OperaVision and another one from the opera house in which the respective production was recorded present; together they share general information and trivia about the opera, the production and those involved in it, yet also respond to questions by the audience. There is a number of "regulars" in the virtual audience who appear to know each other

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5   Auslander's most extensive engagement with this topic is his book *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (Auslander 1999). In a recent interview he revealed that he is currently working on a new, third edition of this book which he describes as the "pandemic edition" as it will take into account recent experiences (Auslander 2021, 260).

from previous chats and display some degree of familiarity with each other, despite coming from countries a far apart as Mexico, Russia, and Zimbabwe, to name but a few. The chat is what makes the premiere really special as it is unique to it and provides a crucial moment of real-time connection and exchange – the chat itself is "live" in the old sense of the term. It is the core element that represents Auslander's "claim" for digital liveness, the Benjaminian aura that determines the quality of the experience. Later viewers can only watch the recorded chat unfolding alongside the stream without being able to contribute to it anymore. Another element supporting Auslander's concept is a line visible only during the premiere which congratulates viewers for being "officially" one of the first fans to watch the event.

The *20 Shots of Opera* were released on the INO website, without any of the You-Tube features supporting the claim for liveness as redefined by Auslander. There was advertising to attract viewers, as well as interviews and a behind-the-scene video, but on release day the website with the 20 operas looked exactly the way it still looks today, with the different pieces being listed next to each other so that the viewers could watch some or all of them in any order they wanted. It is interesting to compare this to the OperaVision concept, particularly given that INO is one of the 29 European opera companies contributing to its program. The *20 Shots* were "premiered" on the OperaVision channel on March 12, 2021 – three months after their original release on the INO webpage. On the night of the premiere OperaVision streamed the twenty pieces as a single video (accompanied by the live chat as usual), not giving the audience the option to watch the pieces in another order. However, after the premiere OperaVision made the operas available individually – in fact, the complete stream of all of them in alphabetical order of composers is no longer accessible on their website. This represents yet another way of differentiating the premiere from the rest of the period during which the recording is available.

Conclusion

Covid-19 challenges music and musicians in many ways, and many different responses are possible. INO's *20 Shots* project – created on extremely short notice – is most innovative in its visual component which is specifically designed for digital production and reception. The music – while generally being of high quality and working very well with the visual realization – is conceptually less innovative insofar as it doesn't exploit the specific options of the digital world, especially its interactivity. It is score-based and by itself does not gain from (or depend on) digital transmission (although conceptually in the vast majority of cases the works' realizations depend on it as we have seen). Issue 5 of the *Journal of Contemporary Music, Art and Technology* has presented a number of case studies about what is possible in this area. Examples of this include an essay on Gerd Kühr's *Corona Meditation*,

a piece performed simultaneously by many players in their respective homes (Göttlich 2020), or an article on a Brazilian podcast consisting of a listener's creative sonic responses to non-musical prompts (Martins, Perotto 2020).

As outlined above, projects such as the *20 Shots* can currently only be realized as publicly funded enterprises – sustainable ways of financing large-scale music theatre largely or entirely through a combination of ticket sales, philanthropy and sponsorships were rare even before the pandemic, and still are today. Individual full-scale projects may be realized on the basis of sponsorship or crowd-funding initiatives, and selected prestigious artists or institutions such as the Metropolitan Opera may be more successful than others in generating income that way, yet the continuous existence of most opera companies (particularly those performing throughout the year) can still only be guaranteed through public financial support. This is notwithstanding Gundula Kreuzer's observation of "the recent upsurge of alternative or 'indie' opera companies" (at least in New York) which focus on either new works or radically revised and slimmed down versions of canonic material (Kreuzer 2019, 131). During the pandemic the income generated through performances has shrunk dramatically; without public support many institutions would have ceased to exist, and a large number of them (such as the Metropolitan Opera and Opera Australia) laid off staff (Shaw Roberts 2020). Opera companies have engaged in these digital projects to keep busy, and also keep in touch with their audiences while having to accept those reduced income streams during this period. Once we reach a "new normal" there will, of course, be a return to face-the-face performances again, while some of the experiences gained during the enforced restriction to the digital realm are certain to stay with us, informing both productions for audiences in theatres as well as in front of screens (INO's plans for 2021/22 include filmed performances, productions mixing live singing with a pre-recorded orchestra and a "virtual reality community opera"). These will certainly include our expanded understanding of use of voices on the basis of pieces like the *20 Shots*.

20 Shots of Opera is a project utilizing the advanced possibilities of our digital age regarding both production and reception. They are not just "operas as music videos" as classified by Jarmalavičiūtė; some of them also fall into her categories "opera as animation", "opera as trance", and "pandemic opera." As pointed out at the beginning, most trends we can observe regarding the digital conception, production and dissemination of music theatre during the pandemic are not new but intensify and develop what has already been experimented with before. In their broad range of topics, styles and directorial concepts the *20 Shots* represent an interesting cross section of how music theatre can productively react to the challenge posed by Covid-19. The *20 Shots* engage with the totality of the human condition as we experience it today – age-old issues around love and death as well as more recent challenges posed by digital technology, environmental problems and Covid-19. Is the whole of the *20 Shots* more than the sum of its parts? Yes and no: Yes with regard to this broad engagement with today's human condition (and also the general

overview it offers over contemporary Irish composition), no as there is no dramatic or aesthetic concept that binds the pieces together and determines, for example, the order in which they are presented. Operas like the *20 Shots* let us discover new modes of operatic materiality, as well as a new relationship between human needs and experiences on the one hand and the non-human agency of our digital tools on the other. As Christopher Morris points out, we are perceiving these works through the fifth wall of digital mediation (Morris 2019, 88). Our look at the different types of embodied and disembodied voices as well as the degrees of liveness in these pieces demonstrate that Morris is right when stating that music theatre of this type is "instructive and exemplary in ways that have wider currency for the study of performance, the role of materiality in performance, and the limits of the human" (Morris 2019, 93).

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IMAGE–MUSIC–TEXT: OPERATIC EXPERIMENTS IN THE AGE OF THE AUDIOVISUAL ESSAY

Abstract: Emerging as a new tool and form of criticism and theorizing, the audiovisual essay has stirred many different opinions within the academy, with its many different outcomes. For scholarly purposes, combining it with text, reflection and commentary seems to be the most common and most accepted form of audiovisual essay, easily found all over the internet in well-known video archives such as YouTube and Vimeo. Towards a more poetic end of the spectrum, breaking both the horizontal and vertical dimensions of any work may deepen and reveal new possibilities, often resulting in the creation of new hybrid pieces. This paper aims to demystify these new formats and concepts, focusing on its potentiality as a tool for criticism and its creative possibilities regarding music and, more specifically, opera.

Keywords: Audiovisual, Music, Creation, Opera, Video

Essay/Audiovisual

Strange days have found us. The Covid-19 pandemic whispered a new breath of attention towards audiovisual research and a new emergency towards a not-so-novel discussion regarding audiovisual formats and practices. It has been stated how "[…] digital technology has a great *potential* to reinvigorate film and television criticism" (Lavik 2012a), and the audiovisual essay is, if anything, a favorite contender of said potential. Not only hybrid in its nature, but also very much capable of reaching both academic and popular audiences, the video essay genre can be

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summarized as a creative, digital remix of "[…] found footage collage at one end and the film/media essay at the other […]" (López & Martin 2014).

According to Erlend Lavik, the audiovisual essay isn't simply a way to share new research, promptly and in a more accessible format, as "[…] it may also broaden, or at least reframe, intellectual inquiry" (Lavik 2012b); it exists as a tool for film studies, meant to merge insights and criticism within and through a video.

> "[…] the critical video essay is not only a product of a new technical panorama brought into being by the Internet and digital platforms, it is also, and above all, a product of our desire. Before it was physically possible to create video essays, we imagined them and traced them out in our writing" (López 2012).

The craft of the audiovisual essayist rests primarily in the editing and combination of various media outputs. As Christina Álvarez López argues, the practices and techniques required for the creation of a video essay derive from cinema itself: "[…] split screens […] analytical zoom shots […] superimpositions and associative editing […] montage of attractions, the relationships between text, sound and image […] repetition and accumulation […]"; that is, creating and sharing thoughts and insights about cinema "[…] with the very tools of cinema itself, with its own language" (López 2012).

Exploring different audiovisual essay possibilities, Miklós Kiss recounts a video created by one of his students, reflecting on a scholastic and pragmatic end of the spectrum, describing it as a worthy attempt not only "[…] at transferring text-based academic qualities to an audiovisual container" (Kiss 2014), but also at addressing the rigorous and conservative academic purposes, making use of traditional textual explanations, reflections and commentaries. Kiss and many others believe this to be the most fruitful approach to this format, and it may very well encompass the audiovisual works that Lavik calls for in his discussions, his search and need for video essays "[…] less like an abstract, and more like the audiovisual equivalent of a full-fledged academic article" (Lavik 2012b).

Although this appears to be the most common and accepted audiovisual format, a combination of controlled visuals, audios and texts approaching an academic lecture or a conference presentation, some creators and researchers rather venture towards a more poetic end of the spectrum, within the "[…] already famous continuum between creative/poetic and explanatory/pedagogical" (López & Martin 2015), a symbiosis similarly evoked in what Adrian Martin connotates as *creative criticism*: a sort of experimentation between art and scholarship, between intuitive, less reflexive processes of artistic creation, and restrictive academic methods and protocols.

> "[…] it's our belief that audiovisual essays can take their makers in two directions simultaneously: both deeper into the text that

they discover anew, and beyond it, into the necessary challenge of inventing a new, hybrid work of their own" (López & Martin 2015).

Reflecting on one such work as described above, Cristina Álvarez López explains how the sound "[…] ended up providing the global structure for the piece […]" (López 2014) as she organized the visual aspect of the essay. This particular concept led to a personal reflection on the audiovisual essay format and its relations and possibilities regarding sound and the musical universe.

For any musician, YouTube might stand less for entertainment and more like a tool and archive for active studying and learning. The array of videos available are no longer considered simple products for simple consumption: "the YouTube effect has changed art and the way people consume, create, and share music" (Cayari 2011, 24). Respected as one of the largest and most famous audiovisual repositories, YouTube is brimming with videos that both define and defy the forementioned notions and structures regarding video essay traditions. Although the majority of these videos, as mentioned above, "[…] work more as video lectures presenting voice-overed film stills […] or PowerPoint slides on auto-play" (Kiss 2014), there are increasingly more audiovisual pieces striving for the more poetic and creative end of the spectrum.

One example particularly pertinent for this discussion is a video called *Flipping a beat from Lachenmann's Avant-Garde Music* (David Bruce Composer, 2018) by the composer and content creator David Bruce[2] (1970). After a preliminary dive into Helmut Lachenmann's[3] (1935) solo cello piece *Pression* (1969-70, revised 2010) and demonstrating compositional and technological processes used in the creation of *found-sound-beats*, David Bruce created a hybrid piece from audiovisual fragments, through the application of various concepts borrowed from the visual arts, and created a work faithfully categorized as an audiovisual collage.

Elsewhere described as the unethical anthropologist, be it a visual, sound or word montage, the collage artist works through "[…] an assemblage of fragments and varying points of view, put together often in a non-linear way" (Hopkins 1997, 5), and, by definition, these practices cannot be bound to a sort of popular belief that these practices are exclusive to the visual arts.

> "The collage aesthetic is the sole methodological link between such modernist masterpieces as T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land, Joyce's Ulysses, the music of Igor Stravinsky, and the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright […]" (Hopkins 1997, 5).

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2   David Bruce is a British composer and content creator. He's been sharing creative and pedagogical videos on YouTube since 2017, covering topics such as Music History and Analysis.

3   Helmut Lachenmann is one of the most influential and radical living German composers, whose works deal deeply with extended techniques, musical structure and the concept of sound.

The processes and techniques employed by collage creators provide a reminiscence to the audiovisual artist endeavors, "situated in the space between mash-up, experimental film, and digital film criticism […]" (Misek 2012).

In a video essay on Vimeo, another famous audiovisual archive, one of the comments reads: "[…] you've aroused my interest sufficiently to dig deeper into the referenced literature. Thank You!" (Catherine Grant, 2011). By quoting contrasting images, audios and texts, Catherine Grant's *Touching the Film Object?* has revealed itself as something easily comparable to a beautiful collage, out of many objects and inspirations, dwelling and developing new interconnections, and daringly exposing her theories with and within a creative object.

Opera/Triptych

Bernhard Kuhn advocates for an opera and film connection, as they "[…] have influenced each other since the beginning of cinema and relations between the two media can be observed up to the present day" (Kuhn 2008, 77), and this almost primal relation further sustained the convictions in the possibilities of the audiovisual essay towards a potential and artistic connection with operatic objects. The intention wasn't to create videos whose meanings "[…] can be summarized in writing" (Grant 2016), and that's why the next results strand away from an academic audiovisual essay to wander into a more poetic and experimental route; nevertheless, for the sake of this article, there's a reflective written statement concerning each audiovisual piece.

The composition of this triptych aims to strip the core components intrinsic to an opera and re-combine them with different intertextual objects, in "[…] a network of intertextual references that challenge the unity and self-presence of the viewing subject" (Grant 2016), while maintaining the embryonic thematic of each opera. The results are as follows:

- IMAGE/SALOME: an excerpt of a visual operatic performance with different music and different text.
- MUSIC/ELVIRA: an excerpt of an aria intertwined with a different visual setting and text.
- TEXT/MADDALENA: an excerpt of a libretto combined with a different imagery and different music.

Succinctly, these three audiovisual essays are the apex of the forementioned literature. In practice, the goal is to explore the combination of fragments in relation to each specific opera, while at the same time trying to underline its unique characteristics by merging them into new audiovisual pieces, while treating opera "[…] as a point of departure for a deeply reflective, poetic and creative transformation" (Vassilieva 2016). The videos themselves were created

and edited in iMovie[4]. As for the audio and sound, the author also worked with one of the simplest and most common software available: Audacity[5].

IMAGE/SALOME
IMAGE/SALOME on Vimeo.

The opera chosen as the core of the first audiovisual essay of this triptych is *Salome* (1905) by the German composer Richard Strauss[6] (1864-1949). The libretto of the biblical story portrayed in this opera is based on the homonymous work by Oscar Wilde[7] (1854-1900), premiered in 1891. The play can be outlined by the defiance and rejection of Iokanaan towards Salome, "[…] a rejection that is made at tragic cost to himself and others" (Navarre 2011, 75), but also by the same defiance and rejection of the princess of Judaea, daughter of Herodias, towards her stepfather, the King Herod. The story reaches its climax with the famous dance of the beautiful female, as she has only one thing on her mind: the severed head of the Baptist on a silver platter. And it was a small scene of the renowned dance of the seven veils that was used as the visual operatic root of the video essay. This unique Stravinskian

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4   iMovie is a software developed by Apple, used for viewing, editing and exporting movies.
5   Audacity is an open-source audio editor and recorder, available for free for Windows, Mac OS X, and GNU/Linux.
6   Richard Strauss was a German Romantic composer, famous for his operas and symphonic poems in late 19th and early 20th century.
7   Oscar Wilde was an Irish dramatist and poet, who in the late 19th century was one of London's most famous playwrights.

primal dance of passion and vengeance is performed by Maria Ewing (1950) on her famous role as Salome in Los Angeles Opera's 1986 production of Strauss's opera.

The accompanying music invites us inside Salome's dancing mind: the sounds of a macabre metronome, a nearly diegetic application of sound within the scene, is intended to keep her dance regular, but it starts to slowly desynchronize the tempo, as the desire for the head of the Baptist keeps rushing her. Each fragment of voices, lasting around 15 seconds, are meant to mimic her breathing, softly, calmly, a contrast with the chaos and confusion of those same voices inside her head; the never-ending repetition of her wishful cravings for the head of the Baptist. The recurring repetition of the small sentences, intertwined with the various metronomes, makes it so the viewer won't focus much of his attention on the repeated, quasi minimalistic soundtrack, instead focusing on the imagery and momentarily on the text, as it comes phased and arranged along the dance and the dancer's movement.

With respect to the sounds themselves, different voices of different *Salomes* were defragmented and rearranged from various performances of Oscar Wilde's play found on YouTube[8]. The metronome is a combination and manipulation of factory sounds exported from the music notation software Finale[9], combined with various claps by King Herod from the same performances mentioned above.

The solo soprano, recurring and reprising since the second half of the video, was taken from the fourth movement "Spring", a movement that "[…] stands out in the cycle like an aria of joy" (Wilson 2003, 327), of *The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza*, Op. 7, for soprano and piano by the composer György Kurtág[10] (1926). Just like Iokanaan, Péter Bornemisza was a preacher, and the antithetically female voice belongs to Tony Arnold (1966), from a recording released in 2019 by BMC Records (Kurtág 2019). The solo voice accompanying the dance is meant to represent not only Salome's lonely desires, "[…] rough and earthy as well as religious, evoking vile horrors of evil and death as emphatically as the longing for redemption" (Wilson 2003, 315), but also her purity, her independence, and, ultimately, a belief in her own salvation. The phrases are short and the superimposed voices, somewhat melismatic, start relatively late in the video as not to collide with the image and the occasional subtitles.

The text section of this video essay, closed-captioned, was taken from the book *À Rebours* (1884) by the French writer Joris-Karl Huysmans[11] (1848-1907). In chapter 5 of the novel, the main character, des Esseintes, offers a poetically obsessed description of a painting of Salome by Gustave Moreau (1826-1898), revering her as

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8   Cest Jackie, 2021; Phoenix Theatre Coniston, 2020; Konstantinos Kavakiotis, 2020; Ken Kahle, 2017; HowlRound Theatre Commons, 2016 & Akhil george, 2013.

9   Finale is a music notation software, released by MakeMusic, and used to create sheet music.

10   György Kurtág is a Hungarian composer, pianist and teacher, and the recipient of the Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition in 2006.

11   Joris-Karl Huysmans was a French Decadent novelist whose major works encapsulate the aesthetic, artistic and intellectual life of late 19th century France.

both *Beauty and Beast*, as she became "[…] the symbolic deity of indestructible lust, the goddess of immortal Hysteria"[12] (Huysmans 2008, 80). The correspondences between Oscar Wilde and Huysmans' decadent novel extend beyond the play, as *À Rebours* also relates to Wilde's 1890 book *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in its thematic juxtapositions, as well as containing an almost direct reference of Huysmans' book, as it allegedly is "[…] the unnamed yellow book which Dorian reads, and which profoundly affects him" (Hewitt-McManus 2006, 4).

Manu Yáñez reflection and connotation of *illustrated song*, a practice which consists of "[…] accompanying the lyrics of a pop/rock song with images from films that allude to the song's text" might fit the practical outcome of this video essay, as both create a bridge between the iconographic dimension of the scene and "[…] the *anachronistic* possibilities of audiovisual *collage*" (Yáñez 2014).

MUSIC/ELVIRA
MUSIC/ELVIRA on Vimeo.

The second opera of this triptych is *Don Giovanni*, which premiered in 1787 and was composed by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart[13] (1756–1791). In this audiovisual piece, instead of focusing on the main operatic character, a fictional Spanish seducer based on the stories of Don Juan dating back to the 17th century, the light is

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12   English translation by the author of this article.
13   Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was an 18th century Austrian classical composer, arguably one of the most prolific music composers in history.

shined upon Donna Elvira, a soprano playing "[…] a lady from Burgos, abandoned by Don Giovanni" (Naugle n.d., 11-footnote).

The music playing throughout the whole video is a fragment of "Mi tradi quell'alma ingrata", the aria sung by Elvira in act II, scene 2 – performed in this recording by Cecilia Bartoli in 2001 at Zurich, Switzerland – as she reflects and shares her feelings of betrayal and pity towards Don Giovanni while still caring for him, and these conflicting emotions meddle with her desire for vengeance; curiously, this aria was only composed after the premier of the opera, as a personal request to Mozart by an upcoming Elvira performer. The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard[14] (1813–1855) dwells on this opera in his 1843 book *Either/Or* and provides a very striking and fitting description of Elvira:

> "She is mute in her despair. Her sorrow courses through her with a single beat of the pulse, and it flows outwardly, the passion shines through her in a blaze and can be seen in her outward appearance. Hate, despair, vengeance, love, all break forth to make themselves visibly revealed. At this moment she is picturesque" (Kierkegaard 1992, 160).

Indeed, the main character Don Giovanni has seduced and abandoned Donna Elvira, but in this unique and fleeting moment, she becomes the focus of our attention. Kierkegaard's insights regarding Elvira also provide a beautiful connection with the visual quotations used in this video: what the viewer sees is a reckoning frame, a lonely figure dancing and conducting in a solitary room for an empty crowd, reminiscent of her newly found and quickly lost passion, a way of life when she was a little less numb for dreaming; and just like Elvira, the ghost conductor becomes at this instant "[…] visible and can be seen" (Kierkegaard 1992, 160).

Till det som är vackert (*Pure*) is a movie by Lisa Langseth[15] (1975) premiered in 2010. The main character, portrayed by Alicia Vikander (1988), is a young soul who, in the midst of her troubled life, enjoys a recurring solace in the music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. The 20-year-old Katarina finds herself seduced by the Gothenburg Symphony conductor, after bluffing her way into a receptionist job in said symphony offices, only to be left alone and in love following a one-sided temporary fling. Along with Mozart, Kierkegaard is also one of the main references throughout the movie, as the married maestro introduces and offers Katarina a book by the Danish philosopher. Just like Elvira, she has been wronged by an experienced seductor; just like Elvira, "she is young and yet her life's supply is exhausted […]"; just like Elvira, "she cannot stop loving him and yet he deceived her […]" (Kierkegaard 1992, 165).

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14   Søren Kierkegaard was a Danish author and a major philosophical influence on 20th century ideology, often regarded as the first existentialist.
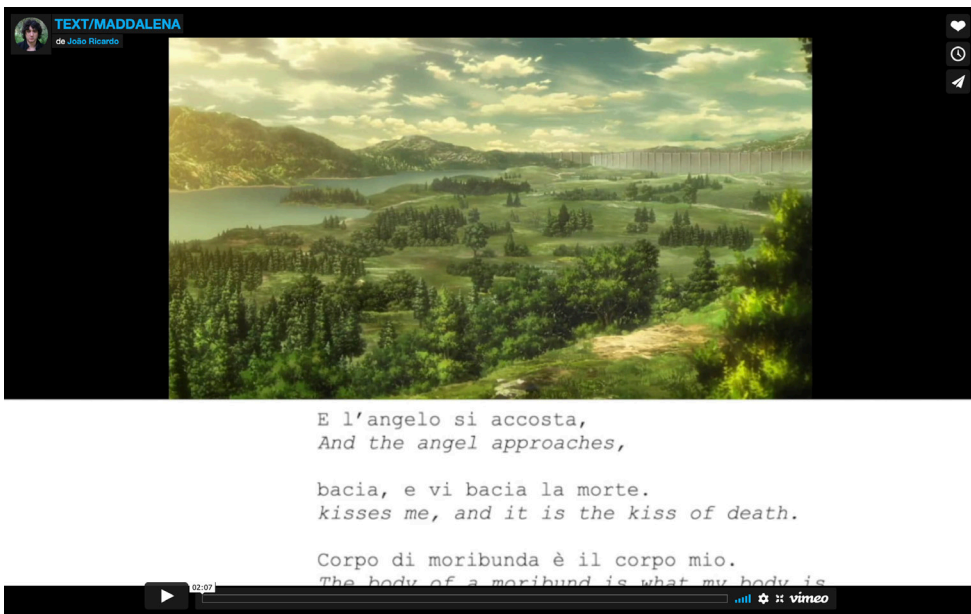
15   Lisa Langseth is a Swedish screenwriter and film director, known for her most recent movies *Euphoria*, from 2017, and *Amor e Anarquia*, from 2020.

The main video inspiration for this essay was undoubtedly the work *Felicity Conditions: Seek and Hide* (A. Martin & C. Álvarez López, 2014) by Cristina Álvarez López and Adrian Martin. Although the scenes are much longer and the black screens much shorter, their piece provided the ingenuity and idea to alternate between shorter and longer scenes and black frames, always accompanied by Elvira's lament and occasionally taking a sneak peek at Katarina's sorrow.

Regarding the textual component of the audiovisual essay, it became rather difficult to disconnect the stimulus from Kierkegaard. But instead of choosing another description of Elvira that would suit Katarina perfectly, the same book *Either/Or* offers this beautiful paragraph, as I tried to chase the poetic awakening of the characters: "May new sufferings torment your soul, but your lips be fashioned as before, for the cry would only frighten us, but the music, that is blissful" (Kierkegaard 1992, 37). The text itself is written on screen as if being typed, just like in the first seconds of another video essay, Catherine Grant's *Screen Memories: A Video Essay on Smultronstället / Wild Strawberries* (Catherine Grant, 2018), but in a somewhat random or chaotic apparent structure, not only so the words wouldn't come across as a translation of the singing voice, but also concealing a second layer of inserted text.

When in serious doubt whether to show Kierkegaard's words on the black screens that interrupt the conducting/dancing scene, the uncertainty became a catalyzer thanks to a statement by Adrian Martin regarding audiovisual essays with no apparent textual layers throughout, which he finds "[…] that they quickly run the risk of becoming merely cryptic […]" (Martin 2012). So, the cryptic critique was tackled literally, and a cryptographic numerical series of the same text was created, as one second represents each letter, so that one word determines the duration of the *blackouts*, intertwined with Vikander's scenes. This application follows the footsteps of composers such as Maurice Ravel (1875-1937), Alban Berg (1885-1935) or Arthur Honegger (1892-1955), who employed cryptographic techniques as a way to inscribe meaning on their pieces and "[…] express a private or admitted symbolism […]" (Perle 1985, 18). Ultimately, this somewhat hidden layer worked extremely well with the overall structure and sentiment of the imagery and the music.

E l'angelo si accosta,
And the angel approaches,

bacia, e vi bacia la morte.
kisses me, and it is the kiss of death.

Corpo di moribunda è il corpo mio.
The body of a moribund is what my body is

TEXT/MADDALENA

TEXT/MADDALENA on Vimeo.

The catalyzer to use this opera on the third audiovisual piece came after a fairly recent re-watch of the movie *Philadelphia* (1993), directed by Jonathan Demme[16] (1944-2017), when Andrew Beckett, the lawyer portrayed by Tom Hanks (1956), introduces, translates and narrates throughout a recording of Maria Callas (1923-1977) singing the famous aria "La Mamma Morta", from Umberto Giordano's[17] (1867-1948) opera *Andrea Chénier* (1896). The character, Maddalena de Coigny, a young and beautiful aristocrat ruined by the Revolution, sings to a public prosecutor about her murdered mother an aria contrasted "[…] between the first part, a tale of death and misery, and the second part, a hymn to love" (Singher 1983, 40).

As the libretto was intended to prevail as the main focus and thematic reasoning of the video essay, the research and inspiration of the use of text in various audiovisual essays reveals itself worth mentioning. The first influence came from double screen audiovisual essays like *Hitchcock & De Palma Split Screen Bloodbath* (Peet Gelderblom, 2016) or *David Lynch's Blue Velvet and The Elephant Man* (Liz Greene, 2015), to name only a few. Maintaining the filmic references for this piece, while wishing to turn away from the recurring vertical split screen practice, new models were found on a different strand of works, the so called *script to screen*, fairly common for the social media movie lover, in videos that combine scenes and

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16   Jonathan Demme was an American filmmaker, producer and screenwriter. He won an Academy Award for Best Director with his 1991 movie *Silence of the Lambs*.
17   Umberto Giordano was an Italian composer, mainly notorious for his operas, who also composed a number of orchestral and chamber works.

scrolling scripts of famous films, like *Pulp Fiction* (MovieMonks, 2017) or *Whiplash* (John August, 2015).

Considering the excessively close relation with the cinematic universe, the imagery used in this piece was not chosen from a movie. Instead, the attentions were focused on *Shingeki no Kyojin* (*Attack on Titan*), following the aria's theme of a murdered paternal figure. The 2013 Japanese manga series created by Hajime Isayama[18] (1986) follows a protagonist out to revenge his deceased mother in a civilization full of man-eating titans, "[…] human-looking creatures that vary in height and size, display little or no intelligence and eat humans for no apparent reason" (Ursini 2017, 21); a famish reminiscence of the mythical creatures from Greek mythology. As the series reaches its climatic ending in the current year of 2021, the concept of loop becomes one of the main plot characteristics. The eternal recurrence concept also influenced the images used in this piece, as the landscapes – found scenes of various episodes from the anime adaptation of Isayama's work – were rearranged to create the notion of a daily cycle.

The music itself is also meant to follow this Nietzschean postulation, through a constant repeated introduction of Jeff Buckley's[19] (1966–1997) cover version of the 1991 Bob Dylan's[20] (1941) song "Mama you've been on my mind". Even though the lyrics don't thematically relate to maternal love and loss, the title alone might be its most recognizable feature, providing an indirect connection to the framework of love and grief that punctuate the video essay ambient. The choice of using the music in this ceaseless fashion might also be traced to cinematic tradition, as is the case of Mark Rappaport's (1942) recently restored short film *Friends*, when in the chapter "Grave Games" (Rappaport 1967, 10:50–13:00) – and in many other chapters throughout the whole movie – the introduction of the song "A White Shade of Pale" (1967) by Procol Harum is played in continuous repetition.

Not only is the title and themes of the song fitting for the maternal tragic love concerning both the image and the text of this audiovisual essay, but the F major chord progression and the *happy* sound recollection of the song creates a great antithesis with the themes of sadness and loss being portrayed. Just like as in many cinematic works when there's a brutal and gruesome murder with an intentional out-of-place soundtrack, the music of this video is meant to arouse the uncomfortableness of the audience, providing a "[…] cheerful nostalgic soundscape as background for violent and disturbing visual images […]" (Dunn 2020, 57).

Choosing a cover instead of Dylan's original version adds an extra layer of intertextuality, as "[…] covers provide an intertextual commentary on another musical

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18   Hajime Isayama is a Japanese manga author, who in 2011 won the Kodansha Manga Award for his best-selling series *Attack on Titan*.
19   Jeff Buckley was an American songwriter, singer, guitarist and, despite his short life, one of the most beloved musicians of the late 20th century.
20   Bob Dylan is one of America's most original and influential songwriters, but also the recipient of the 2016 Nobel Prize in Literature.

work or style" (Butler 2003, 1), but also because Buckley's version, with its senti-mental solo electric guitar, provided a very interesting connection to the loneliness of the aria and the central thematic of the audiovisual work. This kind of cover ver-sion falls under the definition of *interpretive covers*, proposed by Kurt Mosser in his 2008 article, in the section discussing the various details of a *major interpretation of a base song*, which in spite of changes to tempo, melody, instrumentation and/or lyrics, "[…] the base song should still be recognizable at the cover's reference, but the resulting cover, in a fundamental sense, becomes a new song […]" (Mosser 2008, 4).

Final/Remarks

Following the digital demands of the current times, the audiovisual essay has the potential to overtake historical and conventional formats, not only in pieces shared online on video archives like YouTube and Vimeo, but also in increasingly theoretical and scholastic presentations or lectures. Possibly rushed by the pandem-ic, video presentations at scientific conferences have become, if not more common, at least a viable option for the participants, for their spatial and temporal conve-niences but mainly for providing an array of options and alternatives that are scarce when compared with a PowerPoint presentation, thanks to their illustrative and creative possibilities.

Regarding the essays described in this article, the final results are a direct con-sequence of the mentioned works and authors, trending lightly across Lavik's and Kiss' interest in more pragmatic audiovisual essays, regularly accompanied by a tra-ditional presentation of ideas through text close to a recorded academic lecture, but mainly focusing and deepening into the poetical research and creative criticism works of creators like López and Grant, culminating in audiovisual compositions on their own, without formal explanations and commentaries, while also making use of the same scholastic and critical premises. As the videos were meant to be watched and appreciated setting aside the need of a deep explanatory text, short prologues for the three audiovisual works were created – after the first edits – to provide a slight intertextual clue for the viewer but without quoting all the intertex-tual references and the artistic and poetic inspirations.

> "Excessive theoretical treatments and their text-bound accompaniments lose merit in an era of greater cultural productivity and more efficient communications, one in which students and scholars are increasingly becoming creative entrepreneurs, building their reputations through new and more publicly visible forms and platforms. The emergence of affordable information technologies, with their capacity for online self-expression and dissemination, allow for, indeed, actively encourage this new

creativity, potentially resulting in more progressive and enduring forms of knowledge production and articulation" (Kiss 2014).

Ultimately, the three audiovisual works described in this article fall under the category of what Manu Yáñez (2014) connotates as *intuitive essayists/essays*, audiovisual creators and/or audiovisual content "[…] unafraid of hermeticism, who prefer *suggestion* to *evidence*, or *intuition* to *certainty* […]", who approach the already mentioned poetic end of the spectrum. The study and analysis of all mentioned essayists, their works, techniques and processes, propelled and inspired the creation of these pieces, through the transposition of their theoretical and practical outcomes to the musical universe, subverting common and usual formats expected in any audiovisual piece regarding music and any essay regarding opera.

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IMAGE–MUSIC–TEXT:
OPERATIC EXPERIMENTS IN THE AGE OF THE AUDIOVISUAL ESSAY
(summary)

In a video essay on Vimeo, an anonymous comment reads "[…] you've aroused my interest sufficiently to dig deeper into the referenced literature. Thank You!". By quoting different images, texts and music, Catherine Grant's *Touching the Film Object?* has created something new, like a beautiful collage, out of many examples and inspirations, thinking and developing new interconnections; and more interestingly, she exposed her theories with and within a creative object. As Grant argues, her video work gravitates towards Adrian Martin's idea of "mad poetry", a kind of intense theorizing in a creative outcome that at first glance might not present an academic rigor, as a craft which is as much an experimental exercise as any form of traditional research practice. And yet, this creative criticism, this creative way of writing about an artistic object, is becoming more and more usual in both academic and non-academic circles.

Accordingly, the goal of this article is not only to analyze and expose the practices of said researchers and creators, the new formats and concepts, but also to transpose their theoretical and practical outcomes to the musical universe, more specifically opera, by creating and presenting original audiovisual essays that aim to arouse the audience's interest and fascination in the referenced, and not only heard, music.

After a brief exposition of the state of the art, a review of essayists, their embryonic works and techniques that served as examples and inspiration for the present transpositions from film theory and criticism to music and opera, the practical outcomes of this article will be analyzed: original audiovisual works created from opera and rearranged with different audiovisual components from different works, aiming to subvert the most common and usual formats expected in any video regarding music and/or opera.

The end goal is to investigate and explore the combination of fragments related to opera, while at the same time trying to underline its unique characteristics by merging them into new audiovisual pieces, treating opera as the point of departure.

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METAMODERNISM AND THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) PANDEMIC

Abstract: Metamodernism is understood as the dominant cultural logic of the 21st century. Metamodernism's breadth and complexity, as well as its theory's advocacy for contemporaneity, invite for consideration whether the notion could address the most recent global events and the crises after 2020. Therefore, this study designates and explains the five key concepts of metamodernism – metaxy, abstraction, reconstruction, historicity, and a structure of feeling – and uses them to discuss the current state of affairs, the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. The study evaluates the interpretative and discursive potentials of metamodernism, finding that the crisis we now live in can be well-conceptualised from the metamodern perspective, yet at the same time the enormous impact of the crisis brings the usual metamodern perspectives into question and puts the key concepts to test.

Keywords: metamodernism, historicity, structure of feeling, metaxy, abstraction, reconstruction, the coronavirus (Covid-19) crisis, pandemic

INTRODUCTION

Metamodernism is a contemporary cultural paradigm sustaining the idea of a political, cultural, and aesthetic change that, according to its advocates, emerged at the turn of the 21st century and marked the end of postmodernism (Vermeulen & van den Akker 2010, 3). Metamodernism is a "movement representing a post-ideological, open source, globally responsive, paradox resolving, grand nar-

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rative" (Cooper 2017a), recognised and elaborated within a variety of disciplines, from philosophy and aesthetics to political theory, cultural studies, literary and art theory, sociology, and education.

The term "metamodernism" appeared in the literary theory of the 1970s, most notably that of Zavarzadeh (1975), where it was used to convey the transcendence of the typically modernist narrational plane (the inner plane of the character) in the direction of metafiction (the interpenetration of facts and fiction, life and art), irony, black humour, or pastiche.[2] Some decades later, still in the domain of literary theory, Furlani (2002, 713) ascribed additional and somewhat newer meanings to the term "metamodernism": the type of aesthetics that comes after modernism but utilises modernist means. Such purport of "metamodernism" will grow into the term's wide-accepted meaning, first taken by Vermeulen and van den Akker in their seminal article "Notes on metamodernism" (2010). Here the authors carry the term outside its earlier context, applying it to art and culture from around 1999 onwards. In the decade that followed, different writers started seeing metamodernism fit other scholarly disciplines, too, such as political theory (Freinacht[3]) or sociology (Cooper). More recently, metamodernism has become recognised outside of traditional academic platforms as well; it is debated in podcasts and streaming videos and presented through popular performances and memes across social networks (Bastiaanse 2018; Wisecrack 2016).

The discourse on metamodernism is rooted in the perception that the 21st-century cultural, political, and artistic currents cannot be explained anymore (merely) in terms of postmodernism. According to Vermeulen and van den Akker (2017, Ch. 1/8), metamodernism is a suitable term to name "a specific stage in the development of Western capitalist societies, in all its many forms and disguises" – neoliberalism, the Anthropocene, climate change, the widespread use of the Internet, a string of social and right-wing movements (such as the "Occupy" movement, the "Tea party" movement, UKIP under Nigel Farage's leadership), and the changes in the global economy (like the financial crisis of 2008 and its aftermath, or the new "geopolitical hegemony", i.e. "China's state-regulated market system"). The authors propose metamodernism as a dominant cultural logic of Western capitalist societies, "a structure of feeling", a multifunctional and heuristic label for "a range of aesthetic and cultural predilections", "stylistic registers", and philosophies, as well as a period in history (Ibid., Ch. 1/11). Other writers define and explain metamodernism by a similarly magnificent scope of etiquettes – "the mindset or sensibility or cultural code", "a post-postmodern grand meta-narrative", "a developmental stage

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2   Zavarzadeh (1975, 75; see also Abramson 2015) regarded the term "postmodernism" too narrow to encompass different strains in the literature of the 1950s and later. He distinguished the "modernists" (Joyce, Woolfe, and Faulkner) from the "anti-modernists" (Amis, Wain, and Snow), "paramodernists" (Beckett and Nabokov), and the "metamodernists" (John Barth and Thomas Pynchon). Metamodernism in this early sense could be interpreted as a variant of postmodernism.
3   Hanzi Freinacht is the pen name of Daniel Görtz and Emil Friis.

of society", even "a relatively late and rare stage of personal development (Henriques 2020), the "meta-cultural consciousness", "a vision and a possibility", "a more complex form of meaning-making" (Andersen 2019, 16), "a particular lens for thinking about the self, language, culture, and meaning – really, about everything" (Abramson 2017).

The breadth of the concept of metamodernism, as well as the theory of metamodernism's drive toward contemporaneity, make us wonder if the term could address the most recent global events and the crisis that came in 2020 with the coronavirus disease. Have today's cultural, political, social, and artistic currents cut across those from a couple of years ago, hence, can metamodernism sustain the same interpretative and discursive potential it had in previous times? This study aims to answer these questions first by overviewing and explaining the key notions of the theory of metamodernism – metaxy, reconstruction, abstraction, historicity, and a structure of feeling – and then by relating these notions to the Covid-19 pandemic. The study's goal is to show that metamodernism reveals significant potential for conceptualising contemporary tendencies, even though it has set certain ideals that still seem too far to reach – and that might even be too ambitious now that the corona crisis has hit and is bearing unimagined consequences.

1. METAMODERNISM: KEY CONCEPTS

The most influential ideas about metamodernism, in Cooper's (2018) opinion, come from two "schools of metamodernism": the Dutch school (Vermeulen, van den Akker, and their associates) and "the Nordic school" (Freinacht and Cooper himself leaning most toward Freinacht's writings). The Dutch authors focus mostly on metamodern art and culture (Bakirov 2019; Cooper 2017a) and emphasise the concepts of *metaxy, historicity*, and *a structure of feeling*. The other mentioned authors accept these concepts as "foundational" (Cooper 2018) but insist more on the principles of *abstraction* and *reconstruction* in the domains of politics and sociology.[4] Despite differences in focuses, the theoretical paths of all of these thinkers converge and "strive towards similar plateaus" (Cooper 2018), where the core common node is the "developmental lens" (Görtz 2018) through which all thinkers see the coming of metamodernism.

In a succession of supposedly opposed and demarcated historical eras (modernism–postmodernism–metamodernism), metamodernism has been envisioned as "the discourse [...] to replace postmodernism" (Cooper 2017a).[5] Aligning their

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4   There is another circle of Dutch authors, gathered around the *Freedom lab* web platform, whose insights into the connections between metamodernism and the coronavirus pandemic proved to be valuable for the present research.

5   It is (still) not an easy task to designate precisely what type of discourse different ideas of different theorists are shaped into: some discourses seem to be a philosophical/aesthetic platform

early ideas with many of their colleagues' readings of the "decline and demise of the postmodern" (Hutcheon, Lipovetsky, Kirby, Samuels, Bourriaud, etc.), Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010, 1) find the postmodern terms outdated and inadequate to describe not only the contemporary aesthetics but the "ecosystem", "the financial system", and "the geopolitical structure" of today's world as well. The changes that the Dutch authors analyse the most are in the visual arts, where there seems to be an increasing abandonment of "the aesthetic precepts of deconstruction, parataxis, and pastiche in favor of aesthetical notions of reconstruction, myth, and metaxis" (Vermeulen & van den Akker 2010, 2). But the shifts are noticeable in the cultural, economic, and political sense, too, like in the politicians' and CEOs' expressions of a "desire for change" in many interviews, or in the planners' and architects' replacements of "their blueprints for environments with environmental 'greenprints'" (Ibid.).

While Vermeulen and van den Akker's initial denunciation of postmodernism immediately prompted elaboration of metamodernism and warranted the duo's recognition within the theory of post-postmodernism,[6] it was soon toned down significantly by the authors themselves as they continued to theorise metamodernism's far more complex relationship with postmodernism than a mere negation or a critique. The outbalance of the previous censure of postmodernism came in Vermeulen and van den Akker's remarks such as that metamodernism "attempts to incorporate postmodern stylistic and formal conventions while moving beyond them" (van den Akker & Vermeulen 2017, Ch. 1/5) and that it oscillates "between what we may call [...] postmodern and pre-postmodern (and often modern) predilections" (van den Akker & Vermeulen 2017, Ch. 1/22).

So, metamodernism finds its impetus in an active dialogue with postmodernism and also (pre-post)modernism. It embraces some typically modern and some typically postmodern solutions, integrating "rationality and emotions, logic and imagination, scientific truth, and belief or faith" (Dumitrescu 2014, 15). Dember (2018) posits the "subjective Felt Experience" as the "central motivation of metamodernism", and in the light of this preoccupation, metamodernism is able to conduct its critique of "the ironic distance of postmodernism, the scientific reductionism

and an analytical approach to art and culture ("the Dutch school of metamodernism" – but not exclusively), while others seem more socially and politically engaged, proposing even political and social programs ("the Nordic school" – but not exclusively). Some discourses (this study included) tend to systematise other discourses on metamodernism (many of Cooper's texts, for example, also fall into this category).

6   Although widely in use, the term "post-postmodernism" to Vermeulen and van den Akker seems "syntactically correct but semantically meaningless" (Vermeulen & van den Akker 2010, 3). Other authors proposed different terms as umbrella-terms for the times after postmodernism: "hypermodernism" (Lipovetsky), "digimodernism" (Kirby), "automodernism" (Samuels), "altermodernism" (Bourriaud) (Ibid.), "postirony", "cosmodernism", "re-modernism", (Konstantinou 2017. Ch. 6/1), or "reflective modernism" (Mitrović 2017, 6, 191).

of modernism, and the pre-personal inertia of tradition[7]".[8] "Something seemed to have changed in the new millennium that made it cool again to express unabashed feelings – joy, wonder, sadness, vulnerability, triumph – in our art, and in everyday life, unfettered by the ever-present ironic snark that controlled the nineties and earlier", notes Dember (Ibid.).

The interplay between postmodernism and modernism produces the "both-neither dynamic" and leads to the principle, or rather, the state of **metaxy** (*μεταξὐ*) – a term that Vermeulen and van den Akker trace all the way back to Plato's *Symposium*, where it was used to describe "a sense of in-betweenness" (van den Akker & Vermeulen 2017, Ch. 1/21). In Vermeulen and van den Akker, metaxy becomes a metaphor for the "metamodern condition" (van den Akker, Gibbons, & Vermeulen 2017, Acknowledgements; Cooper 2018). The authors use it as the iconic embodiment of what they take to be the three main meanings of the Greek word "meta" relevant in the context of the theory of metamodernism: 1. with or among (metamodernism is situated with or among older and newer historical periods), 2. between (metamodern aesthetics is "characterised by an oscillating in-betweenness or, [...] conflicting positions"), 3. after (refers to the "shift from postmodernism to metamodernism", so it is the chronological aspect of metamodernism) (van den Akker & Vermeulen 2017, Ch. 1/18–25).

In Cooper (2017a), the prefix "meta" is used differently. It is joined with words of cognitive and epistemic meaning ("metacognition", "metanoia", and "meta-analysis"), and as such, it is supposed to signify intellectual advancement aided by fast, technological communication. The meta-epistemology refers to deep and profound thinking and learning, the kind of mental endeavour that strives to arrive at some complex, "totalistic" solutions (Cooper 2017b) to our equally complex, heavily politicised problems and crises (like climate change, racism, drug policy, or war). Such an endeavour in the theory of metamodernism is called **abstraction** – thinking about the multifaceted problems by raising them on "the level of general understanding" (Benjamin Bratton, TEDx Talks 2013), using "demystification and reconceptualisation" (Ibid.), with a goal of revealing "unknown common truths across conceptually related studies" (Cooper 2017b).[9]

Metamodern epistemology, as seen by another advocate of metamodernism, Bratton (TEDx Talks 2013), criticises the postmodern oversimplification of the issues of our world. Postmodern epistemology had a habit of "taking something with substance and value and coring it out so that it can be swallowed without chewing" (Ibid.). Bratton (European Graduate School Video Lectures 2016) advis-

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7   In Dember (2018), the tradition refers to the pre-modern era.
8   Dumitrescu (2007) similarly notices that metamodernism is "a reaction to [(post)modernism] (especially to its fragmentarism, individualism, excessive analyticity, and extreme specialization)".
9   The Dutch authors do not insist on the concept of abstraction, however, van den Akker (in collaboration with Kloeg (2020, 61)), explores the possibility of the *universal*, which is close to abstraction by assuming the "rais[ing of] this or that from the status of the lowly particular to the high ground of the universal".

es that now in metamodernism we are to face "our most frightening problems" by overviewing the issues and *reconstructing* some of the old narratives. Smith (cited in Cooper 2017a) also underlines such an epistemological approach and calls it a solution to the "Derrida trap", which with its endless cycle of deconstructions led to "mindless relativism". **Reconstruction** is supposed to "re-assemble whatever you have deconstructed into a 'better' version" (Ibid.), and at the same time, it is supposed to bring practical solutions to problems, which is something that post-structuralism rarely offered. To follow deconstruction with reconstruction – this is "the metamodern dictum", Freinacht insists (2019, Ch. 17/79). However, while rooting for reconstruction, Freinacht embraces some limitations that postmodern-ism used to shed light on and warns: "We must accept ... that we will never obtain the truth in any absolute meaning of the term"; the reconstruction can only happen in a form of a "provisional synthesis, a synthesis that can never be considered final or as absolute truth" (Ibid.).

Reconstruction, therefore, is not meant to recreate old narratives but should produce "meta-narratives" (Freinacht 2015; Henriques 2020), like universal and encompassing Knowledge (not only a focused understanding of something), or a History that is a shared sentiment (not a pure chronology). The existence of History in the times after its meticulous postmodern deconstruction and proclaimed end – especially in Fukuyama's article "The End of History?" (1992) – has been a huge inspiration and a driving force of Vermeulen and van den Akker's theory.[10] The authors discuss changes that occurred within the "social situation" of the early 2000s and how these changes created an impression in people that a new era, a continuation of the history, happened (2017, Section I/1).[11] It is exactly the impres-sion itself, the *feeling* of something appearing, that Vermeulen and van den Akker insist on. Metamodern historicity is less about a (revival of a) particular historical moment and much more about the production of a *zeitgeist* and the renewed sense of **historicity**.

Historicity is a layered notion. Ricoeur (cited in van den Akker 2017, Section I/1) describes it as a "specific modality in which 'man is present to himself as a being in history'", hence, it is inherently spatial as well as temporal. Minding its complexity, Heiser, whose writings heavily influenced the Dutch authors, sees his-toricity as "super-hybridity", a plenitude of historical, geographical, and cultural

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10   Explaining metamodernism, van den Akker and Vermeulen (2017, Ch. 1/3) assert that the phenomenon "is about the bend of History and its associated 'senses of a bend' that have come to define contemporary cultural production and political discourse". The authors explicitly sustain Jameson's (1992) idea of "cultural logic", according to which there has to be some cultural dominance in every era. Possibly, they also implicitly endorse Bourdieu's (1990, 52–65; 1993) concept of "habitus" or Dalhaus' (1979, 97) notion of "aesthetic habituation", which both assume some set coordinates in art and culture of a period, much like the concept of "cultural logic".

11   Fukuyama (2012) himself revised some of his earlier premature claims, making History potent again by questioning the survival of liberal democracy, which for him previously used to mark the final stage of human evolution.

contexts, intertwining in the era of advanced technologies and the Internet (Heiser 2010a; 2010b; 2017). By the quality of super-hybridity, metamodernism extends and embraces postmodernism and reconstructs History. In its ever-recycling endeavour, the aesthetics of metamodernism is equated with a pleiad of "new" aesthetic phenomena, such as the New Romanticism (arts), the New Weird or Nu-Folk (music), the New Sincerity (literature), the New Mannerism (crafts), etc.[12] But, Heiser (2017, Ch. 4/9) considers the jeopardy of metamodern recycling that oftentimes goes beyond the aesthetics and, by way of loose and asynchronous selection and re-usage of mythical symbols, goes to produce seemingly "autochthonous" political and ideological practices of, for example, racisms, terrorism, and tyranny (in these terms Heiser (2017, Ch. 4/15) investigates "the practices of the infamous Islamic State group", and reads the symbols and emblems of the Nazi party).

Because they focus on the sentiment and a feeling of a time, Vermeulen and van den Akker, in a manner of abstraction, create another metaphor for metamodernism: "**a structure of feeling**" (van den Akker & Vermeulen 2017, Ch. 1/14-17). They borrow the phrase from Raymond Williams, relying also on Williams' notion of "a culture of a period". Adding "feelings" to the otherwise adamant notion of structure makes the phrase "a structure of feeling" somewhat of an oxymoron. It is a deliberately complicated notion because it is taken to permeate all of our lived experience, marked by an overall sentiment of a *zeitgeist*. According to Williams (1962, 63), our understanding of culture always fails to encompass the whole previous cultural experience which could inform us about the culture; therefore, our understanding is limited, it is bound to be somewhat faulty, even biased, as we are confined to our present moment. We tend to gain a feeling toward a particular culture, rather than a firm body of knowledge about it based on pure historical facts. A structure of feeling is "a particular quality of social experience […] historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or of a period" (Williams, cited in van den Akker & Vermeulen 2017, Ch. 1/16). Even though van den Akker and Vermeulen (2017, Ch. 1/14) see this structure most strikingly in arts, they emphasise its irreducibility to any movement, style, or phenomenon; it is "a sentiment that is so pervasive as to call it structural".

Bearing in mind the key concepts of the theory of metamodernism and their features, the following is an attempt to relate them to the Covid-19 pandemic, with the goal of discovering how successful the conceptualisation of the current "structure of feeling" (the pandemic) might be from this perspective.

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12   These names of "movements" and their respective appearances in arts and crafts are displayed in van den Akker, Gibbons, and Vermeulen 2017.

2. METAMODERNISM AND THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS, OR, THE CRISIS OF METAMODERNISM?

Metamodernism is taken to be omnipresent but to still hold a lot of promise as it is yet supposed to reach its full potential and define the entire 21st century (Cooper 2020). Some years ago, Freinacht (cited in Cooper 2017a) outlined policy objectives of metamodernism, elaborating them from an ideological stance but also as a political programme: "clean energy, demilitarization, universal basic income, universal health care/drug legalization, universal education, human rights", a society that is unalienated, equal, and ecologically sustainable, functional socialism, and a world without wars. However, last year the coronavirus crisis began, marking a turning point in the lives of all of us.

On the global level, the pandemic has laid enormous divisions across the countries in multiple domains – political, economic, humanitarian, educational, etc. (Makau 2021; Parkinson 2021; Stiglitz 2020). Its twofold effect is that it has "exposed and exacerbated inequalities between countries just as it has within countries" (Stiglitz 2020). The Covid-19 virus "has not been an equal opportunity virus: it goes after people in poor health and those whose daily lives expose them to greater contact with others" (Ibid.). The disease hits poor countries and, at the same time, countries with advanced economies but unevenly accessible health care (like the US). In a joint statement by ILO, FAO, IFAD, and WHO[13] from last October (2020), the following implications of the coronavirus pandemic are listed as most notable and problematic: a dramatic loss of human life worldwide, the risk of extreme poverty for "tens of millions of people", undernourishment and poor health, an existential threat for enterprises, the risk of losing livelihoods for nearly half of the global working force, a "lack [of] social protection and access to quality health care", "a lack of safety and labour protection" for the workers, and the fragility of the food system due to trade restrictions. There has been a severe drop of the Financial Times Stock Exchange (by "14.3% in 2020, its worst performance since 2008"), while "many people have lost their jobs or seen their incomes cut" (Jones, Palumbo & Brown 2021).

Stiglitz (2020) summarises comprehensively the main reasons for this huge vulnerability of the systems as we know them: "the preexisting state of health care and health inequalities; a country's preparedness and the resiliency of the economy; the quality of public response, including reliance on science and expertise; citizens' trust in government guidance; and how citizens balanced their individual 'freedoms' to do as they pleased with their respect for others." The preparedness of individual countries to handle and resolve the pandemic, as well as to cope with

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13   ILO – The International Labour Organization, a United Nations (UN) agency; FAO – The Food and Agriculture Organization, a United Nations agency; IFAD – International Fund for Agricultural Development, a United Nations agency; WHO – World Health Organization

its hardly conceivable consequences, was obviously insufficient and unsatisfying. While some significant efforts to confront the pandemic have been made – notably the obtainment, distribution, and administration of the COVID-19 vaccine doses – certain such efforts only further uncovered the "deep fissures in the global governance systems for health" (Ekström, Berggren, Tomson, Gostin, Friberg & Ottersen 2021; see also United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, 2021). The current global health situation is far from what Freinacht had envisioned for metamodernism. The pandemic seems to have pushed the metamodern ideals farther in the future, or, it has set back a lot of assumed progress that metamodern thinkers counted on.

Yet again, does that necessarily mean that the pandemic is creating some kind of an anti-metamodern shift? Some of the biggest advocates of metamodernism, like Vermeulen, van den Akker, and their circle, seem to be pretty restrained when it comes to this topic, possibly waiting to better see the aftermath of the pandemic. For some we can only implicitly guess that their answer would be "no": Cooper, for instance, theorises metamodernism as an "ultimate", "totalizing ideology [...], because it implies building permanent peace and sustainability based on conciliating between past, present, and future" (Cooper 2017a). There can be "nothing beyond metamodernism" (Ibid.), he claims, utilising the oscillatory nature of metamodernism, by which the pendulum can go beyond the past and the present so that metamodernism could tie in with anything that has come in the last couple of decades and will come next – the corona crisis included. Finally, there are writers who explicitly consider the coronavirus pandemic as a true metamodern phenomenon. The researchers at *Freedom lab* (Freinacht included) support such claims by viewing this pandemic as "one of the first hyperhistoric phenomena" (FreedomLab 2020) – where the term "hyperhistory", as we will see, stands very close to Heiser's "super-hybridity" and Vermeulen and van den Akker's understanding of historicity.

It can be said that hyperhistory is historicity immersed in technology. Hyperhistory is "a convergence of different histories and mutual connectedness of formerly separate information regimes", enabled by digital technology and gadgets (FreedomLab 2020). Hyperhistory is a "worldview" based on "dephysicalized flows and digital objects" (van der Schalk 2018, 1). The broken-down, binary information is cheap and easily transferable and re-blocked into "meta-information systems" (Ibid., 2) i.e. reconstructed systems. In the Digital Age, the coronavirus is not only a global health issue but is also a real-time mediated event (with interactive maps, counters, statistics, live streams, etc.) and a "viral phenomenon". "Rather than a local problem (such as Ebola, which remained mainly limited to West Africa), for the first time in history, there is a phenomenon that captures the attention and interest of almost all people on Earth" (FreedomLab 2020).

The technological aspect of hyperhistory – and metamodernism for that matter – is (luckily) more substantial than solely spectacular. As a bright example, by using advanced and efficient technological means, South Korea managed to put the

virus under control and minimise its impact on the country's people already in the first couple of months after the outbreak of the corona disease (Campbell and Heesu 2020). "A comprehensive contact-tracing operation was put in place, partnered with a rapid expansion of testing. On March 20 [2020], South Korea was carrying out 100 tests for every positive one that came back, the same day it recorded its 100th death" (FT Visual and Data Journalism Team 2020). As a point of comparison, "it took Italy three more months and 34,000 deaths to reach the same testing levels" as South Korea (Ibid.).

As with the concept of historicity, the corona times fit perfectly the metaphor of a structure of feeling, too. Our present is marked by occurrences, activities, complications, policies and measures, attitudes, topics, and vocabulary so distinctive and so pervasive that together they create a very unique and characteristic sentiment, a sense of a *zeitgeist*. Social distancing, isolation and self-isolation, the disruption of our regular schedule, the containment and quarantine – these and many more make up a "specific modality", the habitus, or the cultural logic of the corona crisis. In one of his writings (FreedomLab 2020a), Freinacht identifies the "mood of corona", or "the different moods that characterize the corona crisis and the accompanying period of (relative) isolation and quarantine". The moods are not (only) experienced on the level of an individual subject, but are a social state, interpersonal, shared emotions – "intersubjective atmospheres" (Ibid.).

By trying to detect these moods, Freinacht conducts an abstraction of the current crisis and "prepares" it for theoretical acceptance and embedding (for him, as a definitely metamodern concept). It is a valuable endeavour, given what now seems like the still inescapable state of metaxy that is getting in the way of the theory's grasp into the further future. We are presently living in the state of blatant metaxy/in-betweenness – between the "often opposing ends of a continuum (fear and hope, stress and boredom)", amidst the "ambiguity in how we experience the corona crisis" (FreedomLab 2020). We are between quarantining and running errands, between social distancing and vivid online interaction, between intimate concerns and global trends and statistics, between different beliefs, effective and inefficient measures, true and false data. And in this state, we are trying to hold on to something – a reconstructed value or narrative, be it family, science, education, entertainment, going outdoors, training, or a hobby.

While metamodernism was conceived as an answer to different political and social crises (Cooper 2018) – and we can add global crisis/the COVID-19 pandemic to that now – it assumes progress, too, or "a progressive project" that would embody Freinacht's ideals in the end. According to some writings of van den Akker and Kloeg, Freinacht himself, and Cooper, the metamodern progressive project must in fact be political. Van den Akker and Kloeg (2020, 62–63) devise the project in Gramscian terms: a project that is "serious about hegemonic politics", but at the same time, "populist in its appeal". It is supposed to "raise popular thought from its muddy, particular position by re-articulating it in the light of a universal position".

It is not a simple task, making a different set of values and ideas – those beyond the current state of affairs – into a hegemony; but it can be achieved, judging by the words of van den Akker and Kloeg, through abstraction.

In his metamodern political philosophy, Freinacht (2019, Ch. 13/56) similarly considers the importance of the particular (he sees it in the intimate, subjective, personal, "inner experience of humans"[14]) and its imprint on the ideas of a higher order. The main metamodern goal is for society to work "actively and seriously with the development of inner experience!" (Ibid.).

For Cooper (2017a), the metamodern political "project" was Bernie Sanders' politics back in 2017; this is when Cooper called Sanders "a metamodern politician", whose "defeat was the failure of American society to learn the lesson at hand. The result was the election of the nightmarish-cartoonish wildcard Donald Trump". Now that Trump's presidency is over, the prospects of metamodernism in America could maybe consolidate on the "meso level" – the level of local civil institutions and organisations, and universities (Franks 2020). For Freinacht (2019, Ch. 13/56), the goal is to save (and reconstruct) democracy, which is particularly hard in a world where there are seemingly democratic values and procedures (e.g. voting), yet decisions are "made in a closed room". "We are approaching a final countdown for democracy. [...] The clock is ticking. Either we begin the slow and cumbersome process of continuously reinventing and updating democracy, or it simply drifts away into space" (Ibid., Ch. 10/30–37).

But besides the failed and only theoretically designed metamodern political projects, has there been a solid example of a state that outlines metamodern progress, especially with respect to the coronavirus crisis? New Zealand comes to mind as it has dealt with the disease mainly very successfully (Ministry of Health 2021; McClure 2021; Melinek 2021) and "is working to redeploy some underused resources to build the kind of economy that should mark the post-pandemic world: one that is greener and more knowledge-based, with even greater equality, trust, and solidarity" (Stiglitz 2020).

Based on all of the above, the key metamodern concepts are satisfyingly applicable to the node points of the coronavirus pandemic and, overall, our current times. The suspense ending of the pandemic, and the pandemic's still not quite clear but for sure immense consequences, prevent us from predicting whether the platform of metamodernism will fully suit the post-pandemic overall cultural sentiment/ *zeitgeist*. In return, the flexibility of the theory of metamodernism and its key concepts could substantially determine how metamodern the future state of affairs will be – –to put it in metamodern terms, the question is whether the "New Normal" (Corpuz 2021, 344) will become yet another metamodern "new/nu" structure of feeling.

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14   In this, Freinacht is close to Dember (2018), who, as we saw earlier, posits the "subjective Felt Experience" as the "central motivation of metamodernism".

CONCLUSION

Metamodernism is seen to have big aspirations as a theoretical concept, but also, it is set to bring pragmatic solutions to contemporary problems. Freinacht (2019, Introduction/48) claims boldly that political metamodernism "eats all of the existing ideologies alive". Cooper (2017a) predicts that metamodernism "could evolve to be a superordinate philosophical framework", fully capable of emancipation from the "matrix-like culture and systemic entropy". Metamodernism's goal is to address the meta-crisis by means of "social transformation to a permaculture ecology, a steady state economy, and the empowerment of secular humanist global civil society" (Ibid.). This process requires intellectual revolution that would rely on meta-thinking, metacognition (thinking about thinking), and metanoia (to change one's mind), as well as on abstraction – raising the particular on the level of general understanding (Cooper), or the universal (van den Akker, Kloeg), in pursuit for all-around solutions to complex problems.

This study has accepted metamodernism as a philosophical, social, cultural, political, and aesthetic conceptualisation of recent decades and current times. It has tried to evaluate the possibility of viewing global crises – referring to the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, its numerous causes and dreadful effects that are still to be recognised fully – from the eyes of metamodern cultural logic, its manifestations, and key theoretical concepts: metaxy, abstraction, deconstruction, historicity, and a structure of feeling. It has found that metamodernism is a potent explanatory platform offering a dynamic and stimulative approach to the pandemic and, overall, our present state of the world. However, given the open-ended quality of the crisis, how metamodern the future will be, or, what metamodernism could become, is yet to be determined. The oscillatory nature of metamodernism – metaxy – is taken to thrive from the friction and sometimes reconciliation of the postmodern and the pre-postmodern, often modern; but when there is the uncertainty of the future in the equation, especially the one initiated by hugely unexpected global events such as the Covid-19 disease, predictions complicate. To use metamodern vocabulary, what remains uncertain is how structurally appropriate for the metamodern structure of feeling can/will be something that brings to it a whole set of unique, distinctive feelings. On the discursive plane, the future is to uncover how reminiscent of other metamodern "new" aesthetics will the "New Normal" be; also, we are to mind the agenda/the purpose of how is the (Hi)story of the crisis reconstructed and told. Metamodernism aims to reconstruct sets of values ("or families of values, groups of values, structures of values") that make up "bigger stories" (Görtz 2018), and Freinacht (2020), very similarly to Wiliams, warns that "we can only recount and reflect upon the past from our own historical vantage point". It is indeed hard to know how we will, for example, recall and retell the coronavirus pandemic in 10 or 20 years.

Even though the connections between the selected metamodern concepts and the pandemic are narrowed and probably even simplified for this study's purpose, the overarching concern of today's metamodern thought certainly is whether we will, in Cooper's words (2017b), "collectively intervene in the right direction (and in time) to build a sane, healthy, and vibrant global society, or [...] continue to make catastrophic bullheaded policies that build the stack into a panopticon style matrix. This is the metamodern 'choice'". With the hopeful coming of less stressful and more reflexive times, metamodernism could potentially turn to the best, most efficient, and not purely necessary solutions.

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METAMODERNISM AND THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) PANDEMIC
(summary)

In 2010, Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker proposed metamodernism as a term to name the "emerging structure of feeling" (2010, 2) of the 21st century, most evident in art and culture. Today, the notion of metamodernism is widely adopted. In the works of many authors, it surpasses creative and cultural domains and becomes a political (Hanzi Freinacht) and social (Brent Cooper) phenomenon whose goal is to seek practical solutions such as clean energy and ecological sustainability, universal human rights, health care and education, and a war-free, socially and economically equal world. As a new paradigm and a cultural logic, metamodernism is a concept charged with meaning, with a lot of interpretative and discursive potential. The present study explores this potential by relating the key

concepts of the theory of metamodernism (metaxy, abstraction, reconstruction, historicity, and a structure of feeling) to the newest global events and crisis – the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. Metamodern historicity refers to the sense of the return of History that emerged after postmodern deconstructions of the narrative. It assumes historical development – in Vermeulen and van den Akker especially with respect to postmodernism; in Freinacht especially with respect to the gradual shifts of epochs – but it is, even more, a *zeitgeist*, a feeling of a distinctive time and place. Since this feeling is so pervasive and unique, metamodernism is called "a structure of feeling", a modality that is specific to our century. This "structure" is marked by a complex relationship between postmodernism and pre-postmodernism/principally modernism (Vermeulen, van den Akker), or the past, the present, and the future (Cooper). Metamodernism constantly oscillates between the mentioned poles and its singularity emerges from oscillations. The metamodern state of in-betweenness found its metaphor in the concept of metaxy. With the advent of metamodernism and the coming of Web 2.0, the process of abstraction started to permeate thought and learning, calling for a comeback of a profound approach to understanding things. Through abstraction, one is to recognise the particularities in the world as belonging to a "big picture", the metamodern structure, and to be able to raise the particularities to the level of universal. The outcome of abstraction, therefore, is a reconstruction of some big narrative (like History). But through this "metamodern epistemology" (Cooper 2017a), practical solutions are to be found – complex problems invite equally complex answers. The corona crisis is precisely that, "multidimensional: it's a crisis from a political, economic, social, geopolitical and humanitarian point of view" (FreedomLab 2020). It has revealed essential inequalities between people and between countries, and great vulnerability of the systems of humanity as we know them. Yet, even with holding off the presupposed metamodern ideals, the current crisis is not anti-metamodern: the pandemic is a hyperhystoric phenomenon (both tangible and digitally mediated), a structure of feeling(s) and moods ("the moods of corona" – Freinacht), an oscillation (metaxy) between many opposing ends and ambiguities (fear and hope, isolation and online social interaction, etc.), it bears reconstructions of "modern" notions such as family or science (medicine, vaccines), and finally, it urges a highly abstracted "political project" of "reinventing and updating democracy" (Freinacht 2019, 230–231), as well as attaining other metamodern ideals, hopefully, in the post-corona times.

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FREEDOM AS VIRUS: A CRITIQUE OF THE NEOLIBERAL NOTION OF FREEDOM AND AN ANALYSIS OF ITS CULTURAL CONSEQUENCES

Abstract: The extent to which the COVID pandemic has been shaped by communication is enigmatic as the very term "viral" has become a term of information science as much as of biology. Insofar as sizable populations have become cynical about information regarding COVID, their behavior has accelerated the threat of the virus. This paper proposes that this pandemic is fundamentally a crisis of communication emerging from antagonisms and inconsistencies latent within a general concept of "freedom". The notion of freedom that has emerged with neoliberalism is one of a lack of regulation. Such a naive idea of freedom becomes particularly problematic when compounded with the classical liberal value of freedom of speech. This paper addresses the impossibility of unlimited speech, particularly on the internet, focusing on the desire such impossibility stimulates. This desire is an economic fuel for social media platforms. Insofar as artists share their practices via social media and generally use these platforms for networking, their practices inherit contradictions that artists must become conscious of to prevent a web-based practice from becoming emotionally exploitive and economically complicit. This crisis amplifies those contradictions that drive the artist to the point of despair.

Keywords: internet, freedom, neoliberalism, speech, social media, expression, censorship, COVID, desire, crisis

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"Freedom is not free."
Ronald Reagan

In an ironic twist, the voices of Republicans across the United States are decrying the risk to liberty posed by the free market. This is because Donald Trump's failed reelection was followed by a more consequential defeat: the suspension of his Twitter account. Suddenly, the party that defended a bakery owner's right to refuse service to a gay couple (Masterpiece Cakeshop, Ltd. v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission 2017) doubles back to explain why Twitter's refusal to host Trump's words represents an infringement on that value most sacred to liberalism: the freedom of speech.

While it is tempting to dismiss the Republicans for blatant hypocrisy, it is important to realize this is a point on which the left and the right can agree. While interrogating Mark Zuckerberg, Rep. Joshua Hawley, a staunch Trump supporter, referred to tech companies as "modern-day robber barons" (Breaking the News: Censorship, Suppression, and the 2020 Election 2020), evoking the language of 19th-century labor movements. This is not to endorse Hawley's character but simply to emphasize the possibility, however remote, that the seed of class-consciousness implanted by right-wing populism might blossom into a refutation of policies that benefit mainly US-based, globalist corporations to the detriment of the global laboring class. I concur with Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe that the problem with right-wing populism is that it constitutes a populace on racism and xenophobia, around identity (Mouffe 2019). It's not impossible that in crushing the threat of white nationalism in the US and Europe, a more fundamental conflict will be exposed.

The above contextualizes German Chancellor Angela Merkel's claim that Trump's Twitter ban is "problematic" (AP 2021). Not wrong per se, but problematic insofar as it presents a problem. The problem is the absence of a common understanding of freedom generally and freedom of speech particularly. The leadership of cynico-authoritarians such as Trump accelerates this problem to the point of crises as their strategies rely on hacking liberal notions of freedom. Trump has consistently employed ambiguity in his utterances to suggest actions to his followers without becoming liable. He relied on the fact that he would never be held accountable for his use of language without inciting a constitutional crisis. Now that he is being held accountable (not by government, but by business, just like market fundamentalists wanted) the crisis has arrived.

How strange is it that this crisis arrived within the context of the COVID pandemic? The two crises have merged, accelerating the destructiveness of the virus by implicating such measures as mask-wearing with fear of big government. The COVID crisis has been, to a considerable degree, a crisis of communication.

The consequences of this compounded crisis are of particular importance for artists. Never before has the functioning of culture so relied on algorithmically governed platforms. In the absence of physical gallery spaces, artists have turned to the same platforms of communication utilized by Trump to cultivate followers. The institutional barrier that quarantines "high" from popular culture has been broken as galleries and museums have clumsily come to realize they cannot naively translate their exhibitions into a digital format. Most importantly, as web-based is the most viable of practices during this time of social transformation, this culmination of events has forced artists to reckon with the romantic idea of artistic freedom that is still the template. The effects of this reckoning will remain even after social distancing ceases to be necessary. "Normal" cannot be returned to.

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English collapses two different concepts into one word: free. A language such as Spanish keeps these concepts distinct with the words libre and gratis: liberty (free from governance) and gratuity (free of charge, or a gift). Ronald Reagan's famous "freedom isn't free" line, so effective in convincing Anglo Americans that war is always justified, relies on this act of erasure. Applying Regan's truism specifically to freedom of speech gives it a new meaning. The ability to speak "freely" comes at a cost.

One can define this cost in several ways, including the cost of the medium of communication. Publishing is not free. One must have sufficient capital to publish a book. Self-publishing online is cheaper, but still not free. During the COVID crisis, the value of the United States' tech stocks has surpassed the value of the entire European stock market (Wink 2020). As the tech market booms and public spaces close, the internet becomes the locus of civic activity. As always, not having access to capital amplifies class division. This digital divide exists between wealthy and poor countries (Lucas and Sylla 2003) as well as between wealthy and poor citizens generally (Anderson and Madhumitha 2019). One's ability to communicate to the masses via access to these platforms is not a gift.

Insofar as the tech companies that have come to colonize the internet have programmed their algorithms to prioritize attention, an amalgamation of utterance and economics emerges.

The discrepancy between pro-market and liberal values is evident where speech is transformed into a commodity. Internet media researcher Renee DiResta claims "these opaque algorithms with their singular purpose – 'keep watching' – coupled with billions of users is a dangerous recipe," pointing out that disinformation flourishes in this environment (DiResta 2018). The commodification of speech is generating awareness that freedom of speech should not imply freedom of reach.

While speech is not free in the sense that it is economically regulated, technology does tend towards becoming increasingly affordable. Thus, platforms of speech

tend towards becoming ever more accessible. If we choose to organize social forces equitably, the cost of self-publishing should become less of a barrier over time. However, speech is fundamentally not free insofar as it is grammatically regulated. Language is implicitly governed by rules, some as arbitrary as the organization of nouns and verbs, which differs between languages, others as fundamental as the very notion of presence. There is an inherent limit, or lack, embedded in speech.

In keeping with the terminology developed by Derrida, there is an inherent process of writing, arche-writing, that traces the différance between all terms. There is no speech without writing and no writing without this fundamental trace. No signifier ever communicates its signified directly, but functions within a network of traces. Thus, meaning is always deferred. This différance is the basis of presence, as an object only ever appears against a background from which it is differentiated. A signifier is defined by what it is not, by limit. Unlimited communication, or free speech, is a contradiction, a sort of bad faith that undermines the role of différance in language.

Freedom of speech, in the neoliberal sense of speech without limitations, is speech without writing, speech that is not given a temporality/spatiality. The search for unlimited speech is akin to the search for the absolute. This is a sort of alchemical quest in which the word (logos) is the thing: the transcendental signified at the heart of ontotheology, the presence without lack, the experience of unlimited pleasure. Yet Lacan asserts another limit: joissance. Pleasure has a limit past which it becomes pain. The quest for the thing-in-itself leads to death, the erasure of difference.

The old meme song "The Internet is for Porn" from Avenue Q here takes on a whole new meaning. The internet is where regulated language is used to find the unlimited presence of the logos, to transcend the limit on pleasure. The internet accelerates desire. Corporate platform providers are those forces that capitalize on the exploitation of this desire. Artist Cauleen Smith cautions in her COVID Manifesto, Tenet #1: "The Internet is not the answer" (Cauleen Smith 2020).

This more fundamental issue becomes practical when we recognize that the internet is a medium of writing. Like Sol LeWitt's drawings, even images are written. This writing is translated by computers such that it is made invisible unless a user adopts unusual browsing habits. This written internet is not always invisible in the sense of redacted; much of the internet's writing can be accessed and languages of web design such as HTML and CSS are not difficult to understand. They are not so much like foreign languages as they are hyper-regulated versions of the user's familiar language.

This is not to say reading the internet is intuitive, particularly when one ventures beyond HTML and CSS. Insofar as communication is innately a guessing game, in which utterances are made, interpreted, and evaluated via feedback, communicating with a computer is communicating with a partner who has an extremely limited capacity to guess, who can only understand literal declarations. As demonstrated

by the practice of Harold Cohen and AARON, a computer is not a tool but a collaborator. To communicate with this inflexible partner, grammar must be regulated to the extreme. As these languages become more fundamental arche-writing becomes evident. The regulated quality of computer languages is used to convey inflexibility in the film War Games, when Dr. Stephen Falken tells the protagonists to get off his property by instructing, "Path. Follow path. Gate. Open gate. Through gate. Close gate" (Badham 1983, 1:18:45 to 1:19:06).

That things (nouns or variables) can only exist as objects of language after their meaning has been declared is not something one needs to consider while communicating customarily. The declaration "let" in JavaScript reads somewhat biblical, as if the programmer creates a world out of the most fundamental of materials: presence. JavaScript is not the most fundamental of computer languages, but binary, a writing that isn't translated for human readability. Even here, communicating is about declaring presence (1 or "on" is the most basic presence and 0 or "off" is absence) and then regulating that presence. These rules seem minuscule on their own, but they combine into complex systems of government.

Almost every custom of the internet is arbitrary. Some technical attributes are innate, such as hypertext. The visual signifiers and spatial metaphors of the internet, however, are particularly arbitrary. The dominance of some web services over others is even more arbitrary. Visiting Web 1.0 websites reveals how many customs were not yet agreed upon only two decades ago. Provided different sets of rules, by different regulators, the internet becomes unfamiliar.

Users might perceive themselves as having liberty, but the computers, the ones reading the internet, definitely do not. They are algorithmically governed. Their governance serves the interest of their programmers. Artists and content producers take for granted that computers will faithfully reproduce the instructions that are their images, ignoring those other routines running underneath and around their images, over which they express no agency. To use the internet with the type of freedom associated with neoliberal ideology, as an informed, rational agent entails speaking the computer's language, and graphical user interfaces make learning this language unnecessary. C++ is the new Latin. As with Christian art, images represent the word to the illiterate.

Communication, like competition, is never unregulated. In the case of computer communication, this is evident. Yet the meaning of "freedom of speech" might be contained somewhere in the ambiguity of the term "liberty" specifically.

Imagine you're playing a game of Monopoly with a friend. Every time they pass GO they demand the bank give them $600 so long as they have the most properties (their "too big to fail" rule). You explain that this isn't a real rule. They insist that you're trying to regulate their freedom to play the game, punishing rather than rewarding their merit. Free competition means that the right to write the rules is rewarded to the winning player. Moral deliberation becomes irrelevant when we can apply the simple formula: might makes right.

Where there are social interactions, there are limits that define those interactions. There are rules in a neoliberal economy, but ideology camouflages these rules to appear as conditions of nature. Economists pretend to be scientists to conceal that their diagrams of economic activity are arbitrary. "There is no alternative," says Margaret Thatcher, as if neoliberalism is innate. Yet despite their insistences, economists are not scientists. They are programmers. This point is effectively argued by economist Kate Raworth, who systematically dismantles the diagrams of neoclassical economics, pointing out the extent to which these diagrams design rather than describe (Raworth 2017). What neoliberals push is not Freedom with a capital "F", but a specific definition of freedom not unlike Hobbes's state of nature: solitary and brutish. Unlike Hobbes, neoliberals consider this freedom more desirable than others.

In the merchant-induced absence of democratic government, we have inherited forms of privatized governance. Twitter is such a government. Trump was never speaking "freely" on Twitter but was arbitrarily limited to utterances of 280 characters. This constraint benefited him by discouraging nuanced discourse and encouraging attention-grabbing dysphemisms, somewhere between the languages of advertisement and school-yard bullying. Marketers refer to such content as "snackable", operating on the belief that internet users' attention spans are less than that of a goldfish. More succinct and desire-satisfying (or is it desire-inducing?) content is superior (Digital Marketing Institute 2014). Their recommendation algorithms are set to share attention-grabbing content, regardless of political consequences (Newton 2019). Bans on right-wing accounts are superficial, intended only for public relations. Twitter is arbitrarily demanding its users have tact after punishing users for having tact. In a sense, right-wing anger over censorship is justified. They are being punished for playing the game in the way it was designed to be played.

Though Twitter limits speech, perhaps it does not limit expression. Regarding "freedom of speech" as equivalent to "freedom of expression", the difference between terms is erased. This difference must be restored. Free-market capitalism, even with the inequality that emerges as wealth becomes concentrated, still allows for a maximum of expression so long as expression is a resource that can be exploited. Expression becomes a competition, camouflaged as romanticism. Artistic self-expression plays a role in neoliberal ideology. In the context of the neoliberal US, Trump is a multi-media artist whose self-expression has yielded him great power.

Trump is a particularly prevalent case study not because he is unique as a cynico-authoritarian (in fact Putin is a significantly more relevant figure in this regard) but because he came to power specifically through his capacity to hack the rules of social media and governance until he reached the limits of both. It was a failed attempted coup, unimaginable in the US just a few years prior, that resulted in his being impeached a second time and in his expulsion from Twitter. Trump is important because he hacked the country that has, since the Cold War, proclaimed

itself the leader of the free world. Of course the contradiction of freedom reached its boiling point in the United States. Now that it has, an electronically-connected world must confront this crisis.

Twitter's censorship is problematic not only because it challenges us to question the limits of freedom, but because it treats the symptom and not the virus. The primary reason why extremism is programmed into social media is economic. Extremism attracts attention, and attention is the basis of social media's economic model. The extremism encouraged by social media is not localized to the US nor specific to a single ideology. ISIS (Alfifi et al. 2018), European right-wing extremists and (predominantly south) European left-wing extremists (Europol 2020), and US left-wing extremists (Finkelstein et al. 2020) join the white nationalists of the United States in gaming these platforms strategically for recruitments in ideologically-driven militias. Social media presents its user with a free market of ideologies. "All that is solid melts into air" (Engels and Marx 1848).

A website like Twitter provides the user "free" access and consequently must extract a value from the user to turn a profit. The internet relies on a material infrastructure that is not at all free (gratis). Twitter pays to host users, so it expects in exchange that their use of the platform will ultimately generate valuable attention. As with the Fordian model, the product is consumed by the producers. The companies that constitute this oligopoly turn civic engagement and cultural production into a covert form of labor. We are not customers, but employees.

For this reason, we should celebrate that US congressional Republicans are reviving 19th-century union rhetoric and are investigating social media companies for anti-competition practices. Of course, they are doing so to defend the abusive speech of white nationalists and the "liberty" to share misleading information. They are not fundamentally offended that social media platforms have been programmed to cultivate extremism. They are offended that they are being denied a winning strategy. It is up to the left to maneuver around Republicans' superficial concerns and to address the underlying problem: that freedom has been hacked.

US Republicans were pleasantly surprised when A Letter on Justice and Open Debate was published in 2020 with signatories including prominent leftist thinkers. While some denounced the letter, treating it as an expression of privilege (Yang 2020), it's hard to invalidate the signature of a figure like Noam Chomsky, whose career has been devoted to exposing and fighting US global hegemony. It's hard to invalidate the signature of a figure like Salman Rushdie who has experienced the implications of free speech more deeply than perhaps any of the letter's critics, having evaded a fatwa against his life for having published The Satanic Verses. Republicans found themselves unlikely allies in this argument against cancel culture.

It's important to acknowledge that this "cancel culture" that is being denounced is a reaction to a lack of government oversight, a lack of protection for vulnerable citizens. It is a system of governance in the absence of representation. Users have to cancel because platforms host extremists. This apparent illiberalism has emerged in

response to a radical concept of freedom that naturalizes exploitive social relations. If we want to preserve free speech, we must realize that speech is not free.

As we proceed, we must be careful to avoid implementing more versions of Article 13, which limits the speech of citizens in favor of big business. A list of more than 70 computing experts including Vint Cerf and Tim Berners-Lee signed their letter advocating free speech titled Article 13 of the EU Copyright Directive Threatens the Internet, stating: "Article 13 takes an unprecedented step towards the transformation of the Internet from an open platform for sharing and innovation, into a tool for the automated surveillance and control of its users" (O'Brien, Malcom 2019). There is a Scylla and Charybdis scenario in play between the dangers of regulating speech online and those of leaving speech "unregulated". This scenario changes, however, when we stop focusing on content and begin focusing on how the platforms are written. We can regulate the writing of the internet.

How can we write a social media platform that doesn't function by the algorithms of competition? This is like asking to make a social media equivalent of PBS, the Public Broadcasting System. For all its virtues, PBS does not generate desire. Compare PBS to TLC. Before the 1980s, The Learning Channel was a public station that provided educational content. When it began to operate with the profit incentive, it slowly began a shift in its content. Now it provides shows like Here Comes Honey Boo Boo, exhibiting and exploiting a little girl and her family. Trump is the Honey Boo Boo of the internet. There is something in these cultural products that generate desire right up until the pleasure principle is surpassed and the desired object becomes refuse. We get tired of winning.

The problem is that the culture of capitalism is sexy. I know that a Nike shoe is, ultimately, just a collection of dead material stitched together to cover my foot. I know they are unethical in their production practices. I know all this yet I still find Nike sexy. It is so sexy that I feel compelled to ignore the ugliness of its production. I'd rather treat the shoe as if it has no genesis. I want to have proximity to the noumenal. I excuse exploitation because in taking responsibility for my desire I run the risk of annulling that desire. My identity must always be deferred to be desirable. I find myself in striving to express myself. Even left-leaning artists incorporate this sex appeal into their work and self-promotion. Desire is viral.

Despite the consequences of how social media platforms are governed, will we always regard them as sexy? Or like Honey Boo Boo and Trump, have they passed the limits of pleasure, revealing themselves as refuse? They now appear to remain sexy not because they promise individual empowerment – the general experience of using these platforms is rather one of being made to feel inadequate – but rather because they operate as a game. They promise a means to overcome the lack they induce. They are not programmed to promote civic discourse, but to offer the chance to transcend the social, to become a real individual rather than an imitation. Expression is gamified.

These "services" fundamentally respond to the aspect of the psyche that desires.

We carry within us a desire that searches for an object, a desire that desires desire. Effective capitalism provides that object most potently by representing the subject as one who lacks. You never knew you lacked "likes" until Instagram invented them. In this sense, Nick Srnicek's platform capitalism is just an accelerated and ever more pervasive form of capitalism. Data becomes a resource, identity becomes a commodity.

The problem with a democratic social media platform is that it cannot provide the object of desire because it makes the object available. One never reaches the Nike object, which is why one wants it (want here explicitly referring to its Old Norse root vant, meaning lacking). If one does transcend lack, the object of desire becomes just an object, just refuse. Desire is a paradox… the paradox on which the economy of (platform) capitalism runs.

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Has freedom become a virus? When South Korea was able to keep Coronavirus under control because of measures their citizens consented to, measures that offend Western notions of individual liberty (Stancati and Yoon 2020), the antagonisms embedded in the word "freedom" became evident. We see the problem of Western citizens, particularly in the US, spurning masks as an aesthetic statement expressing an anti-elitist attitude. We see the aestheticization of mask-wearing, that wearing a mask becomes a visual statement about the model of freedom one ascribes to.

Indeed, consenting to take seriously the threat of COVID and to follow the recommended precautions is a surrender of freedoms, but not necessarily to so-called "big government". We surrender a tolerable degree of freedom for the safety of society. Our networks of neighbors are the people we allow to govern us. What we ask in exchange is that they do the same. This surrender is intolerable from the standpoint of neoliberalism. As articulated by Margaret Thatcher, neoliberals believe there is no such thing as society. Why surrender your freedom to something that doesn't exist?

The contradictions of freedom are most expressed in the practices of artists. Artists, who so often rely on public space, but whose typically liberal leanings cause them to concede that public exhibitions should be limited into the unforeseeable future. Artists, who work in the intersection of the Renaissance genius, the capitalist brand, and the Marxist cultural critic. At the site where culture is produced, its contradictions are made visible.

Sympathetic though they may be, many artists felt compelled to somehow capitalize on COVID, to demonstrate the extent to which they take the social threat seriously for personal gain, to be the first to post on Instagram that one had done something clever with the face mask, to be the first to author a project named "Social Distance". The same impulse infects art "about" the Anthropocene. Those who express themselves the most visibly and publicly feel compelled by competition-in-

duced anxiety to make a resource out of a crisis. In this state of anxiety, freedom of expression reveals itself as a clever form of self-imposed slavery.

If platforms yield profits by inducing a feeling of lack in their users, are artists who participate on these platforms not complicit? Artist and writer Adina Glickstein articulates the problem thus:

> "The signifiers that we adopt to actualize creative intentions are just as readily hoovered up by the platforms where we share them, collapsed into capital as our ostensible leisure is rendered an extractible form of labor" (Glickstein 2020).

Our images are only ever the same image: the image as the object of desire. Such a cultural product amid a global health pandemic appears cruel. The consumer passes a point, like Shinji screaming at the sight of Asuka's mutilated Eva in Evangelion. The alienation induced by such a culture passes the limit of pleasure when we know that people are dying without a hand to hold. All the glitter and dazzle feels like an expression of a unique form of slavery, micro-plastics polluting our bodies. It becomes evident that your culture is there for you when you are buying, not when you are dying.

This is sad. And yet the free market does not relent; sadness becomes a commodity. Lovink refers to our social media platforms as sad by design. The sad girl and sad boy aesthetics and vaporwave replicate the language of advertisement with a self-conscious horror. Selfies of oneself crying are published on Instagram where "the willingness to publicly perform your own mental health is now a viable strategy in our attention economy" (Lovink 2019). The logic of exploitation is here internalized: I don't just cry, I cry as a public statement. I perform crying in an economy where care is limited through quantification. My cry is measured. This is the image of freedom we have inherited.

What these trends communicate is a feeling of hopelessness. Digital self-betrayal as the only valid strategy of cultural participation. "Look at how well I'm doing capitalism! Do you love me yet? Have I destroyed myself thoroughly enough to warrant your empathy?" The density of images published by "creatives" on the internet, all increasingly more novel than the last, seems to dissolve into a larger pattern, forming into a thing. This thing looks like the sound of a cry. What is a cry for attention if not a cry for love or help? The cry precedes articulation, precedes the objects of language (Derrida 1984, 242). "Love me!", "Help me!" As cultural theorist Mark Fisher says, "in the 21st century, there's an increasingly sad and desperate quality to pop culture hedonism" (Fisher 2013).

When we condemn social media, we risk ignoring how useful it has been in the fight for racial justice (where the cry is undeniably justified), in revealing police brutality, and in mobilizing social movements. Yet one could point out that the killing of an unarmed black man goes viral next to a story about Kim Kardashian.

Social media has empowered BLM and MAGA all the same. Censorship ignores the underlying problem: the written algorithm serves the interests of its author. Insofar as we engage, we are serving platforms that thrive by transforming their users into producers, competing with one another. Insofar as we publish content, we provide the images their writings can hide behind. As with the Brazen Bull, our cries are translated into something like-able.

Writer Caroline Busta's article The internet didn't kill counterculture – you just won't find it on Instagram acknowledges the problem that countercultural activity has been harvested and neutered in the Web 2.0 landscape. "Actual power," she asserts, "is controlling the means by which lesser power can be displayed" (Busta 2021). Political activism on these platforms cannot be activism against the hegemony of the platform, thus counterculture style is emptied, performed for public approval.

Of course, we can elect to use the internet differently. One does not need to use social media. Busta's article explores this possibility. She points to the abundance of countercultural activity that can be found off the "clearnet" and on the "darknet" or "deep web". In this space, one does not perform counter-cultural politics for the sake of self-promotion. One's IRL identity is concealed from the public. Busta explains,

"Now 'selling out' is tying your online identity to your IRL life and real name. In part, this is because one of the biggest impediments to countercultural activity is the fact that the internet doesn't suppress expression – it forces you to express and then holds you accountable for whatever you say for years" (Busta 2021).

This sounds like a return to the logic of Web 1.0; a return to the rural after having seen the spiritually corrosive effects of the city. On the one hand, we should feel excited by the possibilities available to us when we abandon the platforms that have colonized the internet. On the other, the idea of returning to an idealized past is dangerous. Plus, it seems that the desire to "cancel" social media itself expresses a more disturbing fact: we have zero confidence that elected officials will adequately govern these corporations.

Another problem worth attending to is that social media is where people are. According to DataReportal, over half of the world's population now uses social media (Kemp 2021). As Lovink asks, "How can we address this topic without looking down on the online billions, without resorting to fast-food comparisons or patronizingly viewing people as fragile beings that need to be liberated and taken care of." The great justification for art is that it is for the people. The private collections of the European elite were transformed into the first art museums with Europe's enlightenment revolutions. Whereas the objects of art once signified the divine right that justified pre-Enlightenment structures of exploitation, in the public museum they

came to deify the movement of history. It is this that soothes the tension between the individualistic, careerist ambitions of artists and their leanings toward Marxist cultural critique. Without the justification of serving a public, art risks dissolving into petit-bourgeois self-delusion, if not also the indulgent production of fetishes, regardless of content.

Not to mention, artists have very real interests in getting attention directed at their work because their survival as artists depends on doing so. What other model is presented to artists? Art is ground zero for the competition embedded in free-market ideals of free speech. What other way do we know of to perpetuate the production of art than to receive financing as a consequence of differentiating oneself? One must get attention. One is free to avoid social media in the same way that one is free to starve.

How do we contend with this tension, between perpetuating a praxis of self-betrayal and sharing with a community? Regardless of the answer, we will continue to express and share via the broken platforms we have at our disposal. Perhaps to experiment with freedom is to experience freedom. We will continue to allow social media to exploit our efforts at political mobilization because we can only put out one fire at a time. We cannot participate on social media, however, with the belief that it is an adequate supplement for what we have lost.

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GIVE: TRANSATLANTIC COLLABORATION THROUGH CONVERSATION

Abstract: Artistic collaborators Kate Ledger (pianist) and Ray Evanoff (composer) discuss their working process in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Conversation provides the model and impetus for this process, an ongoing responsive exchange in which their individual artistic identities co-evolve into forms neither could individually envision, in global circumstances that have acutely disrupted the normal mechanisms providing such social interaction. Artistic values, musical specifics, metaphorical frameworks, and larger references are examined, as well as the role these various elements serve in their art's realization and evolution. Their model is an adaptive, personalized framework for making art responding to an environment where the conventional explanations for doing so have been undermined.

Keywords: Give, Covid-19 pandemic, transatlantic collaboration, pianist, composer

Covid-19 and the exercising of physical distancing has forced us as artists and as people to re-evaluate communication and collaboration. The social vacuum created by the pandemic is not filled through the most immediate means. It is essential

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to communicate with people outside of scheduled meetings with dictated purposes (Galea, Merchant and Lurie 2020, 818). We find ourselves having to make an effort to return meaningful personal communication to our daily lives.

This truth has become a tool for our – pianist (Ledger) and composer (Evanoff) – artistic practices. It has emphasized the value in who we work with. It has underscored the humanity of making things together, how creating connects us, how work and friendship intertwine and augment the meaning of our practices. Our ongoing artistic project *Give*, begun early in the pandemic, has thus been as much a vehicle for socialization as it has been a means to make music. It has afforded us catharsis amidst uncertainty and facilitated creativity.

As collaborators living on different continents, working digitally has always been a necessity. Yet the pandemic's restrictions on socially sharing artwork has pushed us to more fully realize the potential of working and presenting online. This has led us to integrate hitherto-marginalized aspects of the project, i.e. rehearsal, dialogue, failure. Our resulting practice is increasingly a meticulous, sprawling examination and expression of the work between composer and performer. We have broadened beyond creating new musical works to discovering new collaborative roles for each other and new formats to more fully express our creative dynamic. [2]

So our outward adaptation to the present social disruptions brought about by COVID-19 is subtle, particularly as the world has accepted online platforms as increasingly integral forms of communication (Merchant and Lurie 2020, 2012). Yet the worldwide communal reorientation of artists has reverberated through and found likeness in our personal collaborative practice, rooted in our ongoing exchange of ideas. Equal parts verbal, sentimental and artistic, our work together is independent of teleological justification. It is a collaboration through friendship that finds extension in artistic document rather than primarily existing in service of an end product. The music is not a corollary metaphor to these non-musical items but an individualized instantiation: friendship as the genome given expression in sound.

We feel the influence of global circumstances in our work, pace, and method. The conventional fulfilment of a project between composer and instru-

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2   We refer to our video lecture-recital: "Small(s) for solo piano (2020 –): transatlantic collaboration + conversation in 2020-2021," *Noisefloor* 2021, Staffordshire University, https://noisefloor.org.uk. We saw the symposium's circumstantial requirement to present digitally as an excuse to experiment with how we could present *Give*. With much of our remote collaboration already steeped in online sharing, plus the extensive rehearsal needed to execute *Give*'s challenging notation, Ledger used video to document the music's ongoing artistic and technical progression. This was playfully intercut with recorded conversations between herself and Evanoff, highlighting the ever-presence of surrounding dialogue. Video allowed her to present her full experience of *Give*: a chronology of sketches, how she practises, how she interprets, plus anecdotal snippets of how certain passages feel to play. Although this may be how we had to work, due to the pandemic, the nature of *Give* and our collaboration feels at home here and provides an audience with the lesser-seen areas of a music-making practice. The lecture-recital video: https://youtu.be/JI6JBJWVxqM

mentalist, i.e. live performance, is unavailable, leading us to more fully inter-rogate the suspect nature of relationships built on outcomes. In addition to adapting to new mediums of presentation, we find ourselves embracing a form of open-ended conversation and play. It is an alive and lived-in space, one that uncompromisingly represents the world's current predicament. It embodies the adaptation, survival, and self-learning being carried out by so many. It pro-vides a form of therapy, or is simply a space to mutually express and appreciate.

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Conversation is where we begin; it ignites our practice. We use it to consider our reasons for collaborating, how we situate as artists and how we work. We in-quire. We learn how one's meaning inflects the other's. We follow leads, discover associations – environmental, athletic, instinctual. Conversation itself has become rooted in and part of the realization of our project: aesthetic discussions and per-formance critiques coincide with comparisons of the weather or the vaccination protocols of our respective nations. The exchange fosters its own purposes, not all of which are fully pursued but the overall openness to any direction and every pos-sibility is fertile and vivifying. Our working method is the opposite of getting down to business; it's a wait and see.

Conversation is multi-faceted and multi-directional. It fosters an arena of topics, inclusive of our preferred subjects and personal joys. They carry potential for new creative ground and invite that which is already forming our practice(s). Through this we encounter extremes of detail, examining our music both expan-sively and microscopically. The specific attack of a chord, its context, its shape, its tone, its feel, and its purpose fill our conversations. We look closer at a chord, gath-er its data, and eventually redefine its identity. And so we are creating extensions of the music, creating new definitions and moving beyond the traditional boundaries of a 'score', a 'composer'; a 'performance', a 'performer'. Conversation refines what it is we are creating. We value it and the life it comes from, just as we value a sound and the body it comes from. We continue to be informed by it, serving us with both methodology and meaning.

The Arena of Topics, The Spirit of Tactics

We acknowledge a mutual genuineness and honesty; we remain open and expect nothing in particular. [3] Our collaboration is practised through discovery, dialogue, and play. Our efforts direct towards making and remaking, eschewing conventions which justify activities and relationships through the commodities they produce. This may be utopian, but only insofar as "utopia" is defined by how cultural paradigms differ from our actual wants and needs.

Our project thus becomes a means of rebuilding. Some of this repair pertains to the aspects of community and belonging that naturally follow from being physically present and active in a world where exercising social distance is not necessary. But in the process, we find ourselves reworking more entrenched conventions of being professional artists.[4] We increasingly inhabit ways of working together that are unique to us: process becomes its own form of creation and expression.

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Genuineness and honesty means we locate what is necessary for our practice, working within an environment of possibility we co-create. This reveals habits, complex emotions, flaws; we are comfortable with everything that arises as we are searching for what is *true*.[5] We explore elements both actual and imagined; musical notation ignites both such responses. We work *rigorously* and in detail. We aspire to conserve everything that emerges from this process: musical, biographical, metaphorical.

Rigor is an attitude, a mode of undertaking and executing. Rigor is not opposed to play. We would argue that truly operating with rigor necessarily entails acting

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3   We refer to the Zen teachings of Shunryu Suzuki for both reassuring sanctuary and active method: "When we do not expect anything we can be ourselves" (Suzuki 2002, 16). Resisting expectations means we avoid any premature selectivity or intention as "[v]arious desires start to behave mischievously" (Suzuki, 19).

4   One especial critique of such conventions and responding alternatives may be found in musician Bonnie Jones' article "The Bonnie Jones Grant." Jones outlines a pragmatic relationship to earned income that frees her art making from conforming to institutionalized preference and ascending the uphill slope of mythical meritocracy (Bonnie Jones 2016).

5   We refer to Konstantin Stanislavsky's example of *truth*: the "*necessary*" action of actually searching for something (in Stanislavsky's example, a purse) then trying to repeat this action but now, without a real need to do so. Here he explains "two kinds of truth and sense of belief of what you are doing. *First, there is the one created automatically and on the plane of actual fact*" (to literally search for a purse) "and second, there is the *scenic type*, which is *equally truthful but which originates on the plane of imaginative and artistic fiction*." We posit that our actions are to always be looking for the purse. This endless search is in itself a *true* act (Stanislavsky 1938, 139).

with no consideration towards the future or a specified outcome, but rather paying full attention to the moment's exigencies. There are more than enough to occupy.[6]

We are both individuals equally concerned with our thoughts and our bodies. We find musical practice paralleling athletics in instrumentalizing the interior, where physical refinement is not just about strength, coordination and agility, but presence, focus, patience and discipline. Musical compositions become loci for conception, metaphor, philosophy; lived experience is the aesthetic force in our practices. We enjoy the messy reality of abstract conception meeting physical realization.

Embodiment in Sound

Our music embodies our values. We revel in its intense specificity; we use it to explore sonic, cognitive, and physical limits.

The material is continually built and rebuilt, interpreted and reinterpreted, from the ground up. It is rendered in discrete units possessing their own preoccupations, with no obligation to elaborate. Ours is a long-term dilation of this "low-level" mode of operation, which continues to provide fruitful soil.[7]

The concentrated nature of the music facilitates intimacy in composing, learning, and listening. Local complexity and nuance can be cultivated and pushed. We enjoy musical instances in their own right: events, like conversations, like relationships, are self-sufficient. An immense freedom of imagination emerges when musical ideas are allowed to unfold and scale to their own accord, be it on the page, at the piano, or through time.

The goal is to create music that begats, accommodates, and rewards infinite investment in each moment. It sits well within our fractured working environment: uncertain, adjusting and resourceful.

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6   Suzuki again: "We say, 'each moment' but in your actual practice a 'moment' is too long because in that moment, your mind is already involved in following the breath. So we say, 'Even in a snap of your fingers there are millions of instants of time'" (Suzuki 2002, 16).

7   Ian Pace (2009, 180) uses the terms "top down" and "bottom up" when drawing a parallel between approaches to composing and learning complex music. A "bottom-up" approach uses the "low-level materials' own immanent properties and implications" to incrementally build a composition and/or an interpretation.

Excerpt from *Give* (2020 - present)

This musical cell holds its own playing solution. To unlock it, one must "act", not "interpret", perhaps using the notation as a "prescription for action" (Thomas 2009, 77). Here, actions are not performed but rather active responses that themselves construct the music. The requisite movement is actual, not "scenic" (Stanislavsky 1938, 139); it is true. This moment of reaction to a notation is where we converse, delve, and experiment. We coat this moment in specific material to instill panoramic performance realizations that flood consciousness but vivify the action.

The above excerpt pairs speed with pianistic gymnastics; these characteristics beg easy priority over articulation, dynamic, and rhythmic exactitude. But these latter details bear their own influence while honing a playing solution. Ledger's instinct to move up the keys smoothly, uninterrupted, is disrupted by these deliberately nuanced indications.

The first note of this cell, middle C, is to be played by the right hand. Leaving this note quickly would allow fast and easy movement up the keyboard. But the note's dynamic is not slight, and the tactile quality articulation details is not fleeting. The C's combination of tenuto and staccato requires independent treatment. Just tenuto would permit more of the approach into the touch; just staccato would permit more of the release into the touch. Together, both approach and release must be mindfully factored into playing this note. It becomes self-enclosed, incapable of quick abandonment for the sake of an overall flowing gesture.

The mezzo-piano adds a further detail, requiring a delicate yet sung presence. A quieter dynamic would require less, allowing it to be stroked or flicked in transit.

A louder dynamic would permit less restraint and so could be 'grabbed' in transit.

The middle C is also a grace note, which has no measured rhythmic value but still exists temporally. It precedes more grace notes in the left hand (B5 flat and D7) all to be played before the fourth 32nd note of this eighth-note beat. The grace note's absence of rhythm means it is conceived separately i.e. it is 'out of time' as opposed to its 'in time' neighbors. However, the notated tempo provides no time for a conscious shift from 'out of time' to 'in time'. The dense activity of this entire cell makes concentration elusive: the performer's mind is scattered in attending to this multiplicity.

Discussing a single note in this way – the first of our finalized music – demonstrates our scale of intention and how it shapes the sound.

Integrating Through Metaphor

Working intently with such layered notational information can provoke instinctual responses, not the least of which have to do with doubt, fear, and stress and their physical corollaries. But these feelings relax over time as one is immersed in the music. Ongoing dialogue that acknowledges these challenges and responses with an open mind further facilitates this shift. Failure changes from being threatening to fascinating and fruitful. Discomfort serves as an introductory phase rather than an inescapable state. Extreme conditions provide opportunities for growth. There are endless discoveries on the other side of acclimating to these performative challenges.

We no longer react to notation; we develop a relationship with it. Ledger increasingly invites extensions of herself into a realization, interpreting in ways that extend beyond sound. She departs from middle C with a speed that feels too fast to hear. The keys under her fingers push back. She arrives at the top of the piano, where notes collide in the first and only downbeat. Her right arm forms a wing, elbow extending out and rising upwards, bringing shoulder to ear. Her ribs open and rotate around her spine, accentuating the height and shape of the wing. Her body becomes a constellation.

Understanding her movement this way[8] crystallizes a specific physical association with this musical passage. This provides clarity.[9] Her navigation therein be-

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8   Ledger has pages of notes exploring various metaphorical and poetic readings of her playing movements. Another paragraph pertaining to the same musical passage: "Attacking the E flat is like chopping steel with an axe; dangerous and likely to be mis-judged if there is a shred of doubt. The thin blade of the axe might slip and scratch the smooth shiny surface of the steel. The inevitable slip is caught by the F, then the F sharp, almost like a wobble after landing off-balance. It's not a graceful movement and requires re-iterated firmness to remain secure."

9   Such practice can also be helpful in formulating interpretive strategies for the more uncommon and fanciful notations in the music. An example of this, the spz, which applies the suddenness of a sforzando to a much quieter overall dynamic level, will be discussed later.

comes definite and personal. She is not a performer playing a composer's music: it is our music rendered jointly. All worthwhile performance has this personalized quality but our shared sense of authorship is strengthened by our wider context.

Metaphors such as these, both physical and fantastic, soften the hard, technical edges of the music. They also deepen our conversation, drawing attention to often-marginalized facets of how we make and learn and do. Our process is circuitous, allowing Ledger's learning and performance to feed back into Evanoff's composing, one's imagination inflecting the other's inflection of the other.

Blind Spots

We inspect our music and our process, discussing interpretation and meticulously analyzing recordings. This exchange reveals each other's blind spots: habits in movement and musical diction that are best observed by outside eyes. It is hard to be self-aware of such small, unconscious, bespoke negotiations being made between imagination and notation, notation and body, expectation and reality. When noticed, they are often regarded as errors, things to be corrected. Our shared work instead brings them into the open, mutually interrogates them, and then turns what we observe into musical material. The work self-perpetuates in one long ongoing sublimated rehearsal.

Excerpt from Give (2020 - present)

The striking rhythmic nature of this cell unapologetically exposes any metrical inaccuracies. Travelling between the second and third chords is particularly irksome; the leap is large and occurs at a rhythmically narrow point. A focus on achieving rhythmic accuracy meant the dynamics, articulations and even note lengths became marginalized.

Through inspection of the cell, such marginalizations were obtrusively audible to Evanoff; to Ledger, they were less obvious.[10] To her, they justifiably contributed to her realization and were not objectively unreasonable. It was difficult to extrapolate the "visceral" nature of this maneuver from its sonic result so to her, marginalizations had a purpose and represented the realization.[11] Here we encountered our first blindspot: an impulsive moment of action with its own concerns, i.e. to be rhythmically accurate. This habitual reversion happened outside of Ledger's conscious awareness, and so needed wider conversation to draw attention to it.

Extensions

Composing in discrete segments that are then learned and reflected on together allows us to evolve material in mutually pertinent ways. We each provide an opportunity for the other to become aware of our habits, cultivating directions for our work that neither of us could foresee. This welcomely includes the unexpected.

A key aspect of Evanoff's music as evidenced in the earlier excerpts is speed: there is a beloved feeling of propulsion and flurry, of overflow, enhanced by the friction between incumbent speed and the layered detail of each sound and action. This has been an overarching and elaborated upon characteristic of Evanoff's music for years.

Ledger expressed her frustration with the shortcomings of this speed in conversation, after having learned and played the earliest entries of *Give*. She articulated a sense of lost opportunity for intimacy with the tactile complexity of individual actions given the incessant need to move forward, to physically and mentally consider the forthcoming music instead of fully attending to what presently is. Framed in this way, from a friend and collaborator speaking not hypothetically but in response to their lived experience of preparing and executing the music, provided a perfect lens to critically re-evaluate such aesthetic presumptions and to move the music into a new space.

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10   These takes can be found on Ledger's YouTube channel: https://youtu.be/YM24wU8Vl18 and https://youtu.be/lTlVKQvHH50.

11   We refer to Arnie Cox and "grasping gestures" (2006, 48): "... sounds are evidence of the motor actions that produce them, and our comprehension of sound involves comprehension of the relevant motor actions."

Excerpt from *Give* (2020 - present)

The subsequent entry of *Give* composed in response to this dialogue thus explores the interplay of articulative complexity and dynamic nuance with a deliberately distended tempo and minutely specified sustaining durations. These rhythmic elements do not just allow the pianist's hands and mind to linger but require it, engaging them through initiation to resolution in terms of timing, tactility, and interpretation. The tenutos in full and in parentheses, paired with different durations, articulations and dynamics (for example the *ff* and *fff* chords) required specific definition but provided another opportunity for metaphor. For Ledger, the music instantly expanded. Its intense requirement to linger, and define, permitted each uniquely articulated attack to daringly encompass beyond the page.

The return of the *spz* now as an initiatory attack was a true gift. Ledger found joy in fully realizing the dichotomy of this articulation; what it required and meant. She played with the traditional definition of *sfz*, "literally 'forced' and 'forcing'" (Taylor 1989, 79) to hone an instant yet stifled release of energy.[12] She battled with the natural decaying nature of her instrument whose characterization of tone lies substantially in the point of attack. She found that a purely technical, physical solution didn't provide the approach for specifying this attack so considered more

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12   We considered Gyorgy Sandor's "thrust" technique to create a "sudden electric-shocklike contraction during which the body appears to be motionless." This extends to "assuming the right position for this action" and engaging the body in a holding position that is able to absorb the shock of the "thrust" (Sandor 1995, 109).

actual means. Moving outside a musical realm, she extended the execution of the spz towards something akin to real experience: a sensation of opposing forces; a gasp. [13] This attack now included a pre-imagined state of mind as preparation for initiating movement. She internally built imagined noise and tension directly before playing this chord. This caused the *spz* to burst out and be full of character: "almost all of the muscles of the body are involuntarily and momentarily thrown into strong action, for the sake of guarding ourselves against or jumping away from danger, which we habitually associate with anything unexpected." (Darwin 1872, 284) And so this is not just x seconds of music, but something not so easily definable in terms of creative process plus final product. Its boundary includes the conceptually thorny realization of something that is known but in non-musical terms.

The resulting interplay of musical and performance considerations thus emerged directly out of our ongoing conversation concurrent with and interwoven into composition. The music's course is shaped by both of us distinct of our individuality.

* * *

Our methods and materials have been given space to grow in a context where the usual rhythms of life have been so disrupted. There is an obvious increase in time when there are less commutes, less concerts, less visits. This benefits our meandering, outwardly-sprawling way of making music together, in which the project's materials and methods can evolve in their own, often-unexpected directions. After over a year of concerted effort we agree that we have only just begun.

Such spaciousness both is and is not a luxury when resulting from global crisis that has produced overt catastrophe and yet has been experienced so personally. We are speaking to more than silver linings: we find vital meaning working in this way that resonates with us. We are meeting needs that are deep-seated but which have dilated in our present time. Our such working relationship has not emerged presently out of happenstance: we are responding to "special opportunities for meaning making ... and for turning crisis into opportunity" (Venuleo et al 2020, 2). We are reclaiming and revitalizing collaborative creative practice for ourselves, in a time already seeing people reassess their intentions, how they spend their time and what they pursue: "when events of this magnitude occur, we cannot return to 'normal' life as we knew it. As our world changes, we must change with it." (Walsh 2020, 910)

Our work is obviously oriented inward. Dictating its relevance to a wider community feels presumptuous and unduly limiting. However, in the context of wider

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13   Charles Darwin: "Every sudden emotion, including astonishment, quickens the action of the heart, and with it the respiration. Now we can breathe...much more quietly through the open mouth than through the nostrils. Therefore, when we wish to listen intently to any sound, we either stop breathing, or breathe as quietly as possible, by opening our mouths, at the same time keeping our bodies motionless" (1872, 283).

practice, we find we are not alone in our need for change.[14]

We feel a definite shift in our working experience and what results when prioritizing process and relationship over product and profession. We feel this method actualizes our values and results in work that excites us. We foster such a vital, personal working method amidst the pandemic because it is a form of response available to us as individuals to the peculiar intersection of the crisis, artistic practice, and the already-marginalized position of artists in contemporary society. Evidencing this practice to others feels if nothing else a cathartic display responding to unreasoning natural and human disasters. We find ourselves grounded by the comforting reality of friendship and its expression through art in a time when the basics of daily life can so excruciatingly not be taken for granted. This charges the work and leads us to discoveries. It has changed what we require from artistic partnerships. It has afforded us new avenues of personal satisfaction. It provides us with a practice that is more deeply lived and felt.

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14   *The New Virtuosity: A Manifesto for Contemporary Sonic Practice* by Cat Hope and Louise Devenish is an example of how musicians are re-orienting themselves in the 21st Century. It is a result of similar dissatisfaction with how sonic art is created and presented; it looks to remove limitations and redefine how we can work. (Hope, Devenish 2020)

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GIVE: TRANSATLANTIC COLLABORATION THROUGH CONVERSATION
(summary)

The present environment, shaped by the effects and conditions that come with a worldwide pandemic, is disrupted, disconnected and uncertain. However, such disruption has provided the chance to reassess and rebuild. Artistic collaborators Kate Ledger (pianist) and Ray Evanoff (composer) take note of this, see its relevance for their own practices, and use it as creative means. Already dissatisfied with the assumed conventions of artistic practice, they find the space and reasoning to further a personalized collaborative practice. This article aims to outline this practice and how their methods for collaboration connect to wider social needs that are emphasized in the present crisis.

Their method is conversational, mutually fostered, and inclusive. Their dialogue bridges geographical and socially-restricted distance, and enables them to create personalized tools for discovery, evaluation, and evolution. They explain the breadth of their conversation, and how it is instantiated in individual musical moments of their ongoing collaboration *Give* (2020-present) for solo piano. They jointly reflect on how their working process unearths individual artistic habits that are scrutinized together and then used to perpetuate their music. Their utopian perfectionism is handled playfully. Throughout, they make reference to wider influences on their working practice.

Conversation as collaboration allows them to create rigorously and infinitely. Their music embodies survival, adaptation and learning. It expands outside of a finished product and instead is an attitude that forever accompanies their intended practice(s). Despite working on *Give* for a year, they recognize still being at an early stage but anticipate the next moment that captures their imagination and excitement. As collaborators and long-term friends, respectful of and inspired by each other's values, they move forward as the pandemic begins to settle down, intending to continue to harness the lessons of its worldwide disruption within their shared artwork.

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INSTAGRAM AND ARTISTIC PLATFORMS AS REVENUE STREAMS FOR ARTISTS IN SERBIA

Abstract: Digitalization and development of a digital marketing strategy as a way to attract the (particularly young) audience is a prerequisite for modern artists. The COVID-19 pandemic emphasized this need even more, but even without pandemics, it is very hard for an artist to reach its public and to present its work to a wider range of audiences without utilizing digital tools. In this article, the author will present some possibilities available for artists to improve their visibility and promote their work in a new global digital art market. The importance of understanding the digital world, the audience's preferences, and digital marketing are crucial for modern artists. The aim of this paper is to analyze the importance of the digital art market for artists in Serbia. The research was conducted using a questionnaire survey focused on 88 artists actively creating and participating in the art world, mostly from Belgrade, Serbia. After a contextualization of data, it is evident that the majority of artists from fail to generate income in the digital art market.

Keywords: visual artists, digital art marketing, pandemic, social media, Instagram

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Introduction

The digital art market is not a new concept, but in 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, its importance surpassed the importance of the traditional art market. According to the Hiscox Online Art Trade report 2020, more than half (65%) of interviewed online sales platform executives believe that the changes brought about because of the pandemic will be permanent and transform the art market.

One of the most interesting findings is the fact that new and young collectors have become very active during the pandemic, with 86% of them making purchases, and that Instagram is still (from 2017) the most important platform for art-related purposes.

There is a tendency of consciousness about one's living spaces and wanting to purchase art is a part of it. Artworks can also be perceived as part of one's record of wealth (Rani, 2017).

Artists and the Gatekeepers

Probably every artist in the world dreams of global recognition, however the road to this is very demanding and full of obstacles. According to Petrides and Fernandes (2020), the components of a successful visual art career are presented in a pyramidal form. The foundation is the creation of artworks and the desire to exhibit. The next block is to bring their art to the attention of the gatekeepers who are seen as essential in launching, sustaining, and advancing artistic careers – the galleries, curators, critics, cultural institutions, and collectors. Entrepreneurial marketing skills are the next block, enabling artists to create sales to provide financial resources for the further production of art. The final block is creating and managing the artistic brand, viewed as strategic cooperation between artists and gatekeepers, especially galleries (exhibition, art fairs, curated events, auctions). The crucial element connecting all of these building blocks is artistic reputation – a relentless effort involving the artist and art world experts.

However, in the traditional art market, a crucial role of artistic reputation lies in the hands of the gatekeepers, those curators, art dealers, gallery owners and critics. A good example of this is the "artistic chart" of two major artistic centers back in 2008, New York and London. In his research, Thompson estimated that 80,000 artists lived and worked in New York and London (Thompson, 2008). Out of this, less than 0.001% could be considered "superstar artists", since they earned a seven-figure income; 300 more had a six-figure income; and 5,000 artists who were represented by major galleries but needed to have side jobs to sustain an income. The situation for the majority of artists is probably similar today and the vast majority of artists are constantly searching for a market for their art. For all these artists, the digital art market offers the best chance for success.

In the traditional art market, the evaluation of art is evaluated by experts, gatekeepers who determine artworks' value. They are the ones who decide which art products are going to have a chance to be shown to the public. The gatekeepers can be individuals (curators, art dealers, gallery owners, critics) or networks across different levels (Coslor, Craford & Leyshon, 2019), and they not only separate the artists from the end consumers (Olesiewicz, 2011) but also classify the audience (Coslor, Craford & Leyshon, 2019). Gatekeepers' influence in the digital art market is much more limited and thus more artists have a chance to be seen and to present their work to a wide audience online than through traditional means.

Social media is becoming increasingly important in the art world. One of the consequences of the dominant position of social media is that artists can now communicate directly with their audience, rather than having to deal with the standard gatekeepers as in a traditional art market (Walmsley, 2016). This gives them the chance to promote themselves and to be discovered. Curators have also found their place on social media, using the platforms as visual diaries and promoting art according to their taste. When they have a large following, they can have a powerful impact as in the traditional art market (Fisher, 2016), but can never be that influential, since on social media anybody can distribute and produce information (Potnis & Tahamtan, 2021). On digital art platforms, the situation is a little different, because even though artists can promote their own portfolios, the sheer number of artists participating means the choice of artworks can become overwhelming for potential buyers. This is why curatorial direction guides them, again giving value to the art of their choice (Lee & Lee, 2019).

In this paper, we will try to understand through the engagement of visual artists from Serbia the role the digital art market has had on their careers, and address the specificities of different revenue streams in the digital art world.

Digital Art Platforms and Instagram – Possible Revenue Streams

Each digital platform (Saatchi Art, Society6, Redbubble, and Etsy) has its own set of rules and guidelines. This includes Instagram, the most popular social network in the artworld. It may not be possible for an artist to become successful on all of these different platforms. Insights into the different platforms will be provided in this article, and since the global art market surpasses borders, this can be beneficial for artists from around the world, including artists from the Western Balkans.

Adjusting artworks to meet the required dimensions or connecting with other platforms (for example Etsy) and mastering marketing requirements for each can be a truly time-consuming process. In the next section, we will present each platform and offer an insight into whether an artist should invest their time.

Saatchi Art

Saatchi Art is an online art gallery dedicated to young and emerging artists from all over the world, where more than 94,000 artists have their artworks (Saatchi Art, 2021). This platform is open for anyone to create a profile and upload their works, with an option to sell originals as well as prints (an artist gives consent for artworks to be printed and if sold, Saatchi Art prints and ships it, with the artist receiving a percentage of the price). With more than 1.4 million artworks (Saatchi Art, 2021) searchable through categories and subcategories, there is an overwhelming number of artworks for the buyer to choose from. This is the reason why this platform promotes access to curators, offers curatorial collections with new artworks every week, and proposes collaboration with their art advisors for personal recommendations. Like in a traditional art market, these gatekeepers are the ones constructing the meanings and value of the artworks they select (Lee & Lee, 2019). With a consistent and recognizable body of work, and regular postings to this platform, an artist can be spotted by the Saatchi Art curatorial team, and artists can use this online gallery to present their work and further promote it themselves.

Etsy

Etsy is an e-commerce platform for handcrafted goods. An artist can open a shop and list items for sale. It can include any handmade item, including those designed by an artist and produced by a production partner (Etsy, 2021). This opens up opportunities to connect your Etsy shop with a print-on-demand company, that usually has their production centers located around the world. and the art can be printed onto numerous products from art prints, T-shirts, mugs, laptop sleeves to beach or home accessories. When an item is sold, the nearest print-on-demand company prints and sends it to the buyer, and an artist chooses the desired profit from every item. This can help the artist from a particular region to skip postal services that can slow down shipments, which often leads to negative reviews on the Etsy shop. According to Erank (2021), artists from Serbia are selling Etsy's best-selling category – digital downloads. It may be the fastest way to sell artwork since it requires no shipping, but this is also the most saturated group on Etsy. To be successful on this platform is very time-consuming, since having a shop means fulfilling all of Etsy's rules, and understanding their own particular search engine optimization (SEO). It is possible to pay for ads on this platform, but an artist must have marketing skills and be willing to promote his/her shop.

Society6 and Redbubble

Being part of these two print-on-demand marketplaces requires only basic digital skills. After creating an account, the next step is design upload and to choose among the variety of products where art should be printed on. Similar to the example of Saatchi art, here anybody can create a portfolio, which leads to a saturated market and curatorial guidance for buyers. Again, marketing skills are crucial for artists to have to be successful on these platforms.

Social Media Accounts – The Example of Instagram

Largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the whole world turned to online shopping, including Serbia (Ivanović & Antonijević, 2020). Even a survey from 2017, conducted by the US Trust Insights on Wealth and Worth, showed that millennials are changing the art market because every fourth person collects fine art, and the majority of millennials buy art online, with Instagram noted as the platform where they discover art. (Invaluable, 2017). Hiscox confirmed the crucial importance of Instagram, arguing that it attracts younger buyers (Hiscox, 2020). In the contemporary world, every part of the consumer decision-making process is influenced by social media (Appel et al. 2020).

With this in mind, it is surprising that half of the artists who responded to our survey saw no benefit from this platform.

Every year, more researchers write about Instagram (Purnomo et al., 2020), and in 2019 there were two types of research concerning visual artists on Instagram. Shahzadi concentrated on the strategies artists use to promote and sell their work on Instagram, while Kang, Chen, and Kang explored artwork interactions on social media. The findings from these two articles were almost the same – the most liked artworks were also the most interactive ones, and the ability to tell a story is key to success.

According to these articles, to find and make a meaningful connection with the audience it is important to post daily. What grabs the most attention are posts with works in progress, photographs, and time lapses, as well as tutorials.

The artists should ask questions to their followers and share stories from their personal life, establishing a participatory relationship with them, making them feel like they know the artist and making them believe that their contribution matters (Jenkins, 2009)

Meaningful hashtags are the way for an artwork to be found, and after sharing a post it is beneficial to reply to comments as soon as possible.

In addition, it is noted that artists with strategies on what to post to Instagram based on the number of likes or comments increased their visibility.

Methodology

To understand the role of the digital art market in the careers of artists from Serbia, an online survey was conducted during March 2021.

The questionnaire had both multiple-choice and open-ended questions and contained 16 questions aimed to provide insights as to the presence of artists from Serbia on online art markets and social networks. It also explored whether being part of the digital art market benefits them financially.

The questionnaire was divided into three parts: questions about general data, questions about the online art platforms and questions about social networks.

The criteria for the selection of artists to be part of this research was that they are actively creating and participating in the art world. We received 88 answers, mostly from artists from Belgrade.

Results

The first part of the questionnaire was about general data. We found that artists included in the online survey come from different age groups (most of them between 40 to 50 years old, 39.1% of them, and 24.1% were between 30 to 40 years old), they are mostly painters (62.8%) from Belgrade (79%), being members of The Association of Fine Artists of Serbia (69.9%). More than half of the artists stated that the sale of their artworks are conducted onsite 61.4%, with 16.9% selling both onsite and online and 21.7% online.

The second part of the questionnaire covered the online art platforms. The first question revealed that more than half of the interviewed artists did not have a personal website (62.7%), more than half did not have a profile at the online art platforms (61.6%), and those who did mostly use SaatchiArt (21.8%), Etsy (6.4%), and ArtFinder (6.4%).

When asked which platform they found they had the most financial success, more than 70% answered that they had any success at all. Since this question was in a form of a checkbox with the option to add further explanatory text, 6% of responses perceived personal Facebook and Instagram accounts as an online platform which led to the most financial success. Etsy was seen as the most important for 4%, and other platforms were checked only a couple of times.

Still, when questioned to say how much their income had increased thanks to the online art platforms, 79% said they had no success at all, but 11.1% stated that their income had increased by more than 50%, and 5.6% specified that their income increased by between 20-50%.

The third part of the questionnaire asked questions about the social networks themselves, and artists stated that there are two social networks they are most active

in – Facebook (44%) and Instagram (42.9%). A study by Kang, Chen, and Kang (2019) examined the relationship between the most-liked artworks and interactions on social media. The authors collected data from 706 artists' accounts on Instagram and conducted 35 online surveys. Their findings are somewhat similar to ours, but the majority of artists in their survey stated that Instagram is the most preferred social media (91%). Even though frequent posting is one of the most important activities on social media (Shahzadi, 2019; Kang et al. 2019), our research shows that only 9% of respondents post daily, while 44.7% post rarely. With this in mind, and since only 16.7% of the questioned artists stated that they pay for advertisements on social networks, it comes as no surprise that 33.3% of artists said they saw no impact from using social media on their brand visibility, with approximately half (46%) saw a modest positive effect.

When it comes to financial benefits from social media, more than half of the questioned artists said they did not have any (64.4%). Those who did have economic success stated that their financial income increased by 10% (19.5% of respondents) and only 6.1% of the questioned artists specified that their income increased between 20% and 50%.

Rodner and Kerrigan (2014) advised the need for customer-focus marketing, and for artists to concentrate on artworks that the audience reacts to. However, when asked if the number of likes and comments on social media affected the nature of their posts, more than half of our respondents (63.5%) said it did not affect them, and the majority of the questioned artists (84.1%) denied that the number of likes and comments on social media affected their creative process. In Kang, Chen, and Kang's (2019) survey the amount of artists not influenced by interactions social media was 63%.

The main findings of our research is that the majority of artists from Serbia fail to generate income in the digital art market. There is clearly more than one reason for this, but among them is the fact that mastering social media and digital art platforms requires time, a lot of research, and effort without immediate financial incentives.

Conclusion

The digital art market presents a great opportunity for artists around the world. It enables artists to access a new revenue stream and gives them exposure to a global audience. On top of this, the digital market is still changing, growing and its potential and relevance grows with it. There is a realistic chance that the digital market will surpass traditional art markets in the near future. Finally, one of the biggest advantages of the digital art market is that it enables artists to become globally visible, recognizable and to be able to sell their products while being in their own city, reducing the costs of this exposure and promotion.

For artists from a country like Serbia – economically undeveloped, with very few governmental programs that support artists and a country that is not among leaders at the global art scene – the digital art market might present the only realistic opportunity to achieve global recognition and visibility. However, in this research, it was demonstrated that artists from Serbia still haven't realized the importance of active participation in the digital art market. While separate research can be conducted to gather and analyze all the reasons why this important revenue and these promotional platforms are neglected, some solutions to amend this situation are obvious. On one hand, informing artists about the digital art market is the first step. Informing can be done through interviews with relevant stakeholders, publishing papers, and other awareness-raising campaigns. Once awareness is raised, the second step would be organizing training and lectures for artists on how to access and succeed in the digital art market. Of course, these are only short-term solutions – for long-term success, an elaborate strategy should be developed that will include educating artists not only on the digital art market but also on the skills necessary to compete on digital and any other marketplace, including skills on topics such as such as management and marketing.

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INSTAGRAM AND ARTISTIC PLATFORMS AS REVENUE STREAMS FOR ARTISTS IN SERBIA
(summary)

In this article, the author emphasizes the importance of the digital art market, not only during the Covid-19 pandemic but also for the future. Apart from operating in different worlds (digital and physical), there a lot differences between the digital art market and the traditional art market. One of the major differences is the level of influence of the so-called gatekeepers. In the art world, these can be curators, art dealers, gallery owners, critics, collectors, cultural institutions and networks.

In this paper, an online survey was conducted to understand the role of the digital art market in the careers of artists from Serbia. It consisted of questions about general data, digital art platforms and social media. After analyzing the results, it is demonstrated that the potentials of the digital art market are used or even explored by very few Serbian artists.

The various potential reasons are discussed, but this article provides not only questions but also answers and potential solutions. The complexity of the skills necessary to participate in the digital art market is one of the main reasons why artists in Serbia are not active participants.

As a part of the solution, this article offers an analysis of know-how in the main digital art platforms: Etsy, Society6 and Redbubble, Saatchi Art and Instagram.

Reviews

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SEPHARDIM – THE THREAD OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

Production of Thematic Channels of Radio Belgrade, RTS, Serbia

Non-profit association COPEAM, dedicated to the promotion of dialogue and cultural integration in the Mediterranean region, which has operational headquarters in Rome at the offices of the Italian Radio and Television (RAI), this year for the third time announced a competition titled "Making a story from archives" for audio-visual work. This year's regional competition was dedicated to the topic "The relationship between Mediterranean countries: a historical perspective", which is not surprising, considering the fact that the association organizes various events to protect and promote the Euro-Mediterranean audiovisual heritage.

Young professionals aged 18 to 40, who belong to Balkan broadcasters and are active members of COPEAM, could take part in the race for the best realization. Another condition was that the programs must be realized in Serbian with English subtitles, and the duration should be between 5 and 15 minutes. Some of the evaluation criteria were the promotion of intercultural dialogue, creativity and originality in the use of audiovisual archives, as well as technical production (editing, sound, duration, new recordings).

In the big running, since the competition was open to all public radio and TV

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Ethnomusicologist Marija Vitas

stations from 26 countries which are members of COPEAM on both shores of the Mediterranean, Serbian ethnomusicologist Marija Vitas won the award for the best TV contribution. It was a short film called *Sephardim – The Thread of the Mediterranean*, produced by the Thematic Channels of Radio Belgrade. Marija Vitas was the official representative of RTS (public national TV service of the Republic of Serbia), with which she has long-term cooperation. In addition to the author, Marijana Rajić, Ognjen Škrbović and Snežana Grujić also participated in the realization of this twelve-minute documentary.

The film has a mosaic structure, made by combining narrative and musical segments. The story is accompanied by rich visual illustrations, and apart from the author, who was the narrator, a couple of Sephardim from Serbia and the region also talked about their experiences. These were Konstantin Šibul, a student of ethnomusicology at the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad, who deals with his Sephardic identity and Sephardic music and culture, then Stefan Sablić, frontman of the band *Shira u'tfila*, the most agile bearer of Sephardic heritage in the Serbian music stage, as well as Merima Ključo, an accordionist who nurtures the music of the Bosnian Sephardim. Starting from the fact that the Sephardim, leaving Spain at the end of the 15th century, temporarily or permanently settled in the wider Mediterranean area, and left traces of their culture in Morocco, Bosnia, Italy, Turkey, Greece and elsewhere, the author considers Sephardic music as a thread connecting different traditions and nations. As their main identity marker, the Judeo-Spanish language, Judezmo or Ladino, was highlighted, on which many Sephardic songs were sung, and which is in decline today. The influence of Sephardic music is visible in the songs of many Mediterranean cultures, which were taken from the Sephardic and as such nurtured or changed, so the author re-examines their origin and asks whether it would be correct to call such songs Mediterranean. The famous "Lela Vranjanka" stands out as the first such example, a song recorded in 1974 by Staniša Stošić, the soloist of Radio Belgrade, and which is widely accepted as a part of Serbian musical folklore. As another example of the use of elements of Sephardic melody, the author singles out the Greek artist Savina Yannatou and her performance of the traditional Sephardic song "La Cantiga del Fuego".

The Sephardic Mediterranean thread is further woven through Sephardic descendants who perform the music of their ancestors, and among them is Israeli singer-songwriter Yasmin Levy. There were also a few words about Drita Tutunović,

probably the only person in Serbia who first spoke Ladino as a child, and who was the inspiration for one of the albums of the Serbian Sephardic band *Shira u'tfila*. It was also talked about Flora Jagoda, a Sephardic guitarist and composer born in Bosnia, who fled to America, and about the project of two artists from Bosnia, Merima Ključo and Jelena Milušić, which is a kind of homage to Flora Jagoda and the continuation of nurturing the almost eradicated Sephardic culture in Bosnia.

Band *Shira u'tfila*. Photo by Tanja Drobnjak

Through a short but meaningful story about Sephardic music, Marija Vitas managed to show the connection of Mediterranean cultures, their mutual influences and permeation in the historical perspective in the documentary "Sephardim – The Thread of the Mediterranean". Interesting historical facts and the influence of music on the creation of Sephardic (and Mediterranean) identity, as well as the influence of Sephardic culture on contemporary art, which was little known to the wider public, were presented. Professionally shaped, and at the same time not burdened with ethnomusicological explication and meta-scientific terminology, the film is an ideal way to get acquainted with the historical perspective of the development and reshaping of a musical culture and the multiculturalism of a particular geographical area. The author managed to network her research skills and knowledge of traditional music with material from the program archive of TV RTS, the sound archive of Radio Belgrade and the documentation of Radio Belgrade, which resulted in a multimedia work that rightfully won the award.

As the winner, Marija Vitas expects a trip to Rome, where she will attend the award ceremony at the annual COPEAM conference. We hope that the film will soon be premiered on national television in the region, and until then it can be watched on the RTS website, which is certainly a warm recommendation.

Contributors' Biographies

Visser Liebenberg is a freelance clarinetist and postdoctoral artistic researcher at the Africa Open Institute for Music, Research and Innovation, Stellenbosch University. As a clarinetist, his practice ranges from being an active soloist, chamber musician and orchestral player. As an artistic researcher his projects include a multidisciplinary approach ranging from clarinet improvisation with electronics, collaboration with theatre practitioners, composers, dancers and writers, and translating endogenous sounds from the global South for the clarinet.

Wolfgang Marx is Associate Professor in Historical Musicology at University College Dublin and a member of the UCD Humanities Institute where he leads the Research Strand "Death, Burial and the Afterlife". His main research interests include post-truth and music, the representation of death in music, György Ligeti, and the theory of musical genres. He currently edits two volumes on Music and Death, and on Ligeti for his upcoming centenary in 2023. Recent publications include essays on opera in Ireland, Ligeti's writings, the influence of cultural trauma on Ligeti's musical style, and the *Berliner Requiem* by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill. He is editor of the *Dublin Death Studies* series.

João Ricardo (1993) finished his master's degree in Artes Musicais [Musical Arts] at Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, Universidade Nova de Lisboa (FCSH/UNL) in 2019. His second chamber opera – *Eco/Arquipélago* – premiered in August at OPERAFEST 2020 in Lisbon. He studies music composition and analysis under Luís Soldado and participated in masterclasses and workshops with the composers and scholars Jaime Reis, Vincent Debut, Ake Parmerud, Hans Tutschku, João Pedro Oliveira, Carlos Caires, Dimitris Andrikopoulos and António Sousa Dias.
Apart from his works as a composer and music editor, he is a researcher affiliated with Centro de Estudos de Sociologia e Estética Musical (CESEM FCSH/UNL) since September 2019, within the groups Opera Studies Research Cluster and Contemporary Music Research Group, and since March 2020 he holds a research grant at University of Évora (CESEM UÉvora), integrating the project PASEV: Patrimonialization of Évora's Soundscape (1540-1910).

Smiljka Jovanović graduated in 2009 from the Faculty of Music Art in Belgrade, Department of Musicology. In 2016, she earned her Ph.D. in Theory of Art and Media at the University of Arts in Belgrade with the thesis titled "Issues of Theoretical Appropriation: Carnival and Masquerade in Culture, Arts and Theory". For the past several years, Jovanović has been teaching at the university level. Her areas of research include contemporary theoretical and cultural readings of arts and media, theories of identity and gender studies, cultural theory and popular culture, as well as music history and theory. Jovanovic has published a number of articles and studies in relevant journals and a series of music critiques and concert

booklets. She is the author of the book "Identitetska pozicioniranja Džona Zorna" (Beograd: Faculty of Music Arts, Department of Musicology, 2011).

Aaron Michael Mulligan is an artist and curator from Denver, Colorado, currently residing in Brooklyn, New York. He has worked as an art educator at the Rocky Mountain College of Design and runs a post-brick-and-mortar gallery called JuiceBox with his wife and fellow artist Lucía Rodríguez. He has worked as an independent curator and, since the start of the COVID pandemic, has organized web-based exhibitions. He is also the author of .img, published by Anfibia Ediciones based in Santiago Chile.

Ray Evanoff is an American composer and improviser whose work centers around detail, world building, performance extremity, and extended collaborations born of close relationships. He has worked with numerous contemporary music specialists including most recently Ensemble Apparat, Ensemble Dal Niente, TAK Ensemble, Liam Hockley, and Samuel Stoll, and taught at the University of Huddersfield, Huddersfield New College, University of New Orleans, and Harvard. He is an active concert organizer and arts presenter, and is the founder, director, and editor of FOCI Arts, a contemporary arts organization and online periodical. He studied at the College of Charleston (2002-06) and the University of Huddersfield (2008-12). His principle teachers include Quentin Baxter, Aaron Cassidy, and Steven Kazuo Takasugi. He lives in New Orleans, where he works as a private tutor and lectures on music at Tulane University.

Kate Ledger is a pianist specialising in experimental music and collaboration, exploring the line between compositional aesthetic and effective piano technique. Her performances as a soloist and ensemble member include: Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival; Frome Festival; The Society for Electroacoustic Music in Sweden; the PERFORMA conference in Portugal; and Loius Andriessen's acceptance of the Johan Wagenaar Prize. She gave the world premiere of Steven Kazuo Takesugi's Sideshow with Distractfold ensemble, for which they won the Kranichstein Music Prize for Interpretation at the 47th International Summer Course for New Music Darmstadt. She teaches at the University of York.

Jelena Novaković is a junior researcher at the Institute of Economics Sciences, and a PhD candidate at the Interdisciplinary Studies in Digital Art at the University of Art, Belgrade. She works as a researcher, with interest in art management, art entrepreneurship and digital art market. She is also an independent visual artist, working in different artistic fields - painting, illustration, graphic design and new media art. She lives and works in Belgrade, Serbia.

Guidelines for Authors

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Authors must submit original, unpublished articles.

All the manuscripts should be accompanied by author's name, affiliation, e-mail address, and a short biography (up to 150 words per author). Articles can be submitted in English (preferably) and Bosnian.

Manuscripts should be written in .doc or .docx format, in Times New Roman font, font size 12 with 1.5 line-spacing.

Original scholarly paper intended for sections The Main Theme and Beyond the Main Theme should include a short abstract (100-200 words), 5-10 keywords, as well as the summary (500 words). For articles in Bosnian, summary must be written in English. Do not include citations in the abstract. Keywords must be chosen appropriately in order to be relevant to the subject and content of the paper.

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Book, conference, and festival reviews should bring to attention relevant and valuable contributions or events that are in interest scope of our Journal. Reviews must contain a dose of critical appraisal instead of being written merely as summary. The title of the book review should include necessary information regarding the volume, as in following example:

> - William Myers, *Bio Art – Altered Realities*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2015, 256 pp., ISBN 9780500239322
> - *Margins, Futures and Tasks of Aesthetics*, Conference of the IAA, Helsinki, Finland, July 5–7, 2018.
> - Sonemus Fest, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, April 16–21, 2018.

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