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Social Composing

Contemporary composition, in the artistic creative process, calls for *contemporary communication models*. The digital revolution that has taken place since the 1990s through knowledge-sharing and networking via social media platforms or digital reality enhancement is constantly changing our habits of communication. These rhizome-like, allusive communication structures fundamentally impact our perception and our society in the reality-virtuality continuum.

Affect through participation, communicate through sharing in mixed, permeable realities — these are the social platforms of the now real-digital spaces and their communication models within which interaction processes between information and social resonance are explored, discarded, lived, perceived as controlling or liberating, and used or abused. Out of these models important social and artistic questions have to be re-imagined such as the construction of identities and communities, or the definition of presence and attendance, the private and the public, and the possibilities of sensual experiences within digital artificiality.

Contemporary Communication Models

Social composing¹ is located precisely in this mindset. It is a thinking and perceptive unit that searches for strategies of articulation in order to reflect on phenomena existing at the interface of real-digital communication models, to continue them, possibly to oppose them. Social composing is based on the intention of mediating through music and intermediacy — that is, radically placing the communicative ability of music in the center, to be *able* to trigger resonances in all those living in the virtuality-reality continuum.

The consequence of the creative process in social composing is acting with and within real-digital communication models which also means, for example, that the interplay between artist and user, between art and social resonance, is a constant subject of controversy. So far, composers have been asked if they write for or against an audience, for themselves or for others. Social composing eludes these categories. It requires a confrontation with the newly developed forms of communication in social media: the principle tweet / re-tweet and the idea of sharing and commenting, the principle of live chat, interactions in online communities or virtual reality in the presentation forms on Youtube, Youporn, & Co.

As a social composer, I designate composition strategies that deal with social media or social media-immanent communication models and, from them, generate their material. Does this mean I compose in a social environment rather than an "asocial" desk? More or less. There are two basic approaches to social composing as well as social media art. Both approaches are similar in that they can only arise with the internet and online platforms but differ in their work processes. Both forms also

share the idea that this organism of work in or with such communication models is intermedial.

One approach involves compositions that use social media as compositional material where the composition process takes place separately from the source, the digital platforms. What is important, however, is that the composition strategy incorporates social media into intrinsic communication models.² If this approach brings a social media phenomenon into a coherent musical form, for example, audio distortions from live streams that are mapped musically, the phenomenon of reproduction transmitted audio-visually as a context-detached element, etc., then these are works *about* social media. Neither operate *with* communication models so, therefore, do not count as social composing.

In the second approach to social composing, the composition process takes place directly on the social platforms so that dialogue becomes part of the work. Extreme forms culminate in user-generated content such as *Bicycle Built For 2000*, an audio collage initiated by Aaron Koblin and Daniel Massey who called on *Amazons Mechanical Turk Webservice* workers from seventy-one countries to re-enact the computer-simulated song *Daisy Bell*.³ Also, the project *Crowdsound* by Brendan Ferris is to be located here as a prototype⁴, in which users determine the course of a song or text by voting. The most prominent representative of social composing in the digital space is the virtual pop diva Hatsune Miku who is kept alive with her fans' songs and has conquered both social media and real concert halls.

Are we ready for social composing?

It is not surprising that the most prominent examples of the second form of social composing are to be found in the commercial realm. For new music, this way of working — regardless of the public idea of these examples — means new profiles of performers, new work methods, and “sideshow exhibits” to create performances. Unless the long-awaited change toward open, mobile, transformation-capable and genre-connecting performance venues begins, or the composition itself opens the place to the outside, concert halls, as they exist now, are closed spaces, the worst possible venue for social composing concepts. At least through their structure, festivals offer the possibility of exchange, but here, too, the new communication models quickly come up against spatial boundaries. The most suitable place is the net itself, preferably with a projection screen in the real world.

Links to new music are where this becomes an artistic confrontation and a fragile corpus: the most important instrument of new music in connection with social composing is not the performative object (trumpet, violin, synthesizer, video, electronics, etc.) — the most important instrument, simultaneously also the most historically and socially influenced, is the performer. While visual artists can freely choose their instruments and, thus, also choose existing connotations of a cultural or social kind, composers are confronted with professional musicians or ensembles, whose meaning in most cases is the presentation of trained perfection, virtuosity in the game, in short: history has shaped this perfection into profession. In order to be

able to use these skills in social composing, however, the inherent performance of real-digital communication models has to be added. This is reflected, for example, in the shift of complexity and virtuosity from a purely musical game toward a complexity and virtuosity of meanings, from processes and spaces to the use of musicians as part of a mechanism, as triggers of time-controlled processes. Consequences of this — as in social networks or extended realities — are the disappearance of man behind the instrument for the purpose of its functionality and the maintenance of the "human" in corporeal form, the obscuration and amplification of an experience through identification and, consequently, multiplication of one's own circle of perception.

"If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" reads the famous theorem of the American sociologists W. I. and D. S. Thomas⁵ from 1928 with regard to the investigation of paranoid behavior, which today also applies to digital communication models. In the complexity of such an uncontrollable and inconsistent present, countless spaces are created for subjective realities, whether from a need of the individual or from the given possibilities. The attempt to preserve real objectivity, if at all possible, is not entirely abandoned but it seems to be always less interesting, its reality with the "Yes Network" (the network does not contradict, it only reproduces one's own perceptual horizon) to create itself. Social composing as a strategy can set impulses for the visualization and concentration of perceptions — and make a contribution to the fact that, through its communication model, new music finds its way into society.

1 See my article: *Anleitung zur künstlerischen Arbeit mit der Gegenwart* in: *Zurück zu Gegenwart? Weltbezüge in Neuer Musik*, ed. v. Jörn Peter Hiekel, publisher of the INMM Darmstadt, Volume 55, Schott: Mainz p. 62.

2 Examples: the first pieces of my series *Public Privacy* (*#flute cover*, *#piano cover*, *#trumpet cover*, *#trombone cover*), which started in 2013; Sergej Maingardt, *It's Britney Bitch* (2013); Richmond & Chladil, *Overheard* 2008-2010); Example of a social media performance: Keiner, Brandrup, Seeman, *Public is the new Private* (2012), Info: <http://www.publicisthenewprivate.com> (last accessed 15.07.2016).

3 The song composed by Harry Dacre in 1892 only became known sixty years later. John Kelly, Max Matthews, Carol Lockbaum sourced it in 1962 for the use of musical speech synthesis. <http://www.bicyclebuiltfortwothousand.com> (last accessed 15.07.2016).

4 Ferris pursues the non-artistic intention of using this kind of composition to meet the palate of the masses – the result is an interchangeable musical "fabric softener." The concept could be highly interesting by choosing other musical parameters.

5 William I. Thomas, Dorothy S. Thomas, *The Child in America: Behavior Problems and Programs*, Knopf 1928.