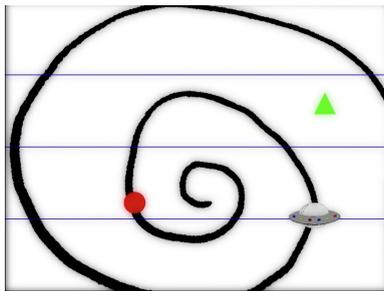


About animated, living, dead and more empathetic music - Oliver Laumann, August 2019



Before GP&PLS in 2017 recorded and released their political songs with the album Pro Monarchist Extratone, the band toured, for several years, primarily playing Icelandic animated notation: a genre consisting of moving video scores, including pieces by composers Páll Ivan Pállson, Guðmundur Steinn Gunnarsson and Jesper Pedersen.

Although the animated scores - even before they were later transformed into political tools - are undoubtedly justified as a pioneering form in compositional music, despite a lack of wider popularity, such as the so-called "graphic" but still static scores, the animated scores are revitalized

by their

↑ Spooky Spiral - Jesper Pedersens (2012) relation <https://vimeo.com/50446539> an

extreme degree of uneven tonelengths and microrhythms, especially compared to how easy they are decoded, simply because they are moving. In short: complex results can be achieved through a simple interactive and easy-to-understand interface. Most compositions in the genre require minimal instruction, relative to how much they achieve by them, especially considering the current standards of musical rehearsal/preparation time, often the instructions have even been given

political utility. The most immediate qualities of animated notation, in relation to traditional western notation, are how they can effortlessly produce an

as part the performance.

These forces are most often

ignored in the critique of animated notation, since the videos are usually much earlier written

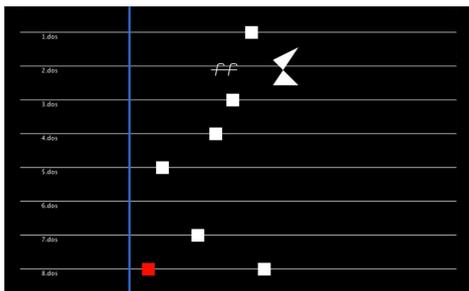
off as not-serious,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J54jIMqPKOM&t=83s> probably because of their (for some, too) colourful outer, which as seen

here in *Hundi* is not a rule. The animations should not be seen as a purely aesthetic exploration of the score, but also of the functionality of it.



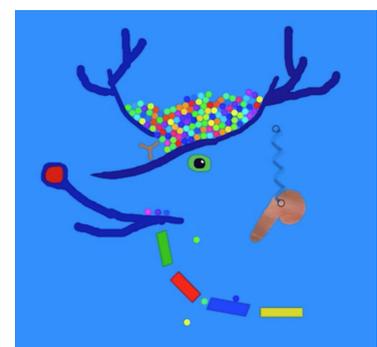
↑ Spooky Spirals - OliverLaumann (2017)



← *Hundi* - Guðmundur Steinn Gunnarsson (2013)

Animated notation also excels by appealing to skill-sets other than a traditional musical one, which is often deeply rooted in instrumentalism. Perhaps the most crucial factor when playing animated notation is WHEN you play, which can help to release the player from choice and thought about what to play. The most

obvious is the resemblance to computer-games or sports, where a player's time of reaction is the most crucial (not to say that you can or should try to "win" animated notation, as "failed" or imprecise attempts at playing the compositions are often also exciting to listen to / experience).

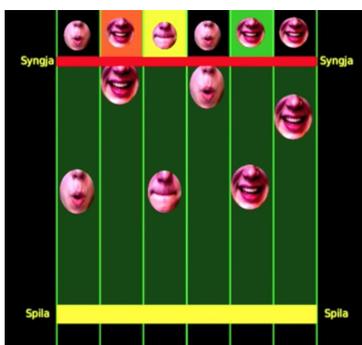


Hreindýr nýs árs Páll Ivan Pállson (2014) ↑

← *Munnur og nef* - Páll Ivan Pállson (2013)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=284RqDv5TbE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1wcKwdRqVBO>



Another resemblance to computer games is, of course, how you by playing animated notation enter into a pre-constructed visual world, and here it comes:

which also informs and affect how you play the composition, on an intuitive level and in more detail than what is possible to write in a traditional score, if it is to be read without to much difficulty. I'm talking about the atmosphere of the score's visual world, which intuitively influences whoever plays the composition, often in ways that would be difficult to plan for the composer. A significant difference is also how the audience enters into this world with the players, as the score is also experienced by them, which differs from the use of the classical score, which - while the music is played - exists primarily for the eyes of the reading and playing musician.

The form thus opens up to all sorts of contributions and one can maybe rather compare the magic that can arise with the one found in a devoted improvisation. One of the first times we played one of my animated scores, which at that time did not have a name, one of those who played chose his audible (and in this case also spoken) contribution when the score asked him to play, should be shouting "Croatian Jungle, Croatian Jungle". This was his association with the visual world, which despite being filmed in Scotland, reminded him of his dangerous everyday-life as a refugee in the Croatian forests.



↑ *Croatian Jungle* - Oliver Laumann (2017)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tiPMkkMSBo8>

The animated notations have been used and have proven extremely efficient in a wide variety of contexts: When playing music with people you cannot speak the same language as, with children, or when you are in a situation where people's prerequisites for playing music are so different, or if you do not know each other at all and it might be absurd, or even discriminatory, to ask people to do something very specific (such as singing/playing within a certain type of set tonality or rhythm) if for example, you have a limited knowledge of their abilities, culture, traditions, understanding of music, etc. So provided that you can see and somehow respond physically, you can play animated notation (and if now you should not be able to see, one can still response to others who are responding to the score).¹

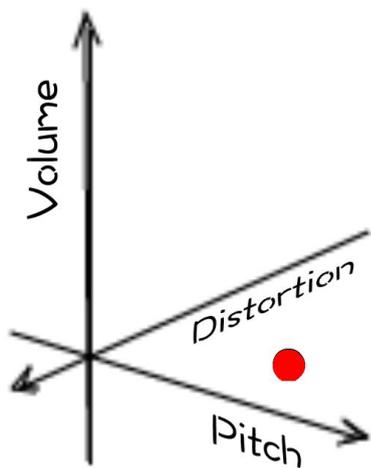
The Living Score

From the idea of an animated score - understood as "alive" or brought to life, and from a desire to make an analogue and screenless version of the animated notations - came another idea to what I have since called the Living Score. Movements on a stage are read, just as the movements on the screen in the animated notations are, or as notes in any other musical score is; a score that answers the playing musician and which can sense a sounding space just like the player and the audience.

This relationship between the visual and the audio creates a radically different experience of the overall scenic experience, where there is usually a known relationship between what goes on stage and a music that, perhaps similar to the scenography, must be supportive of what is at the center of attention; the actors and the narrative. Instead the stage becomes an instrument to shape the music from and through, rather than a visual aspect that the music must accompany.

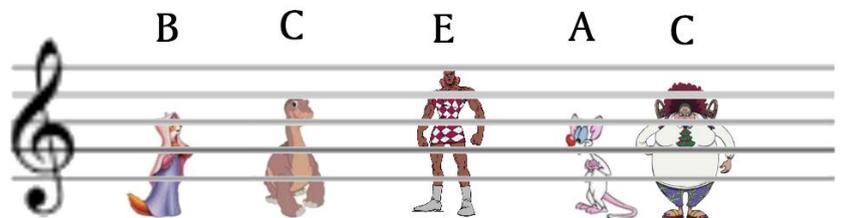
By "translating" from the physical movements of a scene, and not the emotional content of it, you bypass cliché staging of the emotional aspects of the scene. At the same time, fortunately, you do not overall avoid atmosphere, mood and temperament, as this is provided free of charge through the reaction of the playing musician and thereby becoming a musical translation of the character/score's emotional body language, whose nuances would again be almost impossible to note adequately, in comparison to how they translate in this, much more intuitive, way. Is it rather a form of guided or controlled improvisation than composition? In any case, you avoid some of the social problems that can arise when you ask people to just improvise completely freely. If they are not used to that, it can be intimidating and mental blockages may occur for the improviser who was supposed to be "free" to do what they want do. At the same time it is possible, in the following example, to read any scenic plan (with or without associated script, scenography, etc.), whether it is a Strindberg performance or a simple, planned or improvised choreography, as a score :

↓ Coordinate system with interchangeable musical parameters
to read the scene from - Oliver Laumann, 2018



← All bodies, in motion or still standing (here indicated by the red dot), on the stage can be translated into music when you assign the musical parameters to the axes. In the same way, one could let the musical parameters be controlled by spectra other than the physical ones, for example the temperament of the characters, so that one would play higher the more angry or the more desperate a character becomes.

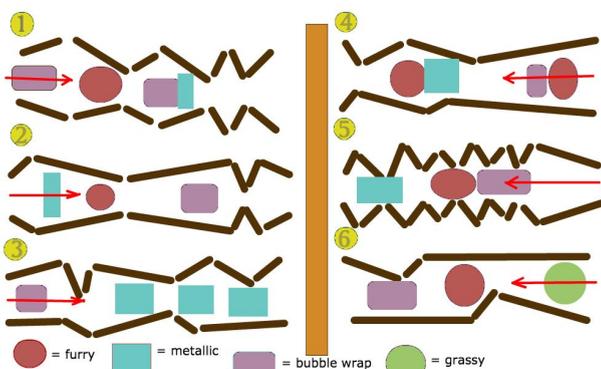
↓ Composition: Mija Milovic. Drawing: Oliver Laumann, 2018



↑ Above Mija Milovic's live score: the characters on stage moving around,

behind a musical staff. Their heads act as notes within the grid, here resulting in a rubato melody: B, C, E, A, C.

↓ Choirpiece/Obstacle Course by Amanda Goodman, 2018. Drawing: Oliver Laumann



Live score with colored shape, 2018 - Oliver Laumann →

In the model on the right, we see how through see-through, colored shapes, placed in front of any stage, you can transform the movements of the stage



into music. The players choose a colored shape and responds on their instrument when there is movement inside the shape.

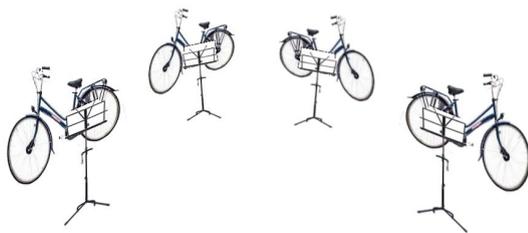
In Amanda's obstacle course we see 6 divided paths, inside each of which there is a person crawling, also constantly singing. The volume of the song is determined by the width of the track and the timbre and quality of the song is determined by the material underlay, here indicated by colored fields.

The Music of Objects - The Dead Score?

Mentality, awareness, sensitivity; these are some of object's or thing's potentially inaccessible horizons for the human. So if, for example, it is music that we imagine things to perform, then we can speak of an inhuman music. To imagine a world and a music not given for a human consciousness. We can fantasize about how things, seemingly beyond our comprehension and empathy reach, interact, connect with and influence one another.

"Dead" is not (in this context) accurate, since it is the "living" qualities of objects that make them viewable as kinds of musicians or at least having musical agency. The idea nonetheless emerged as a kind of contrast to the living score, where living people play after a score made up of other living people, resulting in the notion of "dead", or at least, inhumane objects playing music guided by other inhuman objects.

This, human-inhuman relationship, is probably more accurate than dead-alive.



↑ The Bike Quartet / Bikes reading music - Oliver Laumann, 2019

Speculative realism

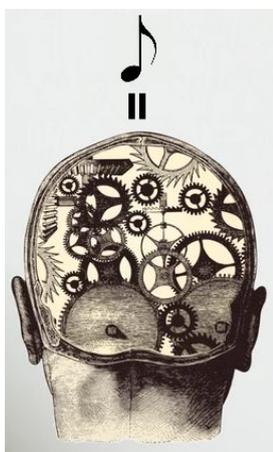
Although there is disagreement as to what this concept exactly covers, the speculative realists revolve around an object-orientation, a reaction to the anthropocentric, human being at the center. How to realize this as an audible experience, or for that matter if it should be, is from here on

an open question, but the idea initiates for the time

being a stretch, a fantasy, a music to imagine. Here are a few text and image examples:



*The earth's music after we humans have become extinct or have left the planet in favor of a new residence
The rust of the cars left behind on the planet and the decay of fallen, unspoiled fruits is a posthuman
symphony. A more moral music than the one made for humans only? An anti-anthropocentric music in
which being is not exclusive for neither a privileged group of people, nor is it just for humans or biological beings at
all!*



← The thinking brain is also a music. The brain here is thought of as an autonomous substance. Hear its whispers and its creaks.



The music occurs between the snare drum and the drumsticks that lie on it, in an empty music room at an abandoned music school, after all people have died. The weight of the drumsticks on the drumheads and metal edge of the snare drum. Intimacy in the meeting between the entire length of the drumstick

and the surface of the skin. How does this weight feel, the tactile characteristics of the stick, was it hand-cut and irregular or factory produced, plastered and smooth, and how does its surface lean? Does it irritate or caress the plastic head or "natural" skin's easily-shaped, receptive surface, as it is untightened.. Are the sticks made so that there is balance within their bodies, so that they rest with dead weight, or are they cut out of a disunited, tense piece of wood, which would result in the stick's restrained and unbalanced lying - and can all this even be considered a music, when the dust has long coated both sticks and drum heads and no human have touched them?

One could argue that it is not an inhuman music as soon as we humans have imagined it. But in Emil Månsson's post in Trappetusind about speculative realism, a Kathrine Hayles quote is printed about the paradoxical fact that the human mind is precisely the tool that, so to speak, must remove itself from the equation:

*This leads to a strong paradox: human imagination is the best way, and perhaps the only way, to move beyond anthropocentrism into a more nuanced understanding of the world as comprised of a multitude of world views, including those of other biological organisms, humanmade artifacts, and inanimate objects.*²

But what happens in the stretch one has to do to imagine the inhuman music? Is it possible to learn yet unattainable degrees of empathy that go beyond the interpersonal? It's possible to imagine countless varieties, from anthropomorphs and animals, to the completely inhuman object, which together indicate a fluid spectrum from the human to the inhuman:

When a bear makes sounds and gestures, what do they mean to communicate. We cannot speak bear, but we can have a very good idea what a bear wants to say when it speaks. We can watch how a bear communicates with other bears, and then recognize the similarities when a bear tries to communicate with a human. What we have learned is that when bears communicate with people in this manner, an attack on a person has not happened. Too often bears are killed by people for communicating with people the best way they know how. The bears are killed because their behavior during communicating is misunderstood as being aggressive and dangerous. The communicating bear is not aggressive, it is uneasy and nervous. - Mike McIntosh

How Bears Talk!! - Mike McIntosh of Bear With Us for Bears.

↑ Bears singing³ - By Bear with us... for bears, 2014

→ Maestro Von

Bearsworth with the Catsville Choir, 2011 Boyds by Enesco Artist Gallery Creation! Strike up the holiday band and join the chorus as our master conductor, Maestro Von Bearsworth leads a quartet of kitties in songs of holiday cheer. Wearing a sculpted black suit and striped scarf, Maestro



"People are places" - Marie Eline Hansen

← The life of the stone is a music -Time, timing or sense of time: We know countless variations of the concept of time associated with music, such as having good (precise? alive? willfull?) time,

when playing music, and feeling for effective delivery of musical material (a joke, a sentence, a song). Just as one's sense of time would change radically if playing



music on another planet with a different gravity (this is discussed by Kresten Osgood and Søren Kjærgaard in Mads Parsum's 2001 film *The Knights of the Night*, ⁴).

Imagining the tree's or the stone's sense of time can give an insight into a very foreign music. One that extends over long periods of time, lengths that the human sense of time cannot fathom at all. Things just being, behaving and traveling as a kind of music. Imagine a rock's or a twig's travels around the world, being exposed to other forces of nature, wind, water, or human forces that might not intend their influence on things as a music. Not to mention all the sounds that occur as the stone and the twig encounter the surrounding world.

Here one last, in this case political, anthropomorph: Mr. Peanut.⁵

Mr. Peanut is a performance by artist Vincent Trasov, from 1974-75, where the commercial character of Mr. Peanut is appropriated and transformed into a political character, e.g. by running for mayoral election in Vancouver.

Although the performance consists primarily of symbolic acts, there are times when it results in something that is truly reminiscent of the infiltration of a political scene: at least another politician did not get the 2684 votes Mr. Peanut received.

Slowly, there are also several who show their support for Mr. Peanut, the mayor of Kansas City, as well as William Burroughs, something that could potentially lead to Mr. Peanut having actual political influence. Mr. Peanut became known for his

interaction with the streets of Vancouver, by step dancing, playing violin and singing mutant jazz standards (*Peanuts from Heaven*) in public, which has a direct

infectious emotional effect on the outside world. The performance is not tucked away in an art institution where you would have to visit him, but is more confrontational, contact-seeking, more difficult to avoid; taking responsibility for the public space. In addition, he also has a political program, including urban planning and education, but in the end he primarily calls on the potential voter for the symbolic, political act to *put their cross* in support of the arts, which did not result in a direct, concrete political result, as he ultimately was not elected, although in theory it could have done so.



To conclude, back to music: It has long been an interest, an interpretation and a desire for music, to fuse with the spirit of music, to communicate with, simulate and fantasize about, or succeed in, fully becoming the inhuman object. Maybe as long as the music itself. For the performer, a step in between may be to merge with the instrument, such as in the traditional Indian ritual *Chilla Katna*, where the musician in aspiration towards becoming "masterful" on the instrument lets himself isolate, only to play the instrument during all hours of the day, when not sleeping. Here it has been common for musicians to hear the instrument speak to them, as with a human voice, perhaps produced by their inner selves, perhaps not.

The desire and aspiration towards this fusion lives on in contemporary musical contexts, learning from and acquiring the inhuman: Dalin Waldo's sense of and interaction with the synthesizer's spiritual life, Arthur Calander's synthesizing voice exercises, Holger Hartvig's speech-magical voice exercises (*Worldline Vowel Exercise* ⁶) which transforms the physical body, the voice, into a time machine.

1. Links to animated notation:

Spooky Spiral, Jesper Pedersen: <https://vimeo.com/50446539>

Hreindýr nýs árs, Pall Ivan Pallson: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=284RqDv5TbE>

Munnur og nef - Pall Ivan Pallson: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1wckwdRqVBO>

Croatian Jungle, Oliver Laumann: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tiPMkkMSBo8>

2. Emil Månsson/Kathrine Hayles: <http://arkiv.trappetusind.dk/trappetusind12.pdf>

- More speculative realism: *Turbulens* af Mikkel Thykier, *Monsiuer Antipyrine*, 2014

3. Mike McIntosh - How Bears Talk!/: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpNx_XXSbMA

4. Mads Parsums *Nattens Ridder*, *JazzTV 2001*: https://youtu.be/zLvM_sCEhko

5. Mr. Peanut/Vincent Trasov: <http://vincenttrasov.ca/index.cfm?pg=menu&filter=Mr.%20Peanut>

6. Holger Hartvig - *Worldline Vowel Exercise*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-TkrYOGF_rE

- More animated notation: <https://animatednotation.wordpress.com/portfolio/jesper-pedersen/>