

for **one century abc**, Titanik, Turku 2023
a conversation between Manfred Werder
and Rasmus Östling
Oct 15th – Nov 10th 2023
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layout by Isto Rahkila

charged to the bursting point with time

Rasmus Östling

I've been doing some light reading recently, and what's struck me is that, even though the term is a bit tacky, I think what Adrian Piper suggested with meta-art could be applied to your occupation, or would you say that?

Manfred Werder

I think there are some crucial issues regarding Adrian Piper's meta-art concept. She proposes to open the range of the artist's activity towards a reflective field around the artwork, what she would then call meta-art. However it seems to me as if meta-art became itself a discursive frame enclosing the *proper* art work (whatever that *proper* would be, and even its being substituted entirely), and alongside with this I sense from her side a strong emphasis on the artist, *their* work and function (the inside and outside of that frame), in explicit opposition to the *world* - which after 50 years of the text's publication seems almost tragic.

Artists entirely deal in the symbolic order; *they* are caught in the symbolic regime even if they compose *just some sounds*. The sounds are not a language but as their reality, that is, the *inscription*, the impact, its power, the sounds follow a symbolic regime. Following such a (certainly unfair) reading of her text on meta-art, one might brutally say that it has become part of the intensification of the aspect of the spectacle that the arts are ever more undergoing.

However, is there at all a way to not become part of that intensification of the spectacle? Is there at all a way towards that what Walter Benjamin calls *pure strike*, that is, a complete suspension of instrumentality altogether? Of what nature is the bond between instrumentality and symbolic order?

RÖ

I agree with you on the first part. It is as if she creates two different, interdependent frameworks: one where an artistic being works as a shell for the proper output, like a circle within a bigger circle, and another (as an almost logical result of the first) where the being and the output exist side by side, separate from each other, almost as if they are not related at all. So, in a way, through an all too linear reading, that division could result in the exact opposite of what she clearly pursued.

An example such as yours really makes me wonder if the emphasis on the spectacle is at all dependent on whether sounds could be exchanged with other primal artistic units, potentially resulting in different outcomes.

One can notice that immateriality (or more cynically, quasi-immateriality) has become a certain goal to strive for in contemporary art, with the result again being something only close to a world without a material necessity in the artistic output, if not coated with an even more intense relation to the spectacle. I can sense that an escape from instrumentality is a constant question, or at least has been one, for you and in your work.

MW

The image of circles within circles and their containment but separation is very powerful in general. I completely agree regarding *quasi-immateriality*. The problem here would be to pretend that there exists only one circle – to keep with the image – that is, the *proper* artwork. The spectacle around that circle to inflate and often monumentalize that *quasi-immateriality* has a profoundly religious stance: the absolute impenetrability of that one circle. There's nothing that is not in relation, thus we must look carefully into the economy of an artwork, the constant flowing of permeable frames.

It seems to me that instrumentality sets the ground for all the problems we've been dealing with. The hardest question might be the relation of instrumentality to power. It seems as if power can't but accelerate instrumentality ever more towards the tiniest ramifications of the social. The justification has ever been: "aiming at some good." Is instrumentality a specific expression of power?

"Every state is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good; for mankind always act in order to obtain that which they think good. But, if all communities aim at some good, the state or political community, which is the highest of all, and which embraces all the rest, aims, and in a greater degree than any other, at the highest good."

What then actually is the "good" to aim for, or even, "the highest good"? It's *bios*, the *qualitative* life of the citizen, built upon instrumentality in the form of conquest and slavery. Aristotle doesn't need many paragraphs to set and justify it, with the ever-recurring formulation: "by nature."

The radically continuous actuality of such statements makes me think about how our music practice is impregnated by them. What is music beyond the instrumental regime?

RÖ

I find instrumentality very diverse (and intimidating) due to the critical angle we clearly share. Although, instrumentality in this sense, notably after including an Aristotelian notion, seems to be constructed of both material and spiritual, almost esoteric, components. I think it's partly derivative of the earlier note on the circles within a circle.

The inseparable bond that instrumentality holds of power, and of the social, could perhaps not only be justified materially, but needs the spiritual element to maintain its grip. This ambiguous duality lets the double-edged instrumentality stay out of reach for a broader critique, mainly because the two (a simplified form) components are responsible for different questions and objects.

Trying to pinpoint the spiritual instrumentality in arts leads me in this context inevitably back to Wandelweiser and other post-Cagean traditions. By being difficult to catch in the act of doing, the dual instrumentality also, maybe accidentally, leads one to a fruitful position of critique. The spiritual instrument in my example is the all-encompassing method or thesis, the one thing you associate with a post-Cagean tradition, be it the emphasis on silence or a reductionist approach in general.

I believe that the one-dimensional view on instrumentality might ignore similar examples. You can't avoid the fact that contemporary music has laid almost all its weight on instrumentality.

MW

It seems that a certain economy, a certain balance between the material and spiritual, between physical and mental survival, would be crucial. However, it's hard to think the two areas separated. As if something regarding survival had to become an object called "the good", malleable and purifiable into something like "the highest good" that finds its adequate representation on both the material and spiritual side: a kind of "theocracy". Both sides build on each other intrinsically and find slightly different balances, expressions of forms of government, expressions of social life. As if it were impossible to separate the two sides, or as if each side had its proper both sides. I'm trying to think the nature of analogy regarding instrumentality between such a history of conquest towards "the highest good" and, say, a *music work of our time*. In other words, I'm trying to think about the strata of instrumentality sedimented in the music we do today. I'm trying to render the *actual music* of the strata of instrumentality sedimented in the music we do today.

RÖ

In a perfect world you could take the music we do, or make, today, delete the multidimensional, varied material, and see where and in which form instrumentality leaves its traces. Alternatively, you could do the opposite: disengage from the strata of instrumentality and see how the archeological sites, formerly filled with pure instrumental power, will respond. I'm mostly repeating myself here, but "trying to render the actual music of the strata of instrumentality sedimented in the music" gives me the tangible image of sieving, where you slowly differentiate something from the entity of which it is a part, but without the necessity of staying as part. Sieving works as an example, because its slow pace corresponds to your tiring task of trying to grasp the diversity of the sediment and working with the multiplicity of material. What is hopefully left at the end is hopefully the actual music, exactly like you mentioned.

MW

The image of the sieve and of sieving works, its notion of time is powerful and ambiguous and relates immediately to survival; wandering around, traversing, navigating through space and time. What music practice - of which the music then would be its intrinsic *actuality* - do we want to be part of? We could imagine uncovering all the strata, not as our objective but as traversing without any objective at all, a deliberate leaving of the *realms* of the *objective* that would necessarily be rather opaque, as transparency already appears as an ideological instrument, a kind of sieve. The *actual* music reflects the world, our traversing, a practice of life.

It's so difficult to enunciate the desire for a more specific practice of life - let's say, in opposition to "the highest good": that there is no outside to the very practice of life - because we would immediately be caught in investing in another outside that would isolate and reduce that what we've just tried to sense.

RÖ

There are two very important, interrelated observations here that appeal to me. First, there seems to be an essential connection between the instrumental tendency and a desperate search for an objective. When one sincerely submits themselves to the actual music, one might find themselves abandoning the idea of an extrinsic objective, facing an opportunity to leave the instrumental regime. The metaphorical image of traversing through space and time, partially inverts the Benjaminian notion of history and its connection to progress; it opposes the act of turning one's back against the future, and instead simultaneously faces everywhere and nowhere, all around. Benjamin's approach to history and future seems almost too dualistic in this instance, it's hard to settle with the fact that the future is only concealed. I like to believe that the actuality in this kind of music can gain its substance from a place which is not completely unknown.

Second, what the direction-less traversing implies, is the very practice of life, as you said. The practice of life could be interpreted as a large enough concept that leaves one without an outside, and guides to a direction which again does not trap one within another isolated framework with its own limits. If one would turn their back towards the future, like Benjamin suggests, they would be completely helpless during a passage through space and time. I won't suggest a forward-facing posture towards the future, but the least you could do with an example like this is to suggest a chaotic, arbitrary approach to the traversal.

MW

Great. The storm that propels the angel of history irresistibly into the future is - I would argue - *instrumentality*, or progress in the words of Benjamin. It seems that we can't think instrumentality *conceptually* but rather *gradually*, and as intrinsic part of life, which ultimately means that everything must be considered in "singular means and ends not subsumable under general laws."

The *actual* music certainly relates to Benjamin's *dialectical image*:

"For the historical index of the images not only says that they belong to a particular time; it says, above all, that they attain legibility only at a particular time. And, indeed, this acceding "to legibility" constitutes a specific critical point in the movement at their interior. Every present day is determined by the images that are synchronic with it: each "now" is the now of a particular recognizability. In it, truth is charged to the bursting point with time. (This point of explosion, and nothing else, is the death of the *intentio*, which thus coincides with the birth of authentic historical time, the time of truth.) It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation."

A practice, a traversing where *truth is charged to the bursting point with time*. The music - an *explosion, the death of intentio*.





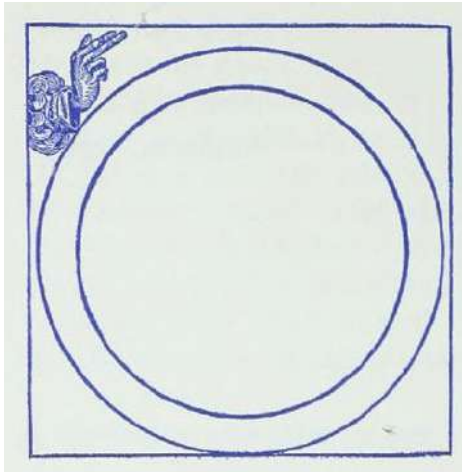
thin these late Yeares, there hath by
 signed a wonderfull Plague, which hath
 slaughters and Murthers, committed
 and brutish People there, in a
 manner to the utter Destruction, Devastation and Depop
 ulation of that whole Territorye (November 1620) (Ilse
 Warren's Cove from Hotel Pilgrim, Plymouth, Mass.

A. S. Packard, Plymouth, Mass.

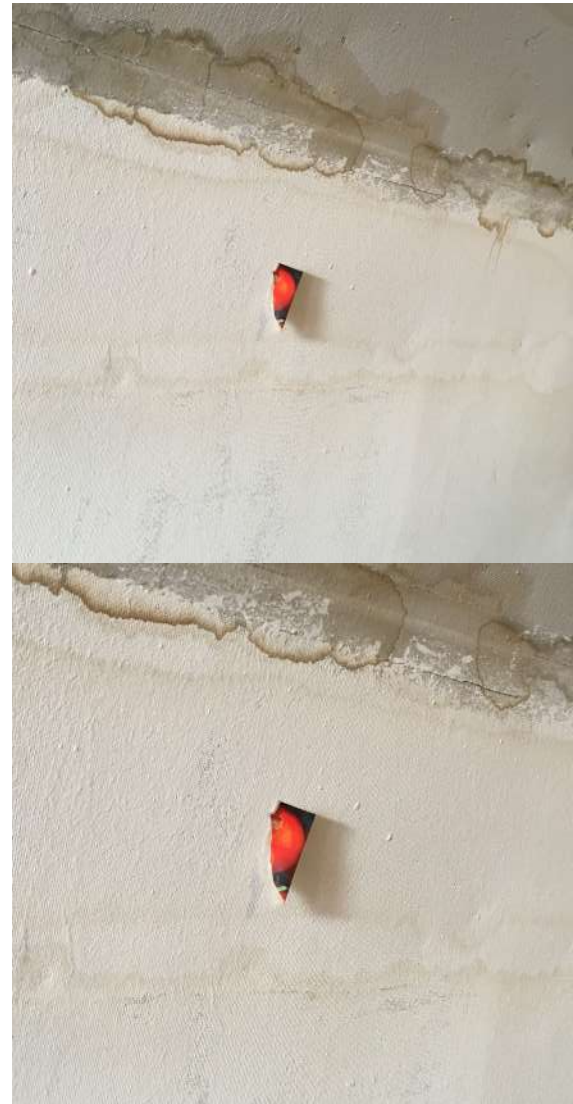


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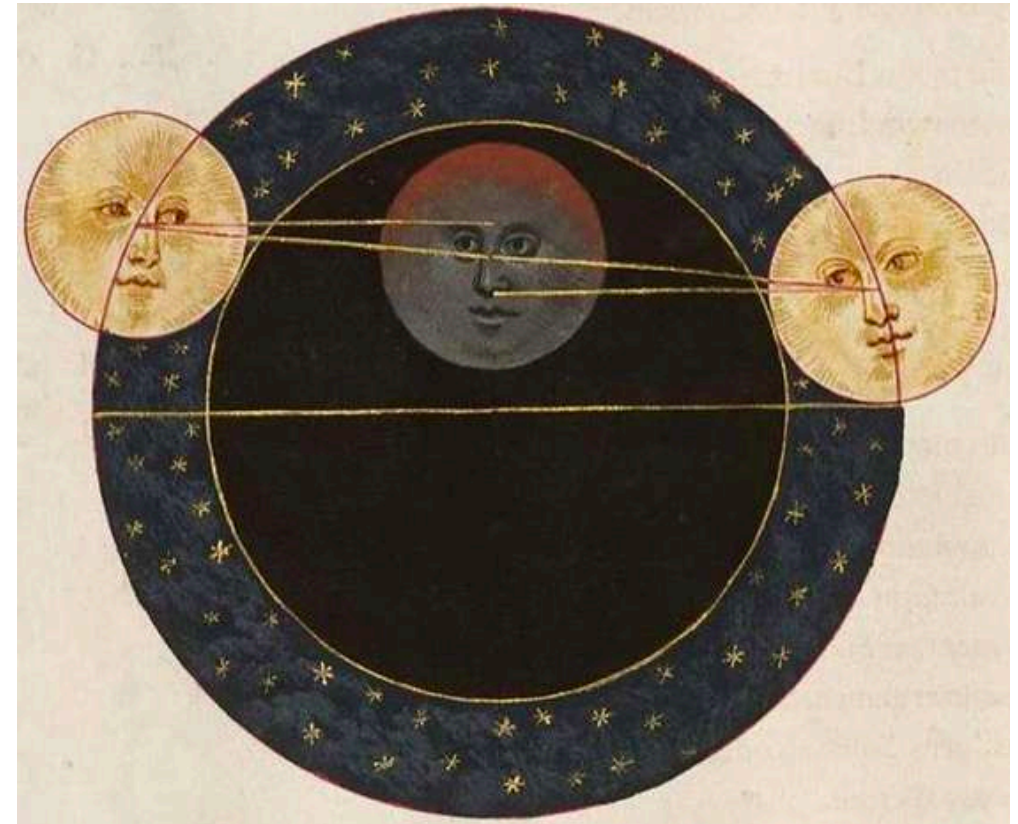
an... es el que... esa vida que en él perman
 idéntica a la vida terrestre, en la muerte y en la
 pervivencia) como si los sagrados son sus estados, con
 como es su vida física, vulnerable por los otros. é
 ecto ¿qué la distingue de la de los animales y plant
 e incluso si estos (animales y plantas) fueran sacra
 , no podrían serlo por su vida desnuda, no podrían se
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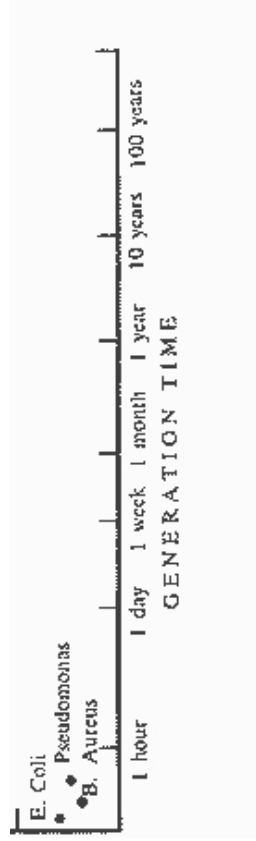


ideas are the stars, in contrast to the sun of revelation. they do not shine
light into the day of history, but work within it invisibly. they shine their
only into the night of nature. works of art are thus defined as models of a
that does not await the day, and thus does not await judgment day either; they
defined as models of a nature that is neither the staging ground of history nor
an domicile. the night preserved. (13noviembre2013)(9. dezember 1923)



After the birth of animals, plants exist for their sake, and that the other animals exist for the sake of man, the tame for use and food, the wild, if not all, at least the greater part of them, for food, and for the provision of clothing and various instruments. Now if nature makes nothing incomplete, and nothing in vain, the inference must be that she has made all animals for the sake of man. and so, from one point of view, the art of war is a natural art of acquisition, for the art of acquisition includes hunting, an art which we ought to practise against wild beasts, and against man who, though intended by nature to be governed, will not submit; for war of such a kind is naturally just(23dicembre2018)





however sacred man is (or however sacred that life in him which is identically present in earthly life, death, and afterlife), there is no sacredness in his condition, in his bodily life vulnerable to injury by his fellow men. what, then, distinguishes it essentially from the life of animals and plants? and even of these were sacred, they could not be so by virtue only of being alive, of being in life. (17november2019

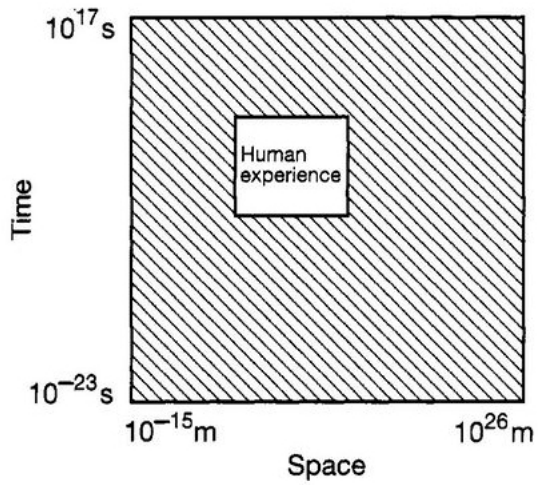


Figure 1.1: *Human experience of space and time in the physical world.*

Literature:

Aristotle: Politics, Book 1 (translation: Benjamin Jowett)

Werner Hamacher: Afformative, Strike

Walter Benjamin: The Arcades Project [N3,1]

Documents:

Manfred Werder: *[the music of history]*

20160, July 25, 2022, Temimilcingo, Morelos

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April 12, 2019, Ciudad de México, Huizachtepetl

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December 21, 2021, Ciudad de México, chino

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Rasmus Östling: *I-VI*