

# Thinking Music Mediation with Donna Haraway

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## Abstract

*This article explores the transformative potential of music mediation as an ethical and relational practice, drawing on Donna Haraway's concepts of "thinking-with" and "making-with" as well as sympoiesis and response-ability. In addressing the urgent need for new ways of living on a damaged planet, it emphasizes the role of music in fostering relationships across human and non-human worlds. Music mediation in "interesting times", framed as a process of becoming-with with 'others', invites us to change the stories and stay with the trouble. Music mediation based on care and response-ability can become an engaged speculative practice of listening and answering with others, a way of relating which continuously composes and decomposes 'us' and 'others'. Drawing on examples like Vanessa Tomlinson's composition Sonic Dreams and the activist orchestra Lebenslaute, this article demonstrates how musicking's transformative potential can make a difference on a damaged planet.*

*Cet article explore le potentiel transformateur de la médiation de la musique en tant que pratique éthique et relationnelle, en s'appuyant sur les concepts de Donna Haraway tels que penser-avec, faire-avec, la sympoïèse et la response-ability (la capacité à répondre). Face à l'urgence de trouver de nouvelles manières d'habiter une planète abîmée, il met en lumière le rôle de la musique dans la création de liens entre les mondes humains et non humains. La médiation de la musique en des «temps intéressants», envisagée comme un processus de devenir-avec les autres, nous invite à transformer nos récits et à rester avec le trouble. Fondée sur le soin et la response-ability, la médiation de la musique peut devenir une pratique spéculative engagée d'écoute et de réponse avec autrui – une manière de se relier qui compose et décompose sans cesse les figures du nous et des autres. En s'appuyant sur des exemples tels que la composition Sonic Dreams de Vanessa Tomlinson et l'orchestre activiste Lebenslaute, cet article montre comment le musicking peut déployer un potentiel transformateur susceptible de faire une différence sur une planète en souffrance.*

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ISSN: [2943-6109](https://doi.org/10.71228/ijmm.2025.24)

m<sub>d</sub>wPress

DOI: [10.71228/ijmm.2025.24](https://doi.org/10.71228/ijmm.2025.24)

*Der Artikel untersucht das transformative Potenzial von Musikvermittlung als ethische und relationale Praxis und stützt sich dabei auf Donna Haraways Konzepte des „Denkens-mit“ und „Mit-Machens“ sowie auf Sympoiesis und Response-Ability. Angesichts der dringenden Notwendigkeit, neue Formen des Zusammenlebens auf einem geschädigten Planeten aufzuspüren, wird gezeigt, wie sich durch musikalische Praxen artenübergreifende Beziehungen zwischen menschlichen und nicht-menschlichen Lebewesen aufspannen lassen. Musikvermittlung in „interesting times“, verstanden als ein Prozess des Mit-Werdens mit Anderen, lädt dazu ein, mit anderen Geschichten zu denken und unruhig zu bleiben. Eine Musikvermittlung, die auf Sorge (care) und Response-Ability aufbaut, kann so zu einer engagierten, spekulativen Praxis des Hörens und Antwortens mit Anderen werden und einer Beziehungsweise, in der sich ‚wir‘ und ‚andere‘ permanent de/komponieren. Anhand von Beispielen wie Vanessa Tomlinsons Komposition *Sonic Dreams* und dem aktivistischen Orchester *Lebenslaute* zeigt der Artikel, wie musikalische Praxen auf einem geschädigten Planeten einen Unterschied machen können.*

## Keywords

**Haraway, care, response-ability, making-with, ethico-ecological musicking**

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## Introduction

*May You Live in Interesting Times* was the title of the 58<sup>th</sup> Venice Art Biennale, curated by Ralph Rugoff, in 2019. He suggested that perhaps the arts could be “a kind of guide for how to live and think in ‘interesting times’.” (Rugoff 2019) And yes, we actually seem to be in great need of ideas regarding how to live differently on a damaged earth. Given the lack of actions that would lead to climate change mitigation on the necessary scale, it seems increasingly likely that the saying *May You Live in Interesting Times* will turn into a cynical curse for humans, as well as for other species.

Aware that the arts alone – and thus also music mediation – cannot initiate transformation processes in society as a whole, I would nevertheless like to point out the potential inherent in artistic and mediating activities. Especially through participatorily engaged musical practices, spaces can be created in which alternate ways of thinking and living together can be developed and new possibilities are imagined and experienced (Turino 2009). That being so, artistic practices can play a significant part in this context, since they

offer modes of sensuous, aesthetic attunement, and work as a conduit to focus attention, elicit public discourse, and shape cultural imaginaries. ‘How might the world be organized differently?’ is a question that matters urgently, and it is a question that art – particularly art attuned to human and more-than-human social justice – asks in generative and complex ways. (Loveless 2019, 16)

To avoid falling into a general illusion about what the arts can achieve, I would like to work out in the following which kind of music mediation could actually make a difference. By thinking with Donna Haraway and others, I outline the essential characteristics of music mediation that stays with the trouble and asks: What connections do we make? What relationships do we create? It is no coincidence that these characteristics are all verbs – they illustrate the becoming of the world and thus also the becoming of every mediation practice. And it emphasizes that we are involved in this constant becoming and are therefore responsible for what becomes of it. As Christopher Small (1998) has pointed out, music is not a thing, but an “activity in which all those present are involved and for whose nature and quality, success or failure, everyone present bears some responsibility.” (Small 1998, 10) This makes musicking not only a matter that creates spaces of possibility, but also a deeply ethical matter: “Meeting each moment, being alive to the possibilities of becoming, is an ethical call, an invitation that is written into the very matter of all being and becoming.” (Barad 2007, 396)

Before looking at specific examples of how music mediation can be practiced in times of climate change, I would like to clarify how I define the term ‘music mediation’ in this context. In this article I understand music mediation not as an activity or approach that aims at a better understanding of a musical piece, but as a deeper understanding of our being together in this world and of relationships arising across species *through* musicking, sounding and listening. Mediation here is a process that enables musical and aesthetic experiences that enhance the eco-literacy of all participants, and it helps us to explore and shape our relationships in times of climate change. Ethical-ecological music mediation, as presented in this article, is therefore related to the concept of eco-literate music pedagogy (Shevok 2015; 2017). According to Shevock, eco-literate musicking is based on four major principles:

- (1) Connecting to local places. (2) Experiencing music and nature in connected, meaningful, and ethical ways. (3) Developing ecological consciousness by ritualizing and creating music rooted in soil. (4) Connecting to the planet more broadly by connecting local understandings to global ecological crisis. (Shevok 2015, 13)

Drawing on the concept of musicking (Small 1998), the core of this music mediation also lies in telling stories: “[W]ith or without a stable work of music, there is a sense in which all musicking can be thought of as a process of storytelling.” (Small 1998, 139). In this case, musicking is about stories that encourage us to reconnect with the ecosystem, to fabulate about extinct species, to listen to the seasons, or to include non-humans as fellow players. Herein lies one of the transformative potentials of music mediation in times of climate crisis: by telling ethico-ecological stories through musicking – stories that are neither characterized by a game-over attitude, nor longing for a purely technological solution to climate change – visions of a future worth living for many can become tangible. Of course, there can be no single way, no recipe how musicking can become an eco-literate practice – rather, the question is: Which guiding principles should accompany music mediation in “interesting times”? In short: How can music mediation

support eco-literate ways of thinking, acting and listening, and become an eco-ecological matter that indeed can be “a kind guide for how to live and think in ‘interesting times’” (Rugoff 2019)?

### *Which kind of music mediation do we need in “interesting times”?*

I would like to suggest the concepts of thinking-with and making-with as a starting point for music mediation that considers itself as involving an ethical matter. This marks a shift from making to making-with, from thinking to thinking-with, because “[w]e become-with each other or not at all” (Haraway 2016, 4). Regarding the social and ecological effects of the climate crisis, Haraway argues that concepts of the isolated self have failed – instead, she argues in favour of making heterogenous connections: “Alone, in our separate kinds of expertise and experience, we know both too much and too little, and so we succumb to despair or to hope, and neither is a sensible attitude.” (Haraway 2016, 4)

What implications does this have for music mediation? Firstly, that the act of musicking must be organized in such a way that it calls for a change of perspective – this corresponds to the core essence of music mediation, which Irena Müller-Brozović defines as follows: “As a discipline of the in-between, music mediation moves between different positions and perspectives”.<sup>1</sup> (Müller-Brozović 2017) The second implication is that knowledge in this mediation network is not centralized. Only music mediation that stays open for various encounters with the so-called ‘others’ can impart knowledge which can become a kind of guide of how to live and think in – what Ralph Rugoff calls – “interesting times” (Rugoff 2019). This implies that the possibility of who or what can be the epistemic subject in mediation processes is not limited – mediation processes happen in a thick web of human and non-human players. Furthermore, as Irena Müller-Brozović points out, the distinction between making music (in the sense of *musicking*) and mediating music is blurred by the focus on creating and shaping relationships – “[...] there is therefore no separation or (clear) difference between *musicking* and mediating music, both are relational activities and both can also be an artistic practice”<sup>2</sup> (Müller-Brozović 2024, 151).

Such ‘earthly’ mediation is therefore neither a matter of profession, nor a purely human affair. It is a way of relating to one another “that does not take place in the ever-same difference between nature and culture, active and passive, but is broken in multiple ways and does not end in closed identities.”<sup>3</sup> (Hoppe 2021, 67) This means, thinking

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<sup>1</sup> The original quote in German reads as follows: “Als Disziplin des Dazwischen bewegt sich Musikvermittlung zwischen verschiedenen Positionen und Perspektiven” (Müller-Brozović 2017).

<sup>2</sup> The original quote in German reads as follows: “[...] es existiert daher keine Trennung oder ein (klarer) Unterschied zwischen *Musicking* und Musikvermitteln, beides sind relationale Tätigkeiten und beide können auch eine künstlerische Praxis sein” (Müller-Brozović 2024, 151).

<sup>3</sup> The original quote in German reads as follows: “Eine Vermittlung zu denken, die sich nicht in der immergleichen Differenz von Natur und Kultur, aktiv und passiv abspielt, sondern multiple

with Alexander Henschel, that “[m]ediation is not the achievement of a subject imagined as self-identical [...]. Mediation involves a process that takes place across several positions”<sup>4</sup> (Henschel 2020, 554) – from humans to non-humans.

Questioning the binary conception of arts and nature is nothing new. Since the 1960s, the Land Art Movement in the US and Europe has been attempting to challenge the idea of landscape and culture, nature and art as opposed spheres (Lehmann 2015, 27). In close proximity to the aesthetic debates and artistic projects of Land Art, an aesthetic discussion of questions of environmental destruction and conservation was initiated for the first time, whereby both ecological problems and fundamental questions about landscape and nature were placed in a historical and civilization-critical context (Lehmann 2015, 29). The most prominent representative of this artistic movement in the field of music and sound art was R. Murray Schafer, the founder of acoustic ecology in the late 1960s. His premise was that we should attempt to hear the acoustic environment as a musical composition, and that we bear responsibility for its composition (Schafer, 1994 [1977]). Building on acoustic ecology, the term *acoustemology* (Feld 2015) was purposed by Steven Feld: “Against ‘soundscapes’, *acoustemology* refuses to sonically analogize or appropriate ‘landscape’, with all its physical distance from agency and perception.” (Feld 2015, 15) Instead, *acoustemology* traces “stories of sounding as heterogeneous contingent relating; stories of sounding as cohabiting; stories where sound figures the ground of difference – radical or otherwise – and what it means to attend and attune; to live with listening to that.” (Feld 2015, 15)

Thinking-with and musicking-with the environment changes the story we tell through various ways of musicking. The ‘others’ are no longer perceived as passive or solely as a source of material for inspiration, but taken seriously as part of the collective becoming-with through musicking. Changing the story is crucial on a damaged planet, because the ecological crisis can also be seen as one of the foremost cultural crises (Connor 2010) – the stories we tell have an impact on how living on earth is organized, as Natalie Loveless writes: “Stories are powerful. The stories that we believe, the stories that we *live into* shape our daily practices, from moment to moment. They have the power to promise some futures and conceal others.” (Loveless 2019, 20) Moreover, as María Puig de la Bellacasa points out, it is not possible to care for everything – we must think with certain stories, we must care for certain worlds. Therefore, thinking-with makes a difference because it “belongs to, and creates, community by inscribing thought and knowledge in worlds one cares about” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2012, 205).

The story told by the Berlin based music collective *FrauVonDa//* is a story about ‘nature’s’ so-called own agency. In their project *THE Å//A UNIVERSE – Hidden Songlines of the Baltic Sea* (FrauVonDa// 2023), the collective focuses on the threatened diversity of

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gebrochen ist und nicht auf geschlossene Identitäten hinausläuft, ist Haraways Ziel” (Hoppe 2021, 67).

<sup>4</sup> The original quote in German reads as follows: “Vermittlung ist keine Leistung eines als einheitlich gedachten Subjekts [...]. Vermittlung involviert einen Prozess, der über mehrere Positionen verteilt stattfindet” (Henschel 2020, 544).

life underwater and yet attempts to show the relativity of the human perspective. They approach the project from multiple perspectives: the artists researched “the sensory perception of marine animals, spoke to marine and aquatic biologists about the millenia-old sturgeon and about symbiotic community structures between bladderwrack, plankton and schools of fish” (FrauVonDa// 2023). Scientific and artistic approaches – like eco-acoustical methods or naturewriting – were ultimately combined to explore possible answers to the question of what and how much we know about the Baltic Sea, its inhabitants and their subjective environments. This resulted in a transmedia performance, an audio walk, workshops, panels and two installations that revolved around an idiosyncratic and multi-perspective narrative of the Baltic Sea ecosystem.

This project can be taken as a good example of a participatory and transdisciplinary mucking process, which is concerned with encounters between humans and non-humans, and a process in which mediation takes place across species and several disciplines, and between experts in different fields who are all contributing to the process. Although the members of *FrauVonDa//* describe themselves mostly as musicians, they also demonstrate skills which Irena Müller-Brozović (2017) describes as typical for music mediators – they act in a hybrid field and organize a meeting between music and other arts, sciences and practical knowledge.

Also, *THE Å//A UNIVERSE – Hidden Songlines of the Baltic Sea* can serve as best practice for future eco-literate projects. The human participants were deeply engaged with a certain place – the Baltic Sea – and different formats were used to arouse critical awareness of the topic of environmental consciousness, while the music which was created was rooted in the soil. Although everyday experts were not part of this particular process, in a similar project, the data could, for example, be collected by citizen scientists, who then also become part of the musical performance.

Besides, the project was concerned with the main questions that every critical mediation process asks: Who is taking part? Who is missing? The difference to most mediation processes was that the musicians did not apply these questions to human participants, but to sea dwellers and other creatures of the Baltic Sea. The performance of *THE Å//A UNIVERSE – Hidden Songlines of the Baltic Sea* also examined the untold, the unseen and unvoiced – as it is not only a matter of with whom we are becoming-with, but also with whom we do *not* become-with.

Thus, music mediation that is concerned with an ethico-ecological matter must remain aware of both inclusions and exclusions, relating to both human and non-human participation. In *The Companion Species Manifesto*, Haraway writes: “The obligation is to ask who are present and who are emergent. [...] Situated emergence of more livable worlds depends on that differential sensibility” (Haraway 2003, 50–51). And some years later in *Staying with the Trouble* Haraway asks what “happens when a partner involved critically in the life of another disappears from the earth? [...] This kind of question has to be asked in the urgencies of the Anthropocene and Capitalocene if we are to nurture arts for living on a damaged planet.” (Haraway 2016, 69)

While we can still perform Vivaldi’s famous *Four Seasons*, enter an acoustic world that is long gone and listen to the sounds Vivaldi may have listened to, the world has

changed since then – global warming has increased dramatically and with it came what is often called the Great Dying. This is the story told in the project *The [uncertain] Four Seasons* (2019/2021). It is an algorithmic re-composition of Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*. Composers, musicians, climate and computer scientists were brought together using geospatial approaches to update Vivaldi's original composition from 1725 for the year 2050 – and make it possible to hear what the original composition would sound like today when combined with climate data from different places around the world (*The [uncertain] Four Seasons*, n. d.). In some variations, the birds have fallen silent, while “rising seas have altered the lifestyles and festivities of all communities.” (Gameau 2021) Playing and listening to Vivaldi with global warming data shows that while sounds can be captured and restored – and therefore we can still enjoy the sounds of 1725 – their sources and makers cannot be brought alive again: “Since his [Vivaldi's] writing, our pursuit of endless growth and expansion has destroyed half the planet's rainforests, 68% of all animal life and has seen a 40% increase of carbon dioxide and a 150% increase of methane in our atmosphere, raising our global temperature by 1.3 degrees.” (Gameau 2021)

*The [uncertain] Four Seasons* encourages a deeper and broader listening – not only to Vivaldi's music but also to our environment. Who will soon never be heard again? What sounds will emerge newly as temperature rises? Which other changes can be heard? Paying critical attention to what we hear and fostering close listening are main tasks of music mediation – they become even more relevant when it comes to music mediation in “interesting times”. And, of course, the project also mediates through sound what climate change does to biodiversity, to weather conditions and to environmental phenomena.

Beyond that, *The [uncertain] Four Seasons* – as an example of an artistic approach to data sonification – can provide inspiration for composing processes with diverse participants in the context of music mediation, from musicians to non-professionals, where participants engage actively with climate data. Through the composition process, the story behind the data is made audible: “Sonification is the process of mapping data with some other meaning into sound.” (Adams 2009, 113)

But projects like *The [uncertain] Four Seasons*, as a radical attempt to make climate data and environmental opportunities acoustically tangible, can not only help to make scientific findings more accessible; they also reveal what happens to the worldly composition of which we are a part, if we as humans do not start to listen to climate scientists, activists and other critters.

### *Compos(t)ing Stories*

The site-specific piece *Sonic Dreams* (2017) by the Australian percussionist and composer Vanessa Tomlinson is “an imagination of lost and unknown sounds” (Tomlinson 2017, 1). It is dedicated to the area around Perth in Australia – to the animals which used to live there and to “all the sound worlds imagined in this work which once belonged to this area of the world” (Tomlinson 2017, 1). Performers improvise their way



through eight imaginary soundscapes: sounds of extinctions that have already happened or may yet happen, for example a potoroo opening its eyes and sniffing after a day full of sleep, a turtle coming for a bath, a stick-nest rat moving about in its nest. Although the soundscapes deal with loss, *Sonic Dreams* does not evoke feelings of despair. Instead, it encourages us to speculate about absent ‘others’, and to listen with curiosity to the response of the ‘other’; in so doing, it brings to mind that we have “an obligation to be responsive to the other, who is not entirely separate from what we call the self”. (Barad 2012, 69) This composition is – in the spirit of eco-literate musicking – composed for a specific group in a specific place. At the same time, this type of composition does not require any special training, just the ability and willingness to empathize with other living beings. Therefore, scores like those of *Sonic Dreams* can be used to work with a wide variety of groups. They can be an interesting way to build musical and sonic bridges to living beings that initially seemed strange or distant to us. Here, the moment of music mediation is to find ways in which musicking can become a practice of communicating with ‘others’.

This kind of musicking could also mark the beginning of a compost story – a term Haraway introduces to invite others to join a “collective speculative fabulation” (Haraway 2016, 8) of how to live and die together in troubled times. She describes how, in these times, new communities appear. Communities which are not bound together by a conventional biogenetic relationship but by “oddkin” – the Children of Compost. They no longer want to deceive themselves with utopian stories of new beginnings, nor do they want to stay with the same old stories, but instead “asked and responded to the question of how to live in the ruins that were still inhabited, with ghosts and with the living too” (Haraway 2016, 138). *Sonic Dreams* is therefore not only a composition that encourages a change of perspective. It cares for relations that are at stake. In this way, *Sonic Dreams* entails the composition as well as the composting, both words coming from the Latin verb *componere*, to put together, to collect a whole from several parts. It becomes a matter of how we as critters, human and non-human, “compose and decompose each other, in every scale and register of time and stuff in sympoietic<sup>5</sup> tangling, in ecological evolutionary developmental earthly worlding and unworlding” (Haraway 2016, 97).

This reveals other important insights into music mediation in times of climate change – aspects already mentioned briefly before. Firstly, the question of who does (not) take part in the musicking process must be radically extended to non-human beings. The process extends across multiple species. At the same time, the core of music mediation remains the same – creating a variety of relationships and dialogue through musicking. Secondly, in musicking communities, we not only create art or artistic relationships. Music mediation has the potential to foster musicking communities which

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<sup>5</sup> Donna Haraway uses the term “sympoiesis” to make clear, that “nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic or self-organizing. [...] *Sympoiesis* is a word proper to complex, dynamic, responsive, situated, historical systems. It is a word for worlding-with, in company. Sympoiesis enfolds autopoiesis and generatively unfurls and extends it” (Haraway 2016, 58).



live and spread the ideas of the Children of Compost. It is a reciprocal undertaking, because it is not only necessary to become receptive and porous yourself, “but also to make porous other bodies, to perform a porosity into other agencies in pedagogic exchange.” (Chan 2020, 132) This is risky and shaky, as “[t]hat which is porous is usually more fragile, its structure is more precarious, yet this affords it many more possible ways of arrangement – many more ways of being.” (Chan 2020, 132) If we want to give up the repressed, externally determined imagination of ‘nature’, we must search for different relationships and explore how we can relate to others as “humus, not Homo [...]; compost, not posthuman.” (Haraway 2016, 55) This, of course, cannot be an ethical matter only, but is “a *political* endeavor based on a post-anthropocentric ethic [...]. A responsive ethos that exposes itself to heterogeneous others without dominating them through appropriation”<sup>6</sup> (Hoppe 2021, 347).

### *Becoming response-able*

“I see and hear life as a grand improvisation – I stay open for the world of possibilities” (Oliveros 2022 [2010], 30), composer and accordion player Pauline Oliveros writes. She thus describes an attitude that is important for music mediation, which aims to encourage ethical connections, sympoietic processes and making-with.

It comes as no surprise that one of Oliveros’ compositions is entitled *Response Ability* (1987), an essential concept for ethical relationships. The simple yet touching composition goes like this: “Listen for a call. When the call comes, answer with your own call. / Call until you receive an answering call. Echo that call.” (Oliveros 2013, 170) As the concept of response-ability “ultimately revolves around open and honest *curiosity* that brings one into transformative, responsive relationships” (Baan Hofman 2023, 3), Oliveros’ composition can be seen as exactly the kind of guidance needed in what curator Ralph Rugoff called “interesting times.” The piece itself is a call for encounters of touching and being-touched by heterogeneous others. Instead of bearing responsibility for others, the ability to answer with others – listening to them and responding – becomes central. This practice is neither self-reflective nor self-referential; it is “about co-constitutive naturalcultural dancing, holding in esteem, and regard open to those who look back reciprocally” (Haraway 2008, 27).

In his keynote *Curating Musicking as a Mode of Wakefulness in Interesting Times* composer Sandeep Bhagwati states that too often musicians “asserted how removed their music is from worldly matters” (Bhagwati 2020) – put differently, they care too little. Music mediation that stays with the trouble brings back care, since care is an important aspect of response-ability. Music mediation must care for care and become a

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<sup>6</sup> The original quote in German reads as follows: “Sich-verwandt-machen ist eine politische Anstrengung, die auf einer post-anthropozentrischen Ethik basiert [...]. Ein antwortendes Ethos, das sich heterogenen Anderen aussetzt, ohne diese durch Vereinnahmung zu beherrschen” (Hoppe 2021, 347).

matter of care if it aims to make transformative connections. Unlike concern,<sup>7</sup> the quality of care is that it can be

easily turned into a verb: to care. One can make oneself concerned, but ‘to care’ contains a notion of doing that concern lacks. This is because understanding caring as something we do materializes it as an ethically and politically charged practice, and one that has been at the forefront of feminist concern with devalued agencies and exclusions. In this vision, to care joins together an affective state, a material vital doing, and an ethico-political obligation (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 42).

Importantly, mediation as a matter of care does not aim for harmony – a state which mediation is often associated with – nor is care limited to “a separate cozy realm where ‘nice’ relations can thrive.” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 204) The ability to answer and to care is based on the capacity of the call of the ‘other’ to touch, irritate and change. Only then can mediation lead to a web of polyphonic voices – and “[i]nstead of reinforcing the self of a lone thinker’s figure, the voice [...] seems to keep saying: I am not alone. There are many, many others” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 76). To keep this game an earthly and lively affair, mediation must work against closures: “That which appears immediate, unambiguous and non-mediated must be transformed into complexity through mediation”<sup>8</sup> (Henschel 2020, 512). Similarly, Puig de la Bellacasa suggests that exactly what possible response-able answers are shouldn’t be determined, nor should there be moral parameters which define these positionings. Rather, the speculative question “how to care?” should be asked (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 19). In this sense, mediation is not something that makes things more manageable or understandable, but often brings up new questions.

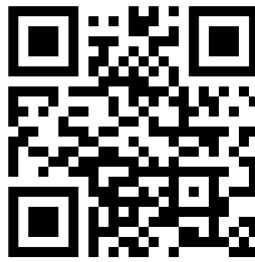
For the composer Sandeep Bhagwati, one thing is clear at least: If the musicking community really wants to make a difference, it will “require the energy to get up from your comfortable armchair and to move from a phil-harmonic sensibility (one who loves harmony) [...] towards a wider sensibility – one might call it ‘philo-sonic’ (one who loves sounds)” (Bhagwati 2020). Or, thinking-with with Donna Haraway, in order to stay with the trouble, we have to become humu-sonic – “whether we asked for it or not, the pattern is in our hands. The answer to the trust of the held-out hand: think we must” (Haraway 2016, 34).

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<sup>7</sup> I explicitly mention the difference between “care” and “concern” here because María da la Bellacasa refers in the following quote to the French philosopher Bruno Latour, who has coined the term “matters of concern” – Latour is known, among other things, for the Actor-Network Theory (ANT). In *Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?* (2004), Latour states that critique is no longer serving progressive or constructive ends, but is instead fueling relativism and distrust. In response, Bruno Latour defines matters of concern as an alternative to matters of fact, in order to promote a more dynamic and complex view of reality: “A matter of concern is what happens to a matter of fact when you add to it its whole scenography, much like you would do by shifting your attention from the stage to the whole machinery of a theatre.” (Latour 2008, 39)

<sup>8</sup> The original quote in German reads as follows: “Das, was unmittelbar, eindeutig und nicht-vermittelt erscheint, gilt es durch Vermittlung in Komplexität zu überführen.” (Henschel 2020, 512).

Think we must – this could also be the motto of the German project orchestra *Lebenslaute*. Founded in 1986 and consisting of professionals as well as amateurs, the orchestra uses methods of civil disobedience – usually in the form of concert blockades – combined with Western classical music to stand up against life-threatening practices in different places (Lebenslaute, n.d.). Lebenslaute describes how they locate themselves in two worlds: “By being both musicians and troublemakers, we irritate and open eyes, hearts and ears to our content.”<sup>9</sup> (Lebenslaute 2020, 10-11)



**Figure 1.** QR-Code: Link to video of occupation and evacuation at Herrenwald (Dannenröder Forest), amongst others by Lebenslaute, 16th October 2020.

For example, while the trees at Herrenwald, a forest in Germany, in October 2020 were already being chopped down, and the police were preparing themselves to end the occupation of the forest, a chamber ensemble of activist-musicians was still singing and playing the biblical Psalm 58, a psalm put to music by composer Heinrich Schütz (1585-1672): “How then, gentlemen, are you mute? / That you cannot speak justice? / What is equal and straight you make crooked, / Help no one to his right, / You willfully exercise violence in the land, / Only iniquity passes through your hands, / What will become of it in the end?”<sup>10</sup> It is quite moving to watch and listen to fragile instruments and singing voices meeting the helmeted policemen and harvesters. As one member describes, this is also what makes Lebenslaute special: “We perform in orchestral and choral dress and thus represent the bourgeois 19th century. We turn music into a non-violent act of civil disobedience. It’s about resistance, not protest.”<sup>11</sup> (Rodi and Büntzly 2012)

The orchestra’s response-able answer to environmental destruction and to capitalist and destructive politics is therefore to counter exploitative practices with classical

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<sup>9</sup> The original quote in German reads as follows: “Indem wir gleichzeitig Musiker\*innen und Ruhestörer\*innen sind, irritieren wir und öffnen Augen, Herzen und Ohren für unsere Inhalte” (Lebenslaute 2020, 10-11).”

<sup>10</sup> Psalm 58 in German reads as follows: “Wie nun, ihr Herren, seid ihr stumm, / Dass ihr kein Recht könnt sprechen? / Was gleich und grad, das macht ihr krumm, / Helft niemand zu seinem Rechten, / Mutwillig übt ihr Gewalt im Land, / Nur Frevel geht durch eure Hand, / Was will zuletzt draus werden?”

<sup>11</sup> The original quote in German reads as follows: “Wir treten in Orchester- und Chorkleidung auf und repräsentieren damit bürgerliches 19. Jahrhundert. Wir machen Musik zu einer gewaltfreien Aktion zivilen Ungehorsams. Es geht um Widerstand, nicht um Protest.” (Rodi and Blüntzly 2012).

music, and they therefore teach others what classical music can do besides sounding in a concert hall. This has an interesting side effect: the musicians of Lebenslaute play Western classical music at places where it is otherwise never heard – in forests, on highways or at opencast coal mines – and by performing in various public spaces they incidentally act like traditional mediators who reach out for an audience that is unlikely to visit concert halls. Their music is heard by policemen as well as the birds, activists as well as coal mine workers. Moreover, by positioning themselves between activism and artistic citizenship, their musicking can be seen as an act of radical care and hope. With this strategy, they successfully perform resistance where other forms of resistance have failed to protect human and non-human rights.

What all the projects mentioned in this article have in common is that they open up spaces where people can explore how they relate to each other, but also to the non-human living world through musicking. In those spaces, music mediation becomes an engaged eco-ethical practice of listening, speculating and answering with others, a way of composing and decomposing each other. Out of these musicking practices, communities of care emerge that are concerned with how to live and create art responsibly amidst ruins and alongside ghosts and the living. It is also crucial that all the projects draw attention to power relations and dualistic concepts of the world, sometimes more, sometimes less obviously: Who can actually take part in this musicking? Who is ‘othered’? Who is missing, is overheard or has been silenced? And by asking how the world might be organized differently in artistic ways, music mediation in “interesting times” avoids getting lost in utopian ideas of saving the world, while also not rejecting the idea that it can become a kind of guide through which ethical ways of being together can be experienced and brought to life, and new forms of being together can emerge. What is therefore needed in these days is a music mediation that constantly reminds us that there is “[l]ots of trouble, lots of kin to be going on with.” (Haraway 2016, 8)

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