Algorithms.

Algorithms ones and zeroes

You will never own

I will always be a network

You are all alone

Charlotte Triebus

Hide to Show

Memefying Live Music, Algorythmizing Social Relationships

Pascal Gielen
Thomas R. Moore

Content

Communicating Urgency

Interview with Michael Bail

Author Biographies

Credits

Hide to Show
Scenic composition for
ensemble, tape, and live video
(2020)

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concept, composition, video, staging
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Hidden in Plain Sight

Preface by Rebecca Diependaele

Nadar Ensemble and composer Michael Beil first met in 2011 in sun-splashed Tel Aviv. At the time, pianist Elisa Medinilla was sinking her teeth into Beil's *Mach Sieben* for piano, video, and electronics. That composition has since been included in various Nadar programs, with performances from St Petersburg to Buenos Aires. With *Hide to Show*, after first tackling *exit to enter* (2013) and *BLUFF* (2015, directed by Thierry Bruehl), the ensemble took on the a new scenic composition by Michael Beil for the third time, its most large-scale production to date.

Michael Beil's oeuvre circles in ever-changing arcs around recurring themes such as virtual reality, fakeness, imitation, and paradoxes. In *Hide to Show*, he questions and highlights the wonderful world of the Internet - its endless stream of memes, covers, parodies, and deep fakes are a goldmine for the composer. On a technical level, electronics and live (!) video stand out as typical elements in Beil's work. By confronting the live musicians with audio and video recordings, he dissects their actions on stage into image and sound. These disconnected elements become building blocks, which the composer can rearrange, glue together and stack on top of each other at will. The listeners

- who are invariably also spectators! - thus find themselves in a labyrinth of new perspectives. Wonder, confusion, and alienation reign supreme on a virtuoso, often catchy soundtrack of live music and electronics. Musical references are ubiquitous - from a dash of Messiaen in *exit to enter* and a Rachmaninov melody in *Key Jack* to Belgian New Beat and the immensely popular *Ievan Polkka* in *Hide to Show*.

This introduction serves to paint a bird's eye view of *Hide to Show*. In the following pages, Pascal Gielen and Thomas R. Moore engage in a detailed conversation with the composer, and then delve deeper into Hyperreality, the aesthetics of the piece, and our digital relationships.

Sketch me, mask me, crop me, get my parodies' avatar. *(Online is the new alone)*

Hide to Show points the limelight on the backstage area while the musicians prepare for the performance in front of the audience, each in their own little room. They play a few notes, change clothes, or dance to the music in their headphones. Not only are the movements of the musicians on stage considered musical material, but Beil's list of artistic ingredients now also includes their actions in the seclusion of the backstage area. Some acts and gestures seem loose and spontaneous, others are clearly choreographed - staged nonchalance, meant for the camera. But we never get to see everything. The musicians hide behind their costumes, curtains that go up and down, and recordings of themselves, so that the real person remains invisible. A parallel with social media is quickly made. Hidden behind your profile picture or avatar, you can appear in the virtual world as an individual without ever really showing yourself. You can take a photo or make a video over and over again. You can

use filters, Photoshop and Auto-Tune, and only post the best version. This way you can easily join a group from your own isolation.

This is also the case in *Hide to Show*: while the musicians are alone in their dressing rooms, the audience oversees their interconnectedness, neatly in sync. In real life, everything is more complicated, and everyone is imperfect.

It's an imitation.
There's remedy for reality.

Throughout the performance, the blinds dance up and down. They literally *hide* in order to show. With the slats open, the audience can peep into the rooms; fully closed, they hide the musicians and their movements. At the same time, the closed slats change into a projection surface. What was just a fleeting movement is now highlighted in detail by sometimes endless repetition, doubling, and imitation. In that process, it becomes less and less clear where tangible reality ends and virtual reality begins.

A special role is reserved for the *Ievan polkka*, a folk melody of Russian origin that ended up in a TV show and on YouTube via a Finnish a cappella group. Upon arrival in Japan, many covers followed, but the internet only really exploded when the song was covered by Hatsune Miku. The blue-haired Japanese phenomenon is a virtual pop singer who also performs as a hologram in real concert halls. While the melody, with electronic squeaks, sinks into the listener's memory like an earworm, the musicians weave new misdirection in the jungle of covers. It soon becomes impossible to determine where the line lies between original, cover, and parody. And was the original actually real in the first place?

Algorithms, ones and zeros. I will always be a network, you are all alone.

Amidst the jumble of imitations and memes, Michael Beil composed an uncanny parody of *In My Room* by The Beach Boys. The overall picture and the costumes have the same look and feel, but the music tells a different story. It seems that algorithms have taken control. The artificial intelligence network coldheartedly says goodbye to the idea that man is its superior: *Hello human, don't you dare. Leave my future mine. Once I thought that we could share, now I do decline. I last forever.*

Hide to Show feels like a descent into wonderland. The performance leads the audience deeper and deeper into a labyrinth of questions, but behind every corner lurks a new perspective. It is precisely by pushing the contradictions between the virtual and the tangible reality to the limit that our present-day balancing act between these two worlds becomes palpable. The paradox does not disappear, on the contrary.

Music, Silence, and Loneliness in the Digital Age

Pascal Gielen
Thomas R. Moore

Playing lonely together

There is a certain amount of irony that, due to the Coronavirus, up until now *Hide to Show* has only enjoyed a limited number of performances. Michael Beil's scenic composition seems to have been written especially for the unreal crossroads in which we have lived these past few years. The piece reflects something of a parody of the pandemic society in which we lived and in some places is still ongoing. The lyrics, *"Algorithms, ones and zeroes – You will never own – I will always be a network – You are all alone..."* — a message that is ubiquitous and repetitiously sung throughout the whole performance, perhaps rings truer then was ever originally intended.

All of us have by now grown accustomed to full days, weeks, and months sitting in front of our computers. In the years of the pandemic, not only were meetings, lectures, and concerts, but also cocktails and even full dinners organized to be experienced from behind our screens.[1] Without that mediating technology, communication seemed and sometimes became impossible. In many cases, it was even prohibited by law. But even without those bans, it seems people nowadays prefer to communicate in isolation. In her book, *The Lonely Century*, Noreena Hertz describes how communication technology and social media paradoxically are at the roots of loneliness found in contemporary societies. Even when people are physically together in a cafe, restaurant, or playground – how often do we still spot people, young and old, absorbed in their devices? This seems to be a new digital art, 'being-alone-together': communicating with the whole world, just not with our loved ones sitting across the table. Covid-19 only magnified that development. In hindsight, Beil seemed to have foreshadowed this social reality with this composition.

Hide to Show explores the possibilities and limitations of digital communication in music and more broadly, into our contemporary society. The piece is the third Beil wrote specifically for Nadar Ensemble. The first, *exit to enter* (2013) laid the foundations for the aesthetic video choices we find in *Hide to Show*. In *exit to enter*, actions performed and recorded live by the musicians become a moving tafferel of images and avatars, each substituting the other for the perceived performance of the rigorously composed sound- and movement-track. In 2015, Beil wrote *Bluff* for Nadar. This piece and particularly its rehearsal process built the trust between ensemble and composer required to produce an evening-long composition. For the third performance, the ensemble collectively opted to perform the complicated, through-composed, and action-filled piece, by memory. *Hide to Show*, a work lasting 75 minutes, must be performed by memory, too. Without the collective experience of *Bluff*, neither side would have engaged in this

monumental project. An additional piece, *Key Jack* (2017) by Beil for pianist without piano,[2] delineates a clearer line to *Hide to Show.* Not only does it expertly combine the video processing and aesthetics found in *exit to enter* and *Bluff*, it further develops Beil's instrumentalization of the musicians' roles in his pieces. In both *Key Jack* and *Hide to Show*, he actively and continuously develops their movement reper- toire and personal idiosyncrasies to be artistic tools he immediately uses in both pieces.

Key Jack is for pianist without piano. However, this piece can only be performed by a trained pianist. The musician must perform the fingering, posturing, and attitude of a concert pianist, 'jacking' the traits in a performative exhi- bition. Each movement, from eye-blinking to snapping to chord-playing, is timed perfectly with the composer's tape and each is recorded. The playback occurs simultaneously and immediately in three-fold: on two life size projection panels and live.

In *Hide to Show*, the eight musicians on stage are placed in six lined-up, but distinct booths, a kind of display case into which the audience can occasionally and collectively peep and leer, while the players themselves remain separated. On the side facing the public, each musician controls a blind of the sort common to household windows, alternating between turning the slats to give a peak into their rooms and opening them fully, offering the audience the complete show. This dramatur- gical staging raises questions. What happens to artistic practice and teamwork if performers cannot see each other? What does communication entail when musicians can only hear each other through headphones and are in physical isolation? A similar experiment is conducted in relation to the audience. What happens when digital images mediate the live performance and technological fixing techniques correct or even exaggerate 'blem- ishes'? What is hidden and what not?

1   Marlies Munck, Pascal Gielen,
     and Lotte Lara Schröder,
     Fragility: To touch and be touched
     (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2022).

2   Commissioned by
     Frederik Croene

Live music's 'sound' and especially its 'feel' becomes increasingly ambiguous and unpredictable when reality is simulated. Drawing on Jean Baudrillard (1983), Beil offers us a taste of hyperreality. This postmodern concept was coined by the French philosopher in his book *Simulacre and Simulation* (1983) and points among other interpretations to the inability to consciously distinguish reality from a simulation of reality, especially in technologically advanced societies. We see hyperreality as the condition in which what is real and what is fiction are blended to the point that there is no clear distinction between where one ends and the other begins. It allows the mixing of physical reality with virtual reality and human intelligence with artificial intelligence.

Hide to Show does not, however, only explore the boundaries of digital communication and hyperreality in contemporary music. The composition also plays with and explores formats that abound in our contemporary Internet culture. The piece is mainly structured as a series of short, repetitive, gif-like fragments – in other words, *memes*: short iconic images that frequently circulate, multiply, and mutate online today. Like memes, the origin of Beil's scenes is not simple to isolate and identify. Baudrillard would conceivably regard them as simulacra: endless copies without an original. Memes are catchy, attract attention, but also fly past our eyes at breakneck speeds. Here, Beil plays with this aesthetic of immediacy. The audience is confronted with a hasty accumulation of scenes that at the outset seem to have little to do with any deeper content. The performance, at first, feels something akin to the associative scrolling we all find ourselves at some point doing online.

A more analytical approach to *Hide to Show* helps us to understand that the scenography is based on at least three principles of today's Internet culture: (1) communication in isolation, (2) immediacy, and (3) hyperreality. In this booklet we will describe what these principles demand from both performers and the audience. First, we will detail Beil's use of Internet

aesthetics. According to Alexander Baumgarten, modern aesthetics is rooted in the ancient Greek sense of aisthēsis, which refers to a combination of senses and affects to experience the world. Aisthēsis contrasts with the more distant scientific and digital approach, i.e. analyses and rational knowledge. Baumgarten shows us that there is the possibility of aesthetic truth or *veritas aesthetica*, which grants a more complete grasp of scientific truth.[3] For the sake of this booklet, we will consider aesthetics as a way in which reality can touch us and with which a performer can touch the audience.[4] But what does this mean in a hyperreality in which our perception of reality is determined by technological mediation and simulacra?

To answer this question, we will delve into how Beil's scenic composition itself relates to social reality. Is *Hide to Show* merely a mimesis of our current Internet culture or is it an artistic reflection of our lived and experienced social (media) reality? In other words: the performance shows hyperreality, but is it itself hyperreal? To resolve this, we will confront the concept of hyperreality with another theoretical notion that illuminates our perception of reality, namely the psychoanalytic idea of the Real. The concept of the Real was established by the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and further elaborated upon in terms of culture and politics by the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek.[5]

3   J. Colin McQuillan, ed., *Baumgarten's aesthetics: historical and philosophical perspectives*, Global aesthetic research (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 130–31.

4   Noël Carroll, 'Aesthetic experience: A question of content', *Contemporary debates in aesthetics and the philosophy of art*, 2006, 69–97; Pascal Gielen, 'Commoning Artistic Use Value. Art, Aesthetics, Culture and the Commons', in *Routledge Companion to Marxisms in Art History*, edited by Tijen Tunali and Brian Winkenweder (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2022), 68–89.

5   Jacques Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*, Norton Paperback, bk. 2 (New York, N.Y.: W.W. Norton, 1991); Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the desert of the real! five essays on 11 September and related dates* (London ; New York: Verso, 2002).

This booklet does not offer the context to spend too much time fully and deeply detailing the multiple theories of both thinkers. However, some insights may assist in better understanding Beil's work.

In a nutshell, both Lacan and Žižek rest firmly on Sigmund Freud's writings on psychoanalysis. Lacan's most important addition to Freud's theory is the understanding that our subconscious is structured according to language. His theory can be seen as an attempt to understand our subject formation. In other words, "How is subjective personality or individual character constituted?" While pursuing that quest, he developed the concept of the Real that continues to play a crucial role. For Lacan, the Real is that which can neither be pictured nor articulated through language. It is unspeakable but constitutive for our subjectivity. It is like the feeling of falling in love, on which billions of words, millions of poems, and quite a number of psychological and even neurologic analyses have been spent. They all can describe and analyse the feeling, but they never can catch the real thing. They certainly cannot simulate or provoke the feeling of falling in love itself. Love makes blind, indeed. It precedes, and goes beyond rationality, but at the same time it determes our Being dramatically.

It is especially this perspective of the Real that sheds some light on the functioning of *Hide to Show* and furthermore on our contemporary digital culture. We will therefore briefly continue our theoretical dive into this concept with the help of Žižek who combines Lacan's Real with insights from cultural studies and critical theory. As it pertains to us and our analysis of Beil's work, it is important to underline that, according to both theoreticians, the Real determines human reality and everyday actions. In that sense, it is constitutive and forms a 'hard kernel' at the heart of our existence. The concept does not point to reality, but to truth itself, and is therefore the opposite of fiction, fantasy, or dreams. However, while the Real is real, Žižek also makes clear that we cannot verbalize it. We can only expe-

rience it through enjoyment, alienation, trauma, transcendence, sublimation, etc. For this essay we allow ourselves to approach this notion more poetically as '*life* itself', which will necessarily include death and transiency in its definition. Understood from this perspective, the Real is not susceptible to codes, concepts, and images and never has been. Paraphrasing Lacan again: the Real precedes the symbolic order. We can only experience or feel it directly and not mediated by signs or words. This approach allows us to question whether what remains hidden in *Hide to Show* could ever become visible. In other words: does the scenic composition simply 'show' the Real by suggesting that what is hidden can in fact never be shown? Or less abstractly formulated: does the live performance offer a taste of life itself without putting it into words? Even though Beil uses extensive technology and infrastructure that acts as a digital and factual wall between the players themselves and between the players and the audience, *Hide to Show* is profoundly different from our everyday Internet experience.

Embodied disembodiment

Throughout most of *Hide to Show*, the players not only cannot see each other while playing; their focus, at least visually speaking, is also kept from the audience. When the blinds open on each of the little boxes, the players have been instructed to either focus on their private room or on a space just two meters in front of the décor. For the audience, it appears as though any sort of eye contact has been strictly forbidden. Bodies are physically on stage, but at the same time they are dreamily absent. Like zombies, they bathe in an atmosphere of apathy and detachment that shows no involvement at all with each other nor with the audience. Yet the musicians play together flawlessly and despite an unbroken fourth wall they manage to keep the viewer firmly

under their spell. It betrays strict stage direction or better, a meticulous composition combined with hours of rehearsals. When bodies cannot physically interact and resonate with each other, every movement, every sound and every image must be meticulously set in advance. Because of the combination of both the highly detailed compositional instructions and the inherent isolation in the piece and the period in which it was created, the performers required a specific rehearsal strategy. Furthermore, *Hide to Show* must be played from memory. Though memorization is not a novel approach, this piece is 75 minutes long and includes not just notes on a page, but detailed choreography and play-acting as well, all of which requires a high level of commitment to the project from the performing musicians.

Initial rehearsals took place in separate and smaller formations because of both the pandemic and the simple fact that the players would, in the end, be separated on stage. The eight musicians initially rehearsed in fixed duos and recorded the 36 parts individually. As a whole group, with Beil, and after Nadar's sound engineer had layered the videos into one complete montaged video, the ensemble studied the recorded rehearsals together and offered collective feedback. Full company rehearsals in the hall progressed in a similar fashion to theater or dance performances, i.e., the composer - similar to a stage director or choreographer - led the rehearsals, choosing where to begin and offering feedback. However, unlike typical dance or theater productions, in matters of physical acting and timing, the performers were solely reliant on the critical feedback offered by Beil. There was no ability to fix issues of synchronization through typical collective and embodied ensemble playing. The separateness created by the décor and composition further generated a kind of rehearsal energy that was also unique to each performer or more exaggerated than usual. Just as in our everyday lockdown virtual meetings, emotional issues such as frustration, exhaustion, excitement, and even satisfaction were often felt individually and seldom shared through the walls of the cabins. This setting made the ensemble rehearsals even more separate and isolated.

A third factor that influenced ensemble rehearsals was Beil's complex live video and audio electronics, built by the composer and performed by Warped Type from Düsseldorf. Nearly everything that the musicians do in the rooms is recorded live, cut, and manipulated by software written especially for this performance. The 'new' videos are then projected back onto the blinds on the front of each room, the person in the room, or a combination thereof. The players perform the recorded actions live and based on detailed instructions written in the composer's score. However, the critical feedback of both the composer and his computer scientist colleagues was required to create the expected and required level of perfection for this piece. The participation of the technicians was thus not a secondary phenomenon of Beil's composition, but an active choice on his part to include them in the compositional process and in its manifest rehearsal practice. For the players, they became the essential link to their fellows in the rooms next door, often only 'seeing' each other in reproduced, after the fact, videos displayed on their closed blinds. Furthermore, the musicians could only hear each other through the in-ear monitoring, making the exact location of the other players - something normally taken for granted - a further unknown. All together it contributed to making *Hide to Show*, from at least the standpoint of the ensemble's interactions, a disembodied performance.

This disembodiment is further enhanced by the occasional use of technological fixing techniques, in which live music and vocals are processed in real time. On occasion, missteps such as erroneous tones were corrected in real time. Just as we hide mistakes, stutters, or stumbles on social media today to present an ideal image or profile of ourselves,[6] Beil deployed technology to create error-free scenes. At these key moments, perfectionism itself becomes a simulation. The act of failing on stage suddenly becomes extremely difficult. Each player's singular accents and

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6   Munck, Gielen, and Schröder, *Fragility*.

authentic interpretations, which are unique to the body of each performer, were kept under sharp control. Combined with the rigorous direction, these occasional technical fixes limited appropriation of the music. Or more simply put, during these specific scenes, the players were discouraged from inserting their personalities or 'owning' the music.

But does this make *Hide to Show* a simulacre? The technological disembodiment of the human voice can dissolve any authenticity and singularity. Correcting wrong pitches and crooked melodies could also take the life out of the live performance. Playing live always means taking risks for musicians. It demands a risk and weaknesses, and vulnerabilities are necessarily taken into account. Without this, the arc of tension, required for an audience to understand and accept that what they are viewing is a performance, would simply slacken.[7] This may be the ambivalence found in any live experience. Tension builds in part because the audience knows that the performer can always lapse or misstep. The life of the live performance is paradoxically based on that failure. Borrowing from Edgard Varèse, music is the art of organizing raw sounds, random sounds, or noise into a sounding composition. That is why music is always artificial, literally: created art and created life, so always not real. The tension of a live performance consists, among other things, in the fact that noise can still break through the orchestration in an uncontrolled moment. The possibility of hiccups, a cracking voice, a wrong tone, note, or rhythm, but also a sweating body, or an uncontrolled movement creates the chance that real life could temporarily break through the artificial.[8] Subverting Beil's title: showing art and making music heard is only possible by hiding the rampant, rough life of sounds and noises or, like John Cage, by framing them within an artificial framework.[9] In this way, we could understand Beil's title literally. Life in the wild must at least be tamed to be able to speak of art. But if the public knows in advance that that life can no longer break through - thanks to technological

fixes, all tension could dissipate. Nothing would remain of a *live* performance. One can just as well listen to or watch a recording at home. After all, cutting out the risk of failure or vulnerability also means cutting out life. It makes live music sterile, soulless, and lifeless. This may be one of the reasons why so many recordings made during the Covid lockdown were so tiresome.

Beil is clearly very much aware of this potential for sterility. Though he aims for perfection and does his best to create it by tactically deploying auto-tune and a click-track to fix this time-coded piece, he also cherishes the inevitable small mistakes made during the recorded sections in which no computer correction occurs. These small blemishes, repeated over and over again thanks to Beil's idiosyncratic and repetitious usage of video feedback loops, lets the audience know that what they are seeing is actually live. It's real and not pre-recorded.[10] In addition, *Hide to Show* knows how to create tension, and thus life, in a new way. There are still real live bodies on stage and even a layman-spectator must realize that the players are performing a mighty feat to string all 36 parts together unscathed. In other words, although Beil employs hyperreal principles of technological media mediation, the public's awareness of a reality remains. It is a reality of sweat, blood, and tears, the hard work the players must put in to keep the virtual wall straight, intact, and scatheless. It is this embodied disembodiment that makes *Hide to Show* a completely different experience than simply scrolling on the Internet. That experience of real life is further enhanced by the physical presence of the audience. Bodies that collectively breathe, laugh, remain silent, cough, and clap. Bodies that resonate with each other and with the performers who make *Hide to Show* a visceral experience that puts hyperreality

7   Johan Huizinga, *Homo ludens: a study of the play-element in culture*, 2014.

8   A whole subgenre exists for those seeking the inevitable blemishes and outright falls. One needs only do a Google or YouTube search for 'Perle Nere' or simply 'concert fails.'

9   John Cage and Kyle Gann, *Silence: 50th Anniversary Edition* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2011).

10   See *exit to enter* (Cage en Gann, *Silence*.) or *BLACKJACK* 2012

in brackets, at least for a moment. In other words, Beil has not completely disembodied his scenic composition. As a result, the spectator continues to savor real life between the virtual.

Memefying culture

In *Hide to Show*, Internet circulating memes are copied and put live on stage. Etymologically speaking, meme comes from the Greek word 'mimētḗs' which means both 'imitator' and 'feigner' – and hardly can be absent in a performance that intentionally thematizes hyperreality. Similar to the way memes act online, the 'memefied' moments in *Hide to Show* are seemingly 'pasted' one after the other without any substantive link. Besides the fact that they can all be found on the Internet and are highly entertaining, the scenes composed by Beil, on the surface at least, appear to have little in common with each other. For example, what does a Beach Boys song, '*In my room*', have to do with the Leek Girl '*Ievan Polka*' dance? Just like online, they appear here offline at first sight without context. Their presence in the performance seems like a random choice. The scenes in *Hide to Show*, like their online versions, appear to wander both vagrantly and detached from time, despite their tangibility on a physical stage.

A meme's success depends precisely on its universal recognizability. This means, among other things, that it must be easily understandable or 'legible' without any historical and geographical context. This requirement presupposes cultural codes and also demands as little 'on the spot' deciphering effort as possible. As a result, however, memes feel like pieces of displaced culture, which can have an alienating effect. By using this medium, *Hide to Show* presents a fragmented, carved, and perhaps also cut up reality. Just as on the Internet, the memefied scenes are highly entertaining, but simultaneously, absolutely disorienting.

Where do they come from? When were they made? And why are they shown here? Inherent to this 'context collapse',[11] any key or legend is withheld from the viewer that would help to decipher the presented memes or scenes. The only thing the public can rely on is a memory of memes that they may have previously seen on the Internet. This result is an immediate, bite-sized, and manageable composition. Without time and without geographic context, culture simply must rely on immediacy. Images instantly attract attention. Hyperreality therefore also means hyperactivity. Following the logic of an attention regime, the viewer must constantly be re-stimulated.[12] And so, *Hide to Show* never stalls or comes to a standstill. There is always something to see or listen to. Often multiple and simultaneous miniature scenes battle for the audience's attention. Beil's composition masterfully weaves catchy 'Acid' samples with his own upbeat vocaloid-style jingles in a captivating counterpoint that bangs on at an extremely high tempo. The acted-out images, both live and reproduced, are also alluringly inviting thanks to quick costume changes and the video-feedback-created layered reality. Beil, in one scene, even goes so far as to map players' legs onto the torso of others - playing even further with the interchangeability of components found in a modern meme. By applying this principle, *Hide to Show* manages a certain charm. Scenes seem to constantly compete and constantly push each other out of the way. Furthermore, they never really seem to settle before the next has already made its entrance.

It is perhaps no coincidence that the notion of meme first appears in evolutionary biology. In his study *The Mneme* (1921), the German scientist Richard Semon describes so-called 'engrams', which are said to be neural substrates for storing and recalling memories.

11   Alice E. Marwick and danah boyd, 'I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately: Twitter Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience', *New Media & Society* 13, nr. 1 (februari 2011): 114–33.

12 ' New Extractivism', New Extractivism, accessed 9 november 2022, https://extractivism.online/.

Subsequent reactivation of an engram by cues available at the time of a specific experience induces memory retrieval. However, the existence of engrams has never been empirically proven. For example, a meme does not have a DNA code like a gene which makes identification difficult. As mentioned above, memes are timeless and bottomless. Their origin is therefore difficult to trace and identify. However, the lack of empirical evidence did not stop Richard Dawkins from digging up this very notion once again in 1976 for his controversial book *The Selfish Gene.* Just as a gene - as a basic unit - determines individual body and character traits, a meme could be considered a basic unit for our memory and culture transmission. Memes, like genes, would be guests in a body and mind and would reproduce themselves by jumping from one host to another. According to a Darwinian logic they survive when they are effective for a new 'host' – when they 'fit'. A meme survives when it is able to adapt to a new context, when it is successful and contributes to the effectiveness of its host.

Dawkins' theory has not only come under heavy fire for using organic metaphors to explain how our memory works. Moreover, his unproven theory is said to be strongly ideologically colored.[13] The existence of a selfish and competitive gene would provide biological or natural evidence for the 'truth' or right of neoliberalism. If that belief was well grounded then adaptivity and especially competitiveness would lead to more creativity, progress, and prosperity. However, for memes there may be some elements of truth in this neoliberal reasoning. Memes seem to have a better chance of online survival if they subscribe to the three foundations of the Darwinian philosophy, namely copying, varying, and competing.

Beil also varies and copies his memes, as they scream for attention, appearing and disappearing at breakneck speeds. Yet *Hide to Show* itself does not follow this online logic completely. The scenic composition, for example, does not only grapple with, but outright contradicts the prin-

ciple of immediacy simply by holding the audience in their seats for more than an hour. The viewer also cannot just scroll associatively like a typical Internet consumer without any act of commitment. In our case, Beil determines what the public will see and hear as well as the duration thereof. Moreover, *Hide to Show* does not float above history, but is embedded in a historical tradition of music history, at least in a tradition of the performing arts, namely the concert. The audience sits still and has no buttons to press or screens to swipe that would operate the performance. The sovereign power rests entirely with the composer and in this case equally with the players to whom the viewers willingly surrender for as long as the show lasts.[14] Moreover, the performance is not vagrant or bottomless. The concert hall where the performance is played is physically and materially grounded in a geopolitical space with its own cultural policy, specific cultural education, and traditions. With *Hide to Show*, Beil therefore places the work first and foremost in an artistic tradition that reflexively observes and comments on everyday social phenomena. Although the scenography is highly entertaining, the viewer cannot escape a sharp and bitter undertone which is in stark contrast to the seemingly random online supply of memes. Upon further reflection, Beil's selection does not come across as random at all. Some memefied scenes demonstrate it implicitly, but others sing loudly and explicitly: loneliness! Does not all social media, all our lust for communication and connection, hide our growing loneliness? Like memes, today we seem to float like cybernauts, modern day vagabonds who are both bottomless and rudderless in a historical vacuum. We cling to fleeting images, easy tunes, and messages. We network endlessly in the vain hope of finding footing and anchoring. Meme etymologically also refers to 'mimeme', which is

13   Rob Nixon, 'The Less Selfish Gene', *Environmental Humanities* 13, nr. 2 (1 november 2021): 348–71.

14   Elliott Schwartz and Daniel Godfrey, *Music since 1945: issues, materials, and literature* (New York, 1993).

ancient Greek for 'root'. In *Hide to Show* there is a melancholic atmosphere in which precisely that desire for roots and being able to take root grows ever more present and palpable.

Hyperreality versus the Real

Disneyland is arguably Baudrillard's best known example of what he termed hyperreality in the recreational life of the contemporary Westerner. Here, children and adults alike go to literally live a fantasy. "Disneyland is a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulacra". It yearns to be fake so that the rest "can be seen as real".[15] While the park itself is harmless, Baudrillard's message is more all-encompassing. For him, daily life, thanks to ubiquitous technology, takes on a constant veneer of simulation, an ever-present innuendo to the absence of anything real. In *Hide to Show*, Beil clearly finds inspiration in Baudrillard's ideas, for example in the Leek-Dance meme and thread that appears early in the piece and morphs into the work's grand finale. The origins of the Hatsune Miku version of '*Ievan Polka*' are murky, but with its 16 million views it is undoubtably an Internet sensation. Early on in *Hide to Show*, Beil re-examines, parses, and then reconfigures the 'original' leek-dancing farm girl video.[16] At first, we only hear the highly catchy tune played back with equally recognizable electronic instrumentation. However, just three scenes later, Beil treats the audience to the first live, flesh-and-blood, version of the meme. The dance is still couched in one of the booths and in what comes across as an attempt to drive the point mercilessly home, Beil shows Miku's simulated and 'mapped' version of the dance on the blinds of the room adjacent to the live dancer.

Miku is from head to toe a fantasy. Her body is a cartoon, animated, and while based on real humanoid design, is clearly an 'ideally' drawn figure. 'Her' official image was first drawn by the manga artist Kei.[17] Her voice, the basis for vocaloid technology, is a computer enhanced recreation of several voices, all of whom simply recorded a basic set of phenoms.[18] One can 'let' Hatsune Miku sing simply by playing a keyboard that is programmed with her sample bank. By composing a piece in which players dance her moves live, Beil stretches the concept of sampling, programming the players with Miku's physical movement repertoire and then later in the piece, putting her voice literally into the musician's mouths.

That brings us to the second example of hyperreal inspired scenes. Towards the latter half of the piece, five players group around a table outside of the fixed décor to reenact the famous Beach Boys video clip to their 1964 hit single, '*In my room*'.[19] Though the musicians' movements are clearly stylized to the 1960s era clip, the music is Beil's and the audible voices were created using vocaloid software. In other words, the players lip-sync this scene, simulating reality on at least two levels. First, simply by 'acting' as though the audible voices were their own. And second, by recreating a visible genre that pre-dates the audible. Beil instructed the musicians during rehearsals to act like the Beach Boys, 'the perfect sons-in-law'. This picture, for him a total fantasy that the players were to enact in real life, matches succinctly with the phantasmagorically created

15   Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, Foreign Agents Series (New York City, N.Y., U.S.A: Semiotext(e), Inc, 1983), 10.

16   ЛУЧШИХ ТЕХНОЛОГИЯ, *Hatsune Miku Ievan Polkka Dance Comparison*, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DTSkygDlwR0.

17   Adriana Sabo, 'HATSUNE MIKU: WHOSE VOICE, WHOSE BODY?', *INSAM Journal of Contemporary Music, Art and Technology* 2, nr. 1 (july 2019): 65–80.

18   "VOCALOID – the Modern Singing Synthesizer" accessed March 15, 2022, http://www.vocaloid.com/en/.

19   SHAYMCN 5 HQ, *Beach Boys : In My Room (1964) Remastered Stereo*, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hu0Jb-QjGm8.

voice – they have little or no basis in reality besides a recognizable language and vocabulary. A few scenes later, those same players are seen jammed into one room for the same number. Only this time, they sing it live – though heavily corrected using auto-tune: a perfect presentation ensured through technical intervention. Just as genetic engineering hopes for the perfect life, perhaps even eternal life, technological corrections here generate the illusion of the ideal live performance, the possibility of artistic perfectionism without fail.

That hope for technology, however, assumes that humans will eventually be able to fully and rationally decode real life and the live experience, and that this will lead to the generation of life itself. It is in fact the belief that we could play god, or for music, that mere virtuosity suffices to offer a catchy performance. However, it is delusional to think that, just like the 'perfect sons-in-law', there is a calculable success formula for liveliness and life itself, or that one could develop an algorithm for subjectivity, spontaneity, and authenticity. Returning to Lacan and Žižek, that would mean that we could actually capture the Real in the symbolic order after all. According to that logic, we could also, for example, develop a chemical formula for love or a composition that induces love, such as Patrick Süskind in *Perfume* (1985) who had his protagonist develop a fragrance that spontaneously evokes lust and blind desire. That vain hope, however, conveniently overlooks the evidence that with every endeavor to mold the Real into codes, symbols, and formulas, we immediately quell any life. As an example, think of analyzing sex verbally while making love. This has the immediate potential to undermine any desire to continue the deed or, rather, to match the deed to the word.

As the word cannot replace the deed, the signifier cannot replace the signified. In semiotics, signifiers are signs, sounds, or words that provoke a meaning, like the word 'dog' provokes in our heads a certain general image of the animal. The signified is, on the contrary, the real

specific dog with it's specific breed and its concrete charac-
teristics such as its color and shape. However, in hyperre-
ality, the signifier can replace the signified. As an example,
we can point to common and deceitful commercials that
suggest that one can immediately buy a good feeling or even
a happy life simply with their product. Hyperreality main-
tains this illusion by simulating an impression that the Real
can coincide with a symbolic order. In semiotic terms again,
that means the signified, like a human or an object, coin-
cides with their signifier, namely the word 'human' and the
word 'object', respectively. In hyperreality, therefore, reality
dissolves into signs, an example of which can be found in
the Hollywood Blockbuster, *The Matrix* or in any other
immersive experience wherein reality is simulated by signs,
a *virtual* reality, indeed, of ones and zeros. The same counts
for our monetized economy, in which the real economy
is determined by mass psychology and hysteria of virtual
markets. The value of a product is thus no longer derived
from its quality and functionality, but from its speculative
value. The value of commodities in this state is not deter-
mend by their 'use value' - as defined by Karl Marx – but
by their '*sign* value'.

Futhermore, in a hyperreal environment we experience
reality as if there is a one-to-one relationship between signifier
and signified, and no longer any margin of interpretation and
imagination between the two as well. Reality is thereby confused
with a sign that literally distorts our experience of it. These
days we are surrounded nearly 24 hours a day by the world
wide web, and although it could be considered a simulacre, the
functioning of the web as we know it, relies completely on this
one-to-one relationship. Our experiences of life and the meaning
thereof are strongly conditioned by it. As intelligent as the ubiq-
uitous digital media may be, a major handicap still exists: any
interpretation and ability to imagine or fill the gaps between
signifier and signified has yet to be generated. This is one expla-
nation, as an example, for the inability for algorithms to distin-
guish between nudity and porn. According to the London police,

it can even be difficult to distinguish between child pornography and a desert landscape.[20] Artificial intelligence (still) lacks imagination, so it must take any observed reality literally, or again in Baudrillard's terms: the signifier = the signified. Digital technologies can only capture sounds, images, and movements logically, encoded in a connection of ones and zeros. Sounds and images can vividly be reproduced, but only through logical links of previously stored sounds, images, etc. As the mathematician Marcus Du Sautoy states in his book on artificial intelligence, "A digital camera can take a picture so detailed that it far exceeds the storage capacity of the human brain, but that doesn't mean it can turn those millions of pixels into one coherent story. We are a long way from understanding how the brain can process data and integrate it into a story."[21]

In contrast to humans, computers have the immense ability to remember anything they record. It's this 'giga' memory – along with their connection speed – that gives the veneer of intelligence. In contrast, people constantly forget and therefore must rely on interpretation and imagination to, for example, link historical facts and 'narrate' them in a consequent story.[22] Computers, however, must first register everything encyclopedically to make the 'correct' logical connections and then reproduce a reality – a voice, a sound. Anything outside of this digi-logic, any ambiguity that slips in, escapes the virtual eye or simply blocks the system. This suggests that, despite all current algorithms and meta-algorithms, we now have artificial intelligence, but still no artificial intellectual. Human intelligence exists precisely by the grace of imagination, that ability to glue together illogical and paradoxical events or a contradictory reality. Interpretation for thinking beings rests on that peculiar mixture of factual knowledge and imagination: facts and fiction. For us, the Real, life itself, is only 'attainable' through imagination. We can only grasp it without really grasping it - in codes, language, symbols, etc. We can

only 'read' or better, feel life – including life in a live perfor-
mance – between the lines and binary codes and in-between
the signifier and the signified.

Beil seems to understand these mechanisms all too well.
Hide to Show owes its live-ness not primarily to technological
ingenuity and digital mediation, but to the public's imagination.
The scenography puts the viewer to work. They are pushed to
create a personal whole from sometimes incoherent fragments.
Moreover, Beil keeps life in the show by ignoring the distinc-
tion between real and artificial, body and the image of the body,
between life and virtuality. The viewer and listener are some-
times left literally guessing, and that is precisely what acti-
vates our imagination. What is real and what is not? The public
knows that a game is being played and it must rely continu-
ally on interpretation and imagination to guess what is real and
what is not real, to fill in the undecided space between signi-
fier and signified, and the ambiguity between 'ones and zeros'.
In that imagination we can see, hear, feel, and taste the hidden
life itself, the Real, without being able to literally see, hear, feel,
and taste it. Was art not precisely the expression of "that about
which one cannot speak"?[23] The life of the live performance
can only be tasted between the lines, shining through the cracks
and fissures in the symbolic order. No logic, codes, or words can
comprehend it. Experiencing the Real means an experience that
transcends all understanding. True life can only be shown by
not showing it. To hold life in a live performance, an artist needs
to hide to show.

20 Marcus Du Sautoy, *The
    Creativity Code: How AI Is
    Learning to Write, Paint and
    Think*, 2019, 81.
21 Du Sautoy, 80.
22 Pascal Gielen, 'Art and Social
    Value Regimes', *Current Sociology*
    53, nr. 5 (september 2005):
    789–806.

23 Ludwig Wittgenstein and Georg
    Henrik von Wright, *Culture
    and Value*, [Nachdr.] (Chicago:
    Chicago Univ. Press, 2006).

Grand Finale

We can conclude that *Hide to Show* makes use of hyper-
real 'techniques' but extends beyond the hyperreal itself.
Beil subscribes to a modern artistic tradition that reflects
on our contemporary condition through a game of signs.
The scenography suggests how we use codes in our digital
culture to signify the world and ourselves. With a refer-
ence to sociologist Niklas Luhmann, we could say that
the composer establishes a second-order observation by
showing us how we look at the world today.[24] *Hide to Show*
sets our own looking 'to watch' and our own listening 'to
listen'. Our first-order observations are nowadays greatly
determined by digital lenses and within an Internet culture
that has its own aesthetic. As we endeavored to clarify in
this essay, the latter is characterized by a twofold collapse.
First, as with memes, we are cut off from time and space in
a so-called 'context collapse' and, secondly, the space of inter-
pretation and imagination collapses between signifier and
signified. Moreover, the digital screen culture surrounding
us is two-dimensional, not only literally, but also in its
sensory capacity. Audio-visual media merely appeals to two
senses. Touch and smell are often neglected in the digital
sensory palette, leaving us with a disembodied experience
of the world. The same applies to relationships we have
on social media today. They are also disembodied. That's
the reason why Internet connectivity often leaves us with a
feeling of loneliness. This is also a 'message' we, both implic-
itly and explicitly, took away from the performance of *Hide
to Show*. Loneliness is not only literally sung out during the
performance, the described distant focus of the performers,
the separated booths, and the technological fixes also
displace human presence and coexistence. In summary, Beil
demonstrates in our eyes that a hyperreal Internet culture

can lead to social and aesthetic deprivation. As a result, we find it difficult to touch life and the world anymore, and the world cannot seem to touch us either.

And yet, Beil is not a moral 'preacher', and he is certainly no technophobe. On the contrary, the scenic composition demonstrates how internet culture and digital technology can enhance our creativity. Beil is certainly inspired by it and quite adept at playing with it as well. This makes *Hide to Show* funny, spectacular, and highly entertaining from start to finish. The gloomy message is more inconspicuous. The proverbial hangover only comes after the performance. Here is where we reach the limits of digital technology. It can function as an extension of human creation, but as yet cannot replace it. After all, Beil only achieves this 'under the skin' feeling by reopening or even interrupting our digitized aesthetic horizon. He does this, among other ways, by stretching the space between the signifier and the signified on the one hand, and by putting real bodies to work on stage on the other. That approach becomes most apparent during the *grand finale*.

Perhaps not coincidentally, Beil lowers the digital veil just before the metaphorical curtain falls on the performance. The last leek-dance is anything but a pre-programmed copy. Moreover, unlike the voice or instrument, one cannot easily 'fix' this dance. In the finale, perfectionism is no longer guaranteed. Every performer has their own body-idiom with their own possibilities and limitations. It is impossible to fully synchronize this scene. That certainly applies to the musicians on stage who do not have trained dancers' bodies. At any time, any one of them could fall out of this meme's mold. A leek could slip out of a hand, and the musicians-come-dancers can and do fall out step. However firm Beil maintains the harmony and synchrony, the viewer cannot fail to notice how exposed the players

24   Niklas Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, Meridian, Crossing Aesthetics (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2000).

have become. The dance could fall apart at any moment. It is precisely this fragility that makes the grand finale touchingly beautiful. We are using the slightly sentimental 'touching' here deliberately. With the Leek-Dance, affection breaks the pre-programmed codes. Human emotions suddenly shimmer through the meme and the tight choreography. With this vulnerability, Beil shows exactly where life is in live performance. It is the momentum and force that pushes *Hide to Show* to touch the Real. This performance gains a soul. The audience immediately comes to grip with a reality that every perfectionism conceals failure, that behind our hyper-visual culture an endless void is hiding, and that behind music there is nothing more than eternal silence.

Communicating Urgency

An interview with Michael Beil

MB:	Michael Beil
PG:	Pascal Gielen
TRM:	Thomas R. Moore

9 January 2023
Via *Zoom*

PG: *As I mentioned, as a sociologist, I probably look at things completely differently than you might as a composer. So as a layman, I would first like to ask you about the materials you use in your compositions.*
What are you interested in?
I can also imagine that you, as an artist, have or feel a specific urgency to communicate something larger than yourself.
Can you elaborate – with a nod to society – on where or what that urgency is for you?
For Hide to Show in the first place, but maybe also in general as a composer living now?

MB:

That's three very complicated questions. I will start with material. Material, as it pertains to contemporary music is actually very much related to the early period of contemporary music in which composers began to refer to musical elements as material. They focused on creating structural music that is totally dedicated to its form, avoiding emotional or concrete content.

To answer your second question: I am of the opinion that communicating something with music is not really possible because music does not contain information like language or an image. So, you can mainly address feelings

with music, and you can communicate music related things. However, it's very difficult and almost impossible to communicate extra musical content with music. It can be sound related. And then it can be in a kind of recognizable signal, like a microwave bing. When I use that bing, then I cite, or refer to a kitchen, and maybe in a context with a lot of kitchen sounds I can communicate something about a kitchen, but it can never be concrete.

In regard to your third question, urgency in the society means for me ... What does society need? And what do I give to society? And to be more specific to myself: What does society need as art and what does society need as music, or art music? And that's a problem, because actually there is not such a big need at the moment for art and art music as we know it. It had a special purpose at the end of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century, but art lost this purpose in the last decades, obviously. And so, artists are a bit staggering now. Doing anything to continue, trying to do something different or new with moderate success. The visual arts discovered money, so there it's very much about being famous. The media mainly reports the length of the row of people queuing at the entrance of the museum and the prices bid at auctions. Also, they write more about the curators than about the artists. You rarely read anything about music anymore. If you do see something, it is mainly about classical music. And then it's about the interpretation of some famous pianist, conductor, or singer and stuff like that. But there's hardly any writing about contemporary music anymore.

So, what can I give to society as a composer that is really urgent? I can work with a material and give it a new meaning in a certain context. That's how I describe my work. I don't work with structural material like motifs, or algorithms, or a special kind of musical constellation, but I work with musical meaning. I can also only get that meaning from other music. So, my material is other music and when I work with it, I have to change its meaning to

challenge the listener. And what I hope people gain from it is that they may start thinking about something that is related to music, like in Hide to Show.

TRM:

Backing up a bit, did I understand that correctly that in your opinion Art Music has somehow lost its relevancy? And if so, do you personally feel some kind of urgency to help it regain a kind of relevance? Or is that not important to you?

MB:

Art Music is a very wide field and that is also a complex question. In former times, the artists were kind of outstanding persons having a view on society and being tasked with criticizing that society, revealing problematic points. But today many consider themselves to be artists, and outstanding, and special. So, the artists have to define their roles in a new way, or they may grow obsolete. Of course, artists don't want to be obsolete and society loves and admires artists, but not for what they formerly did. Instead, for what they imagine them to be like. I would even say that this situation forces urgency to be more on the side of the artists and not so much on the side of the society. Society doesn't need more art because there is a lot of it available, ready to be reissued again and again. So artists need to find a new purpose in society and that is the new urgency.

TRM & PG:

So that purpose is no longer to hold up that critical mirror?

You yourself seem to have been quite critical in your piece, and we also think that you do communicate. There are lyrics in Hide to Show, concrete words that are literally about loneliness. So, we were wondering, how do you position yourself?

Of course, like we wrote in our essay, you're not a moral preacher, but at the same time, you do give the audience, or at least, show the audience a kind of mirror of what we, society, are doing and in what times we are living. Are you taking up a position against this entertaining new social media tradition?

MB:

Well, you're right, I'm showing what we do in society and our interaction with social media, but I'm not criticizing it. I am more just trying to lift the curtain a bit – just to have a look what it might mean. What does it mean for a musician when he or she stands on stage? What does it mean for the audience? What does it mean for a composer who produces new music? The piece is a kind of research for me about this topic, and the outcome of the research is not presented as a talk or as a lecture, but in the form of a composition. I see composing very much as a research outcome. But I'm not judging social media and, for example, saying it's bad for our social life and health or something like that. It's just a fact that everybody has a mobile phone with them all the time - even older people, and that's a new situation to deal with it. Also, composers have to deal with it. (Even those in the classical field who really try to close their eyes to it, must deal with it.) We all have to deal with it.

Personally, I'm very positive about digitalization and social media. Not that it's the rescue for humanity, but I'm not really so critical about it. In *Hide to Show,* I just try and show what's going on.

PG:

As a layman, I often find new music incomprehensible and, if I may be honest, often unintelligible. New music seems to remain something for 'insiders', connoisseurs or specialists, but if I may still allow myself a layman's judgment: the new music I saw in recent years also seems

to me to have stuck – like you said above – in the 1970's and for me with John Cage. Just as in visual art – a world I know much better – quite a lot of conceptual art has stuck with Marcel Duchamp. In my view, you and Hide to Show grandly break with that tradition. Hide to Show is wonderfully accessible, but that is not to say that the music and performance are any less complex, and there are many layers to it that not everyone – including myself – is all in on. In my view, it makes Hide to Show a gem, but also particularly socially relevant.

Can you comment on how you yourself view the evolutions in the new music scene?

Also, how is your work perceived by it?

MB:

I love your comments, Pascal, that as a non-trained listener while listening to contemporary music, you cannot distinguish between what they do now and what John Cage did already fifty years ago. Of course, specialized composers and musicians can hear the difference. But, depending on the skills of the listener, the difference can be small, and it may vanish. How can that continue? And it's a pity for us. I know you learned trombone, Thomas. You are well trained as a musician and of course you want to go on playing trombone your whole life. But on the other hand, there has to be a change.

My vision of the future is something like implants, or plugs we have under the skin where we can attach computers, or totally new instruments, and make music. Because we, of course, want to go on making music. But we cannot do a new kind of music with the old instruments. That's just not possible. For me, the next step would be dramatically different musical instruments and interfaces.

TRM:

Switching gears here a bit, can we now take the time to zoom in on Hide to Show? Specifically, could you walk us through the structure and form of Hide to Show?
How does the piece progress, and what elements recur throughout the composition?

MB:

Sure. *Hide to Show* consists of six scenes, each made of six parts, in total 36 parts. In each scene, the parts cover different aspects. There are six parts for dance, each with a different cover, and one in each scene. There are also six songs varying between virtual voices or real ones. Then there are instrumentals, parts about dancing and moving, parts focused on hiding and showing, and finally transition parts, where the performers change clothes. In these 36 parts, the audience experiences all kinds of combinations of the performers being inside/isolated or outside/real and of really playing/singing or faking. Between everybody faking inside and all the performers playing outside, you find all kinds of combinations and constellations.

TRM:

Can we also talk about the instrumentation?
As I understand it from previous conversations, the piece is written for eight musicians and those eight musicians happen to play specific instruments. Can you elaborate on this approach?

MB:

Basically, you know, I wrote the piece for certain people because I know Nadar well. I imagined the people I worked with. It was not a trombone player, or a cellist, or a typical contemporary pianist. I wrote for Thomas, Pieter, and Elisa.

Also, I did several pieces for musicians without instruments before, like *Key Jack* that is for pianist without a piano. That's very important to me and this piece: you are all musicians and I account for and count on this throughout the work. The instrumental parts are quite virtuoso at times. However, playing instruments is only one sixth of the piece. It's related to the "inside and outside". It's a piece where the musicians act inside these little cabins, but they are also outside, and outside the cabins is for me the reality while inside is the artificial or virtual situation. I show in *Hide to show* that the real situation takes place more rarely than the virtual situation, thus playing instruments takes place more rarely than not playing instruments. In the 70 minute show, the musicians are on stage, but they only play their instruments 12 minutes of it. So we see, "OK, they're musicians. They are playing the instrument, but mostly they're doing different things."

PG: You write specifically for certain persons, certain musicians. However, are you also writing for an audience? Do you have in mind a totally different audience than the 'ordinary' classical and contemporary music audience?
Is your hidden agenda not also to break open this public?

MB:

I can say from my heart, yes, I am writing for an audience. There is of course an important discussion about this, a discussion that has been around since Plato's critique of the theater: What attitude do we have towards the audience? In a normal contemporary music concert, 90% of the audience is well educated and musically trained. For *Hide to show* there are a bit more 'normal' people who will attend, so I changed my musical language so that when people of all ages and who are just interested might have an open door to the show. On the one hand it's very important for me that everybody has the oppor-

tunity to enjoy the show. If a person is open and wants to experience something related to his or her own network, it's fine. Every person brings something to the concert, a whole life with cultural experience. Each will see something that they will of course interpret with their own cultural background, so I have to take a wider approach to offer something to a lot of people. On the other hand, I have to pay attention that it's not just entertainment. I'm not entertaining people. I'm not satisfying expectations when I think about the audience. In the 70s it was fashionable to say "I don't care about the audience. I'm doing my stuff and I am lucky when they are also interested in the stuff I like". I try to imagine possible reactions of the audience to be able to surprise them. An art experience is actually only possible when I reach the audience to then surprise them. I'm very happy when people come after the performance and say, "oh, I recognize this and that, and I know it from there and then it was combined with this, and this was really strange." Or "this atmosphere, that was a bit like this or that." Then I know that they were not bored, that they started thinking about something, but of course it really doesn't have to be pedagogical or have to train people in a certain direction. Not at all. It's not entertainment, but instead more like teasing people to think about something or just having a great evening. Best both.

PG: *A question of another order. How much does*
        your kind of music also need visualization?
        I think also about many performances of
        Nadar that work with visualization.
        It's often very spectacular and I feel like I almost
        need this to appreciate the music.
                So, I was wondering is this also then
                the future of contemporary music?

MB:

Well, on one hand I would say visualization is just normal. Everywhere you go and see or hear something, there's a video whether it's necessary or not. It's just a normal thing. That means that I don't need any explanation for using video.

However, that said, it always plays an important role in my pieces. I have different concepts, but basically, I use video to confuse people, to put them on a track and then push them away from the track so that they feel a bit insecure. The audience thought they just understood something and then suddenly there's a new situation that doesn't fit. That's something I really like, and I often work with this way of surprising people. Then again, there's that question, who am I surprising? Is it working with everybody? I have to deeply think about this and in *Hide to Show* there's the additional meaning of video as a presentation form. That's new. I never did that before in a piece. The fact that people, musicians practice something on stage, perform it on stage, and record it on stage. But when they show it, they're not on stage because they closed the blind. It's like TikToking or Instagramming, where when you show what you recorded, you can hide completely behind an avatar, or you can put yourself in disguise or put on so much make-up that you are not recognizable anymore. But for the players on stage in *Hide to Show* the audience can see both. They see practicing, they see performing, and they see showing off; and then they can compare it or think about the links between it all.

TRM:

Those links seem to be quite fluid.
Maybe we can go into that for a bit, also in relation
to your use and your definition of hyperreality.

It seems to be much more fluid than Baudrillard's definition.[1] *His seems to be unidirectional, and yours seems to be at least bidirectional.*

MB:

I understood from Rancière's book that hyperreality is something that first only exists virtually, in the Internet, in a video, in the cinema, or wherever, and then afterwards is very similarly reproduced in reality. For example, Disneyland, which only existed in comics and then suddenly it became real. People could go there. They can touch things, they can smell and taste. It's not just two dimensional. That's how I understood it and Baudrillard described it very nicely with this parking lot situation in which you put your car at Disneyland where it's grey and ugly and then you cross the door where it becomes this dream world.

TRM:

So this is Baudrillard's (and Rancière's) definition of hyperreality as you understand it, but for you, and the way you apply it, there seems to be more. You are not just taking something that's virtual and creating it in reality. I have the impression that there's more steps to it for you. It also seems to be fluid as well.

MB:

Well, actually my question was how can I find things like Baudrillard described in the world of music? That's how I got stuck on Hatsune Miku, who is a virtualized person giving concerts in real life where real young people dance in a concert hall and just watch the hologram of an artist. There is a real band playing for her, too. That's the first thing that really struck me. And the second thing was the Hatsune Miku song, *Ievan Polka*, because of its evolution. There are a lot of cover versions of the Polka going in all different directions. However, with Hatsune Miku, who became totally virtual with virtual voice and virtual performances, which then on the basis of the software written for young

people to work with her voice and her dance style, new covers of *Ievan Polka* appeared in which real people tried to recreate the recreationally created voice, dance, and even dress. That's for me hyperreality in its pure form. If you try to imitate something that's not existing. That would have been really unimaginable let's say 50 years ago. It was not possible and nobody could do that, and that's a new thing for me and that's hyperreality how I wanted to have it in my piece. For me it's just imitating a virtual thing in music in real life. Like auto-tuning, there's a lot of young singers now singing in reality as if they were being auto-tuned because they only know auto-tuned singers.

PG: *Besides Hyperreality, do you have any other sources of inspiration, things you like or things or people that are important references for you? I don't just mean theoretical sources, but also in the field of music or social developments in daily life?*

  MB:

Well, there are things I like and things I reference. They are not necessarily the same and of course it's evolving, changing all the time. I go to a lot of exhibitions and I try to get an impression of what's going on in the visual arts as well, and of course, I go to concerts. However, I don't get very much inspiration from concerts nowadays. I watch a lot of cinema, too. I'm a big fan of David Lynch. Actually, I like all experimental cinema and I think the cinema world is very open to doing real experiments and trying new stuff, including all kinds of new things invented in the world. That's very important that we as composers – like in the 60s when Stockhausen went to the cellar of the WDR and just took all the tools to his studio and tried them. That's a quality we should find again, just take new achievements of our time to make music instead of reproducing academic styles.

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1   Jean Baudrillard, Simulations, Foreign Agents Series
     (New York City, N.Y., U.S.A: Semiotext(e), Inc, 1983).

PG: *So, just as Stockhausen, you're using techniques of other media to implement them in music?*

MB:

Yeah it's called "Zweckentremdung", using something not for the purpose it was built for. He used these units for measuring taken from the radio technicians and used them for making sound. He used many devices that were not built for making experimental music.

Contemporary music is still very much dedicated to classical instruments even though classical instruments are kind of worn out. The possibilities are exhausted. You can't press out any new sound from a violin today or any other instrument. So, for example, writing a new trombone piece is not really possible, even if you're very specialized. I think you are simply writing a series of citations.

As I said, I think we really need totally new interfaces for new instruments and maybe we don't need to use our fingers to play them. Maybe then we can just think about something. Like, you could think of a Lynch-style atmosphere and then you just get it. And how would you make it higher and lower? With your shoulders maybe? Or even better, you're just dancing and then it creates itself automatically.

TRM:

I like that idea, and speaking of movements, can you talk a little about how you write your movements and how you give them meaning?

MB:

Well, there are movements that produce sounds, there are movements that are related to sound production, and there are movements signifying sound production. So if the musicians sit in a restaurant in the evening and they speak about music, generally speaking they always make these movements showing [music] that

are related to playing an instrument. But actually, that's a little on its head. We have to be aware of the fact that the instruments that we play were built for people making movements for producing sound, so the movements don't come from the instruments, the instruments come from the movements for which they were built.

As a composer, I'm determined to not only use movements that are related to instruments, but perhaps to also use movements from, for example, a restaurant. My piece *Caravan* is dedicated to "restaurant movements". I just made a list of how musicians would describe music with their hands and made a piece out of that.

In *Hide to Show* it's more about dancing. Everything's very much related to moving the whole body together with music. I was not aiming for "dance" like choreography and it is not really dancing like in the club. It's just moving the body with intention, like covering the dance of somebody else or listening to music inside using little movements.

PG: *You are a teacher as well, right? If we can go back to the very beginning of our conversation, you indicated that maybe the path that classical and New Music is on will lead to a dead end. You said that music needs to do something completely different. Perhaps it has even gotten bogged down, both artistically and socially. You also mentioned a lack of urgency on the side of society for art music.*
So, I was wondering, what is important for you nowadays in your teaching and for your students within this context? What should an ideal conservatory curriculum look like?

MB:

Actually, that's also a very wide field. First, from my viewpoint, composers of contemporary music still could be a bit more open towards the music, the instruments, and the tools of our times. For students, we can go back to the topic of our attitude towards the audience. That must be questioned and discussed. There's a lot of self-understanding stuff in the heads of the young composers, and there's no culture of putting something in question anymore. That's really strange to me because the composition techniques that were evolved in the 50s and 60s aimed to question the music production of that era. What came out, however, was the unfortunate academization of those techniques, and now they are simply available as rootless style tricks. Young people now use them without the related attitude of criticizing, because they simply are not aware of it.

What I try to do now is to train the students to just restart questioning things, but not in the way of the "dualistic" thinking in the 60s; like this is good, and this is bad. This is the former way, they have to find their own way. To destroy and revolutionize to get ahead, that's the old way and the new way could perhaps be contextualization, linking meaning. I try to tease them with thoughts about how music can be meaningful. How can music have meaning besides the structure and the material?
And it's difficult. It's very difficult.

PG: *What's difficult?*
To convince them?
Or to make sure they get it?

MB:

It's difficult for me to express myself and not to literally repeat the mistakes of the past myself. I'm a baby of the 80s. My studies were in the 80s, but it's a different situation today and I have to adapt. That's not easy for me and for the young people. It's

maybe sometimes just difficult for them to understand that they don't just do a career. They make pieces, they get scholarships and commissions, and become famous. Why should they put in question anything? Or why should they do something different?

In addition now, sometimes the person is more important than the work. We see the same situation as in visual arts. Famous people are booked, not good works. And that leads to a situation where curators become more important than the artist. If you read about exhibitions, for example, the articles are so much more about the curator and the concept of the exhibition and so little about the artists. It's the same with modern music festivals.

PG: *And do you think things need to be changed in the institution itself?*

MB:

Very much.

PG: *Can you give one or two examples, what needs to be changed?*

MB:

Well first, there are too many protagonists of the classical scene, musicians and artistic directors who are still too proud of working without electricity. As far as the academies go, there has to be awareness of the fact that we are educating armies of classical instrumentalists each year. What should they all do afterwards if opera and concert houses switch to new technologies? I think a majority of those responsible in classical music have their heads deeply buried in the sand and will soon have a rude awakening. Classical music, including contemporary music is already kind of a museum.

Actually, it's quite similar in pop music. There's also kind of static-ness in the evolution there as well. There are so many revivals going on, but there's not anything really different. There's been no big evolution recently, even not in electronic pop music. They're also losing people in the concerts. Not the main acts, of course. Lady Gaga has always sold out. Of course, that's a different thing, but the basic, little concerts with not so well-known pop groups or singers, they are not sold out anymore.

PG: *I have one more open question to end.*
                    What will be next?

MB:

Next is a break. I am happy this year to archive my works and clean up the scores and patches. I will read books, get new input, do experiments, and then I will restart. There's a lot of music out there that ensembles can already play. There's no need to hurry.

PG: *Does this mean that* Hide to Show *is for you*
             a kind of finishing an era, something you
             really wanted to do, and now you have to find
             another way again?

MB:

Well, I already have two pieces that are headed in a new direction. I just had a premiere in December of a new piece that gives controllers to musicians. They control digital processing live with videos they recorded themselves on stage. This gives them more freedom and responsibility in the show. So, I am trying to give part of the responsibility to the musicians and that's very difficult for me because I love to be in control. Actually, I will dedicate this year to think about interfaces, processing, new instruments and more freedom for the performance.

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Author Biographies

Pascal Gielen (1970) is writer and full professor of sociology of culture and politics at the Antwerp Research Institute for the Arts (Antwerp University - Belgium) where he leads the Culture Commons Quest Office (CCQO). Gielen is editor of the international book series Antennae - Arts in Society (Valiz). In 2016 he became laureate of the Odysseus grant for excellent international scientific research of the Fund for Scientific Research Flanders in Belgium. In 2022 he was appointed by the Flemish Government as curator of the Culture Talks conference. Gielen has published many books which are translated in Chinese, English, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Turkish and Ukrainian. His research focuses on aesthetics, creative labour, the common, urban and cultural politics.

Thomas R. Moore (1980),

a trombonist and conductor originally from Easton, Pennsylvania, now calls Antwerp, Belgium his home. After graduating from Indiana University in 2002, he attended the Utrecht School of the Arts in the Netherlands, earning his second Bachelor of Music degree in trombone performance. He then went on to earn his Master's degree in trombone performance and chamber music from the Koninklijk Vlaams Conservatorium in Antwerp.

Moore is a conductor and trombonist with the Nadar Ensemble and a regular guest with Spectra Ensemble. He has premiered works with groups such as ChampdAction and Ictus Ensemble, and has performed at notable festivals such as //hcmf, Time of Music, and the Darmstadt New Music Summer Course.

He has also been a member of the orchestra at Theater Des Westens in Berlin, conducted the Orchestra of the Royal Dutch Air Force, and served as Musical Director for the hit Dutch musical, Soldaat van Oranje.

In 2022, Moore defended his PhD in the Arts at the University of Antwerp and the Royal Conservatoire of Antwerp and now works as the head of brass and a lecturer of artistic researcher at the Royal Conservatoire. He also chairs the research group Performance Practice in Perspective.

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studied Musicology at KU Leuven, where she graduated in 2006 with a Master's thesis on the music historical role and significance of composer Louis De Meester (1904-1987). She has been the general coordinator of MATRIX New Music Centre since 2011. In this function, she focuses on the question of how to bring (knowledge about) new music to a wide range of audiences. Relevant publications in that context are *Het Pluriversum van Lucien Goethals* (ed., together with Dr. Jelle Dierickx, 2016) and *Brewaeys Unfolding* (ed., together with Dr. Ann Eysermans, 2022).

Nadar Ensemble

Adventure, interdisciplinarity, and above all a strong and critical contact with today's world through, among others avenues, the use of new technologies, these are some of the main objectives for the Nadar Ensemble and what we hope to share with Gaspard-Félix Tournachon (1820-1910), whose pseudonym was Nadar. He was not only a well-known photographer, balloonist, caricaturist, spy, art critic, and curator, but regularly organized informal "salons" to which he invited artists, thinkers, writers and scientists, thus creating a true cross-disciplinary dialogue.

Since our 21st century is pluriform, multi- and transmedial, and is more and more inhabited by digital natives and a networked generation, Nadar Ensemble is not only fascinated by contemporary music, but also by film, the visual arts, performance, theater, installation art, and all that is contained – or not – by these categories. The Nadar Ensemble wishes to develop forms of musical presentation that reflect this world, in an attempt to anchor new music more strongly in today's world.

Nadar has performed at the Darmstadt International Ferienkurse für Neue Musik, Donaueschinger Musiktage, Tzlil Meudcan Tel Aviv, Ultima Oslo, Musica Strasbourg, Platforma Moscow, Holland Festival, Opera Göteborg, Tfnm Zürich, San Martin Buenos Aires, Acht Brücken Cologne, reMusik Sint-Petersburg, Tampere Biennale Finland, Gogolfest Kiev, Cité de la musique Paris, Harvard University Boston ... Nadar was invited as guest curator for the SPOR festival in Århus, Denmark. Although Nadar is artist in residence at DE SINGEL Antwerp, its hometown is Sint-Niklaas, known for its famous hot air balloon festival.