

**De
Bijloke**
Muziekcentrum

Hide to show Nadar Ensemble



Welcome to De Bijloke Music Centre, a 13th-century architectural gem in Ghent and one of the oldest concert halls in the world. The building was recently thoroughly renovated, with the acoustics of the large concert hall optimised by an international team of architects. This allows De Bijloke to compete with other major concert halls.

We look forward to welcoming you and your class to our music centre for the Nadar Ensemble's Hide to Show concert. In this dazzling show, Michael Beil and the Nadar Ensemble masterfully play with what is real and what is not.

Lights out, concert mode on. Yet Hide to Show is no ordinary concert experience. Six closed cubicles with Blinds form the backdrop for the artists who play music, act, sing and dance. Each one prepares for their moment of glory, and we peek in. Or so we think.

In the illusory play of video projections on the opening and closing slats, nothing is what it seems. A hyperreality unfolds on stage that is not so strange to us. TikTok has nothing on this!

Before the concert, Pascal Gielen, professor of cultural sociology at the Antwerp Research Institute for the Arts (ARIA) at the University of Antwerp, will give a presentation, and after the concert, you will have the opportunity to ask the artistic team questions in a Q&A session.

This lesson pack provides insight and context into the creation of Hide to Show and the philosophy behind the performance. It is a useful tool to prepare your pupils, stimulate their interest and encourage them to attend the concert with even more openness.

See you soon, Muziekcentrum
De Bijloke

1. The creators of Hide to Show

1.1 Nadar Ensemble

The Nadar Ensemble refuses to be pigeonholed. Except for this performance, but more about that later. The ensemble specialises in contemporary music, but that means much more than just making music. In the 21st century, musical genres and new techniques flow smoothly into one another: Nadar also makes use of film, visual arts, performance, theatre, installation art and everything else that may or may not fall under these categories. You can see what this means in the following introductory video.

F1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FwRWNXuO2CM>



What items are used as musical instruments or as part of the performances?

ANSWER: Hot air balloons, ordinary balloons, electric toothbrushes, plants, cranes, lamps, drones, classical instruments such as cellos, violins, pianos, flutes, saxophones...



Did you know?

If you are interested, you can watch the full performance of Mátyás Wettl's Nocturne, a composition for lamps and light switches. It is normally performed live, but during the COVID lockdown, the ensemble created an online version.

F2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGe4LGq_BAw



1.2 Michael Beil

German composer Michael Beil combines electronic music, instrumental music and video in his work.

The perfect combination for our adventurous ensemble. Their first meeting dates back to 2011 and since then they have gradually developed a language together, with *Hide to Show* as the The techniques you see in the performance are particularly complex, both in terms of programming and setting up, as well as To be performed. In Beil's oeuvre, you can see how this becomes increasingly layered and daring through greater (technological) knowledge and a deep trust in the musicians. *Hide to Show* was therefore written especially for Nadar.

1.2.1 Technique: Video loops

One of the most important elements in Beil's work is the use of live *video loops*. Musicians take their place in front of a camera, make a movement lasting a few seconds, and this is then incorporated into the performance. played at different moments. Every 'mistake' inevitably ends up in the performance. For example, during a performance of *Key Jack* in Brussels, an auditorium employee walked through the frame, causing his shadow to appear endlessly on screen for the rest of the performance.

1.2.2 Assignment Key JackZ.



If you watch the first five minutes of *Key Jack*, you can see how all the elements are set up in the first three minutes and then used in combination to allow the pianist to play together with two virtual versions of himself. What strikes you about this excerpt and the score shown below it?

F3: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpaoF5_L1S8

The pianist plays on a board and has no keys, yet the score does contain notes and chords, because the position of his fingers must be correct. There are also instructions on how he should look (e.g. don't forget to grin), so he also has to act.

You could consider the score to be an extremely detailed script.
After seeing *Hide to Show*, try to imagine what the score might look like.

2. About the production Hide to Show

Hide to Show explores the outer limits of these video techniques.

Form and content fit together seamlessly, as the major themes of the performance (the internet, algorithms, representation and loneliness) are presented in our daily lives through the same media of videos, recordings and projections.

For this work, the stage is divided into two zones. On one side, there is a series of dressing rooms where musicians sit, which they can close off with sun blinds that can be raised completely, left half-open or turned away. On both sides of the stage there is a place where the musicians can play and sit together.

2.1 Sunblind assignment

If you can't quite picture this,

Then take a look at the trailer for the play at DE SINGEL in Antwerp

F4: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=scSVqg_Pvil



How are the sun blinds used? Can you link this to the title of the play?

ANSWER: The musicians can hide behind them, but images are also projected onto them. When they hide, something else is shown. So they can't completely hide away.

This brings us straight to one of the themes of Hide to Show.

In his essay *Verschuivingen (Shifts)* about changes in our time, Stefan Hertmans describes it as follows:

"Since the rise of social media, the boundary between the inner and outer worlds has been systematically eroded. The inner world, the subjective intimacy of every citizen, and the outer world, the objective living environment that we share in the public domain, have become increasingly intertwined."

2.2 Assignment: privacy and identity

Read the following piece on privacy and identity by Maurits Martijn¹ and answer the following questions.

- Give three contexts in which you represent a different 'me'.
- What are the differences (if others are allowed to know, of course...).
- On the internet, you see that different contexts are beginning to overlap and people are present as citizens, parents and friends. What problems could this cause?

Social relationships are not possible without hiding something.

Who you are is largely determined by the private nature of your inner self. Privacy is therefore an important characteristic of your 'self', but not a necessary condition: even a (hypothetically) completely transparent 'self' is still a self.

But this is where the social component of privacy comes into play. Because the 'I' we refer to when we talk about ourselves is not static: we are, due to the social context in which we find ourselves most of the time, not just one self. At your parents' house, you are someone different than when you are out with your friends.

The ability to hide one 'self' (the well-behaved 'self' that your parents like to see) from the other 'self' (the tough, boozing 'self' that your friends like) is an essential part of what it means to 'be yourself'. Put more simply: a person is, in different contexts, at different times, in the presence of different people, always someone else.

2.3 Context collapse

The phenomenon of various contexts intermingling on the internet is also known as *context collapse*. This puts everything on an equal footing: a video of your cat, a racist comment, news about an impending nuclear war and a recipe for muffins. Hide to Show does not judge, but shows how this world works. All possible contexts and ideas constantly overlap, and no single element dominates all the others. As a viewer and listener, you orient yourself in this situation.

2.4 Technique: Doubling

In the trailer, you also saw the lyrics appear on the screen:

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



When a new medium is invented, it always takes a while for the general public to understand what it can be used for. Initially, people still tend to think too much within the framework of what came before. For example, when film was invented at the end of the 19thth century, people thought that films could be nothing more than a nice illustration to accompany music. More recently, it also took a while for people to understand that a computer is more than just a complex typewriter. On the other hand, there are also adventurous experimenters who explore the limits and possibilities of the new medium. Soon after the advent of film, George Méliès understood that you could use it to double yourself. Nadar ensemble regularly shows his *L'homme orchestre* at the beginning of a concert.



Watch a still from the film. How could Méliès have created this effect with the resources available to him in the early twentieth century?

Doubling by means of film was also successfully used at the 1958 Expo in Brussels, to which we still owe the Atomium. In the Czechoslovakian pavilion, multimedia performances were staged under the name *Laterna Magika*, in which actors, musicians and dancers interacted with pre-recorded versions of themselves.



Technology has not stood still in the meantime, and as you have seen, Michael Beil does not have to limit himself to pre-made recordings, but can incorporate live recordings into the performance. Seventy years later, these magical doublings still evoke wonder. One of the strangest effects of doubling is that it creates confusion about what is the original and what is the copy. In *Hide to Show*, it is sometimes very difficult to discern whether you are looking at the musician or a video of the musician. But is that really necessary?



Do you think it is necessary for us to know whether we are watching a real person on stage or a video or image?

Our brains also have a very difficult time with duplicates of ourselves. For example, looking at images of yourself can lead to great confusion.



Try to describe what happens when you look in a mirror for a long time.

- Looking at images of ourselves can even be used in a therapeutic context to overcome fears.



Watch the following video from a VPRO documentary about deepfakes.

F5: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HcQwRkmDTmU>



- How could *deepfakes* potentially be used to overcome fears?
- How do you think you would feel if you saw a *deepfake* of yourself?

2.5 Uncanny valley

An important reference point for Michael Beil's work is the recently deceased director and visual artist David Lynch. Like Lynch, Beil likes to give his viewers a sense of alienation.



Watch the scene from David Lynch's *Lost Highway*. In this scene, one of the main characters is at a party when he is suddenly approached by a mysterious man.

F6: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZowK0NAvig>

- Which elements contribute to the alienating experience? Open not only your eyes, but also your ears, and pay attention to the way doubling is used here as well.

Beil uses similar means to give you a strange feeling. In English, we call this *uncanny*, a term for which there is no good translation in Dutch. It is the feeling that something is not quite right. You find yourself in a situation that is familiar, but something is not quite right.



Go back to the excerpt from *Key Jack*. Which elements create an alienating effect?

Technology can have this effect on us by imitating something eerily well. This is called the uncanny valley.

This video clearly explains the phenomenon.

F7: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aYuBDkto2Vk>

You may experience the feeling of the uncanny valley during *Hide to Show!*

2.6 An endless game of references

Hide to show is packed with references to a wide variety of cultural phenomena, from internet memes to Belgian dance music from the 1990s, the Japanese virtual pop star Hatsune Miku and the American pop group The Beach Boys. Both in the music and the images, these references are sometimes made through sampling and sometimes through imitation of characteristic elements such as wigs that imitate Hatsune Miku's hairstyle.

Beil is by no means unique in this respect, as musical and textual quotations can be found throughout the history of (classical) music. Below is a summary of the *Ring Cycle*, a famous opera series by Richard Wagner. Which famous film and book series does this story remind you of?

A stockpile of gold from the Rhine is stolen by the dwarf Alberich. He uses part of it to make a ring that gives its owner power over the entire world. When Wotan, the chief god, steals it from him, Alberich puts a curse on the ring. The ring will bring death to whoever possesses it. The ring passes through the hands of various characters, who all ultimately die.



Wagner based his opera series on, among other things, Scandinavian sagas that also served as a source of inspiration for J.R.R. Tolkien, the author of... *The Lord of the Rings*. Such ancient stories appear in all kinds of versions.

In literature, we call this phenomenon intertextuality. Texts constantly refer to other texts.

Not only are there numerous references and quotations in stories, but this can also occur in various forms in music. The most obvious example is **sampling**.

2.6.1 Technique: Sampling



Listen to the first fifteen seconds of *Are You My Woman?* by The Chi-Lites.

F8: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEZAC9B7MFQ>

- Which other famous song do you recognise here?

Crazy in Love by Beyoncé



In 1996, DJ Shadow made it into the *Guinness World Records Book* with the first LP made entirely from **samples**. The sound clips, gathered from the damp basements of record shops, were rescued by Shadow from the rubbish heap of music history and given a new lease of life as atoms of a soundscape that, thirty years later, is still described by many listeners as a spiritual experience. Such a work of art could only have been created by a DJ, a musician who transformed the passive experience of listening to what comes out of the turntable into a creative act, in which the listening material became an instrument.

Pieces of an experience are stuck together in an unexpected way and a new, previously unimaginable story is created.

If you are interested, you can watch a clip here of DJ Cool Herc, who pioneered the idea that DJs can also be musicians and not just play records by other musicians. He demonstrates a technique on the turntable.

F9: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hw4H2FZjfp0>

A sample is a piece of music that is cut and pasted to become part of another piece of music. We are familiar with sampling from, among other things, the hip-hop culture, where this began with the mixing of different records by and after each other.



Search your own music collection for a song that uses samples. Who or what is being sampled?

With today's technology, you don't even need a record player anymore; with the right software, you can gather fragments and stick them together. By placing a piece in a new context, it may also take on a different meaning.



In *Hide to Show*, Beil makes extensive use of samples. Some notable samples refer to Belgian music history, or at least part of it from the 1980s and 1990s. According to legend, a DJ at the Boccaccio dance club accidentally played a record too slowly, and the audience reacted enthusiastically. *New Beat* was born. The dark style of the music builds on internationally acclaimed Belgian acts such as Front 242, combined with striking fashion accessories such as photos stolen from gravestones and the ubiquitous *smiley face*. For *Hide to Show*, Beil sampled, among others, *The Sound of C* by Confetti's.



Watch the clip. Which elements determine the sound of this song?

F10: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aV69I6-2G0o>

- If you look closely, you may also recognise the location where the clip was filmed!

Other notable samples in the performance:

Qu'est-ce que vous voulez? by The Amazing.

F11: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yv_kN0FlrQM

I need your lovin' by Marc et Claude

F12: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bq-IVzuUd_8

2.6.1.1 Ethical issue: Samples and copyrights

Using samples is not without its problems. Under current legislation, you cannot simply use someone else's music to make your own music.

Copyrights are the rights that apply to images or sound. You may not copy or use a film or song without permission if it is protected by copyright. However, you can reach an agreement and pay for it.



What do you think are the most important purposes of copyrights?

It is not easy to enforce copyrights in today's world. Copying is easy, and music and images travel around the world in milliseconds via the internet. Some therefore argue that the concept of copyrights needs to be changed, and there are even political parties that are strongly committed to this. Witness the following point in the Pirate Party's manifesto:

Information, education, knowledge and scientific findings are part of our shared cultural heritage and should be accessible to everyone. Pirates support an open sharing culture and free software, as well as copyright reform. On the other hand, they also respect the work of creators and are aware of the obstacles they face in the current system.

What such a reform should look like is not simple. We look at three cases in which the problem of copying.

Case 1: The funky drummer



Consider the example of drummer Clyde Stubblefield, who is the most sampled drummer ever.

F13: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OOS18vi7WLC>

- Do you think Clyde Stubblefield should be paid by the artists who sampled him? Why or why not?

Case 2: Beyoncé is a collaborative venture

2. HOLD UP

WRITTEN BY THOMAS WESLEY PENTZ, EZRA KOENIG, BEYONCÉ, EMILE HAYNIE, JOSHUA TILLMAN, UZOECHI EMENIKE, SEAN RHODEN P/K/A MELO-X, DOC POMUS, MORT SCHUMAN, DEANDRE WAY, ANTONIO RANDOLPH, KELVIN MCCONNELL, BRIAN CHASE, KAREN ORZOLEK AND NICK ZINNER / PUBLISHED BY SONGS MUSIC PUBLISHING, LLC (ASCAP) OBO I LIKE TURTLES MUSIC, NEON REGGAE CO-OP CITY, WB MUSIC CORP. (ASCAP) AND OAKLAND 13 MUSIC (ASCAP) ALL RIGHTS ADMINISTERED BY WB MUSIC CORP. OBO ITSELF AND OAKLAND 13 MUSIC, UNIVERSAL MUSIC CORP./HEAVYCRATE PUBLISHING (ASCAP), SUGAR POP MEOW MEOW (ASCAP), WARNER/CHAPPELL MUSIC LTD. (PRS), MELOXTRA PUBLISHING (BMI), UNICHAPPELL MUSIC, INC. (BMI), 456 MUSIC ASSOCIATES (BMI) ALL RIGHTS ADMINISTERED BY UNICHAPPELL MUSIC, INC. (BMI), SOULJA BOY TELL'EM MUSIC (BMI) EMI BLACKWOOD MUSIC INC./DISASTER PUBLISHING/BIG-N-MAGE PUBLISHING (BMI) CHRYSALIS MUSIC LTD/BMG BLUE (BMI). ALL RIGHTS ADMINISTERED BY BMG RIGHTS MANAGEMENT (US) LLC / PRODUCED BY DIPLO, BEYONCÉ AND EZRA KOENIG / VOCAL PRODUCTION BY BEYONCÉ / BACKGROUND VOCALS BY MELO-X / GUITAR BY JR BLENDER / DRUM PROGRAMMING BY DIPLO AND JR BLENDER / MIXED AND RECORDED BY STUART WHITE / ASSISTED BY JON SHACTER / SECOND ENGINEERING BY RAMON RIVAS / ASSISTANT MIX ENGINEERING BY JOHN CRANFIELD / RECORDED AT RECORD PLANT STUDIOS IN LOS ANGELES, CA AND MAD DECENT STUDIOS IN BURBANK, CA / MIXED AT PACIFIQUE RECORDING STUDIOS IN NORTH HOLLYWOOD, CA / PACIFIQUE STUDIO ASSISTANT: ARTHUR CHAMBAZAN / MASTERED BY DAVE KUTCH OF THE MASTERING PALACE NYC AT PACIFIQUE RECORDING STUDIOS, NORTH HOLLYWOOD, CA

CONTAINS ELEMENTS OF "CAN'T GET USED TO LOSING YOU" WRITTEN BY DOC POMUS AND MORT SHUMAN. PUBLISHED BY UNICHAPPELL MUSIC, INC. (BMI) AND 456 MUSIC ASSOCIATES (BMI) ALL RIGHTS ADMINISTERED BY UNICHAPPELL MUSIC, INC. (BMI).

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Today, music is often not just a collection of samples, but also a collaboration between a large group of artists. Just look at the credits for the song *Hold Up* from Beyoncé's *Lemonade*.



The vast majority of the money and credit goes to Beyoncé. Give two arguments for and two arguments against this distribution.

Beyoncé is not without controversy when it comes to copying. For the *Countdown* video, she drew 'inspiration' from the 1980s choreography *Rosas danst Rosas* by Belgian Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker.



Watch the following clip in which both videos are placed side by side.

F14: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yj5Kp38Oz04>

- Do you think Beyoncé is guilty of plagiarism here?



Read Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's response below. What are the main criticisms they express?



"People asked me if I was angry or honoured. Neither. On the one hand, I am glad that *Rosas dans Rosas* can reach an audience that would normally never be able to see such a performance. Beyoncé is not the worst copycat; she sings and dances very well and has good taste. On the other hand, there are rules and ways of dealing with these kinds of things, and surely she and her team must know this?

This event does not make me angry, but it does make me think. Why does popular culture need thirty years to recognise experimental dance? A few months ago, I saw some schoolgirls from Flanders dancing to Madonna's 'Like a Virgin' on YouTube, and it was beautiful to watch. With global pop culture

It's different now. Does it take thirty years to recycle non-mainstream performances? In the 1980s, this piece was seen as a statement by strong women based on a feminist viewpoint on sexual expression. Now that I see Beyoncé dancing it, I think it's beautiful, but there's nothing edgy about it. It's just seduction and consumption; the sting has been taken out of it.

Beyoncé did not follow the right path in working with her material. She also watered down the original message and took the sting out of it. Finally, she finds it strange that it took thirty years for her techniques to find their way into mainstream culture.

After this statement, Beyoncé edited the video and removed the clips without commenting further.

Case 3: Ed Sheeran already existed in the^{17th} century

Global superstar Ed Sheeran was also confronted with copyright issues. He had to defend himself in an American court because his song *Thinking Out Loud* allegedly copied elements from *Let's Get It On*, a song by Marvin Gaye.



Watch the video in which he explains on a radio show how he defended himself.

- What is his defence? Do you agree with his reasoning? Why or why not?

F16: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NcCKIsTgjeM>

There are dozens of songs with the same sequence of chords dating back to the^{17th} century. You cannot copyright a chord progression.



The above examples show that musical creativity, artists' rights and our current technology are not easy to reconcile. Together with some classmates, come up with a system to ensure that artists continue to earn sufficient income from music, but that musical creativity is not restricted.

Michael Beil would agree with Sheeran, but sees this more as a sign that composers and musicians need to take a different approach² :

Contemporary music is still very much focused on classical instruments, even though those instruments are more or less worn out and exhausted. The possibilities have been exhausted. You can no longer get a new sound out of a violin, or out of other instruments for that matter. For example, writing a new piece for trombone is not really possible, even if you are highly specialised. I think you would just be writing a series of quotations. As I said, we need new interfaces for new instruments, and perhaps we won't need our fingers to use them, but will be able to control them with our shoulders or by dancing.



Give an example of a film, piece of music, image or game in which, in your opinion, truly something innovative is being introduced. What is innovative about it?



Are we doomed to recycle the past forever, or can we still create new things and come up with new ideas?

2.6.2 Life is live

In *Hide to Show*, Beil still uses classical instruments such as the saxophone and the human voice, but combines and edits them with electronic music and video. It is particularly unclear which elements of the performance are performed live, which are pre-recorded, and which recordings were made during the performance and played back. Many performers today use this kind of hybrid form, combining live music and images with recordings and effects, from Taylor Swift to Travis Scott, but also famous classical musicians such as cellist Yo Yo Ma.



Watch a clip from the film in which cellist Yo Yo Ma plays at President Obama's inauguration.

F17: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFALyKG_Bck

- How can you tell that he is not playing live?
- Why would he not be playing live?
- Is it important to you that music is performed live?



This hybrid experience of live music and images combined with recordings and virtual images is not only continuing in concert halls, but also in our daily lives. We don't just look at screens, we look at the world through screens, like the visitor filming a concert. Keiichi Masuda's short film *Hyperreality* shows us a possible world in which everything is covered by a layer of virtuality.



Watch the short film.

F18: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJg02ivYzSs>

- Describe the world of this film in five adjectives.
- Why would the reality in the film be described as hyperreality?
- How did you experience the scene in the supermarket when the virtual layer briefly disappears?
- What is the most important value in this world?
- How do you interpret the ending of the film?

2.6.3 Concept: Memes



You have undoubtedly encountered memes on the internet. But can you explain what a meme actually is? Try explaining to your neighbour what a meme is, as if your neighbour were an 80-year-old who had never seen a meme before. What is typical of a meme?

The origin of the word *meme* lies in biology. In his book *The Selfish Gene*, biologist Richard Dawkins argued that genes are the biological transfer of information to the next generation, but that there is also a transfer of cultural information units. These do not depend on human reproduction. Interestingly, his word contains both memory and *mimesis* (imitation).

A good description of a meme is a 'contagious pattern of information'. It can involve ideas, behaviours or styles. You can easily recognise this in fashions or crazes, for example. Suddenly, a lot of people are wearing their trousers very high or very low, or brands or logos are spreading among a group. To put it strongly: people are the way *memes* spread. It is very difficult to determine where a *meme* begins, and it will often mutate or change quickly, link up with other *memes* or die out very quickly.



A simple example is the use of youth language. Can you think of any words you used as a child in primary school that you no longer use? What did the words mean? Why don't you use them anymore?

When pupils or teachers speak in class, they often act as multipliers of *memes*. Typical questions such as 'Is this worth marks?' or statements such as 'I'm never going to need this in my life' are *memes*. Raising your hand or giving a 'sceptical teacher's look' could also be considered *memes*, as could school myths such as 'If half the class is absent, the teacher is not allowed to teach'. They are often passed on without any reflection.



Can you think of any examples of memes in your class?

Memes can also be used for political purposes, something that the current generation of politicians understands very well. Below, for example, you can see Argentine President Javier Milei posing with a chainsaw to show that he will be cutting government spending. A little while later, Elon Musk also posed with a chainsaw on stage at a conservative conference, encouraged by Milei himself in the background.



What do you think is the purpose of this chainsaw meme?

Do you know of any other examples of political *memes*?

2.6.3.1 Memes in *Hide to Show*

It is impossible (and also unnecessary!) to pick up on all the references in *Hide to Show*. Not only because of their sheer number, but also because of the pace, the different layers of the piece (music, images) in which they occur, and the widely varying cultural contexts from which the memes originate.

We will look at two of them to give you a starting point.



Meme 1: *Hide to show* features Japanese virtual pop star Hatsune Miku. In fact, the programme text states that the musicians are in her world; in other words, the performance is a virtual world. Hatsune Miku is primarily a synthetic voice. The voice was created by sampling sounds from a voice actress so that they could be placed in sequence to form words. The voice was later accompanied by a hologram depicting her as a sixteen-year-old girl who looks like she stepped out of a manga or anime. Miku is so popular that concert tours are regularly organised in which a hologram of her sings accompanied by a live band. Her popularity is not limited to Japan, as she also performed at the leading Coachella festival in America in 2024. You can buy and download the software yourself to create your own songs via developer *Sonicwire*.



Watch the concert clip.

F19: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9LG7wo82ivs>

- Would you go to a virtual concert yourself if you had the chance?
- Do you think Hatsune Miku is a 'real' pop star?
- What elements must be present for it to be considered a concert?
- Is a Hatsune Miku concert different from a concert where the artist is projected onto a large screen, as often happens at festivals?

Meme 2: The Leek Dance

This mysterious viral video shows a Japanese girl in the countryside dancing with a couple of leeks to the tune of a Finnish polka, *Jeavan Polka*.

F20: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c17xydS2vgU>

Just like genes, *memes* mutate and mix with other *memes*.

The Leek Dance shows how absurd and random this process can be: someone has made Hatsune

Miku perform The Leek Dance.

F21: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_qqGbEFIlr0



Then a manufacturer made a Nendoroid, a small doll, of Miku with a pre-istyle.



Finally, someone has created a Nendoroid in which the leek has been transformed into a car that Miku drives around in.

2.6.4 Concept:



The British tabloid The Sun recently complained that a documentary featured a 'soft', 'woke' T-Rex. How a dinosaur can be 'woke' is left to the imagination of the article's writer, but it does highlight an interesting phenomenon. What happened?

In a documentary by David Attenborough about dinosaurs, a Tyrannosaurus Rex was shown, reconstructed and digitised according to the current scientific knowledge we have about this animal. On the one hand, the T-Rex was given feathers and, on the other hand, it was shown how a male specimen cared for a child.

The author of the article considered this to be an expression of weakness, because in his imagination a T-Rex is a different creature. Where does this imagination come from? After all, there are no Tyrannosaurus alive today. Answer: the film *Jurassic Park*! In this film, the T-Rex is the villain and is portrayed as bigger and more gruesome than what we know about it scientifically. The author has begun to confuse this image of a dinosaur with what it might have really been, to the extent that a more accurate picture, such as the one shown in the documentary, seems implausible.

is dismissed. However, the image has become more realistic than the thing itself.

The French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, an influential thinker for the Nadar Ensemble and the work of Michael Beil, would not be surprised by such confusion. In the 1980s, he wrote about the phenomenon whereby a symbol or sign becomes completely detached from the reality it represents. He put it bluntly as follows.

The way we use words and images in combination with the way we live changes their meaning and it can happen that a word or image no longer has any connection with what it once referred to. It no longer refers to anything except itself. He calls such an isolated copy a **simulacrum**.

For example:



When you eat a strawberry, you taste 'strawberry flavour'.



You can also eat yoghurt with 'strawberry flavour'. Hopefully, there are also real strawberries in it, but often it is a combination of flavouring and a few real strawberries to convey the 'idea' of strawberry.



There are also strawberry-flavoured sweets. This flavour has little to do with the original taste of a strawberry. For example, there are people who like strawberry sweets but not strawberries.



You can also buy strawberry yoghurt sweets that simulate both yoghurt and strawberry. We have now reached the point where you can buy sweets that are reminiscent of these sweets. Or, as an Amazon description of the product below puts it: 'Customers find that the sweets have a pleasant taste, with a creamy texture that evokes memories of the real thing'.

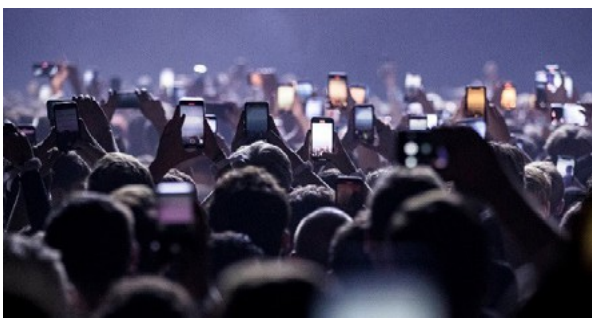


Do you know of any examples of simulacra? In other words, copies of existing things that are now so different that they no longer have anything to do with the original?



The idea of a simulacrum can also be found in the strange way in which the internet turns you into a spectator. You can watch people doing fun things like eating delicious food instead of eating yourself. You can also watch people watching people doing fun things in so-called reaction videos. Meanwhile, you can also watch people watching people watching people doing something.

This duplication also continues in concert halls and at festivals. People film a concert instead of enjoying it in the moment. Compared to the actual experience, the images and sounds in the video are of particularly poor quality, a poor copy of the experience. The purpose of creating the image thus becomes the image itself.



2.6.5 Technology: Algorithms

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

This phrase runs throughout the entire performance and is sung by both an artificial voice and the musicians.

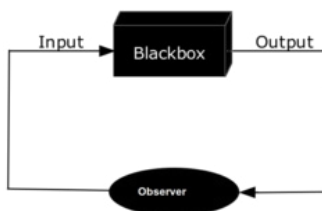


How do you interpret this phrase?

Philosopher Bruno Latour said the following about technology:

If a machine runs efficiently [...] then one only needs to focus on the input and output, not on the internal complexity. The more successful science and technology become, the less transparent and more obscure they become.³

In other words: the better something works, the fewer questions we will ask about it.



Technology then functions as a black box, the inner workings of which we do not understand; we only know only what we can put into it and what outcome we can expect.

Example 1

Throughout their development, children learn quite quickly to work with black boxes. It is enough to understand that turning or pulling a door handle will open a door. The child does not need to know how the lock works. Even a dog can learn this and (unintentionally) let the neighbours in.

? Does it make sense to learn how a lock works? Why/why not?

- Can you give two examples of black boxes that you learned to use as a child?

Example 2



You don't need to know how a medicine works to use it or be cured by it. In fact, no one knows exactly how some medicines work, but we do know that they work or produce the desired result and don't have too many dangerous side effects. One example is the painkiller paracetamol, whose exact mechanism of action has only recently been unravelled.

? Is it important for a doctor to know how a medicine works? Why or why not?

- Is it important for a patient to know how a medicine works? Why/why not?

Example 3



Smartphones work very well, but no one really knows how they work. For example, who can repair their own smartphone? When Steve Jobs launched the iPhone in 2007, he made it clear right away that you would not be able to write or install programmes. "We decide what is allowed on the phone," Jobs said during the presentation of the device. Anyone who wants to look under the bonnet has to hack their own smartphone. The term says it all. You have to '*jailbreak*' a smartphone.

? What is the connection between black box technology and power in this example?

- Can you think of any other examples of black box technology that you have to *jailbreak*?
In other words, technology that you are not supposed to use or look inside yourself.

We live in a world that is determined by algorithms, but do we know what they are and who decides which algorithms are used?



Think back to the last time you opened a social media app such as TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram or YouTube. Which videos or photos appeared on your timeline or page? Of the billions of videos or photos available on the app, only a limited number appear on your timeline. What factors determine which ones do or do not appear? Try to think of as many as possible together with a fellow student!

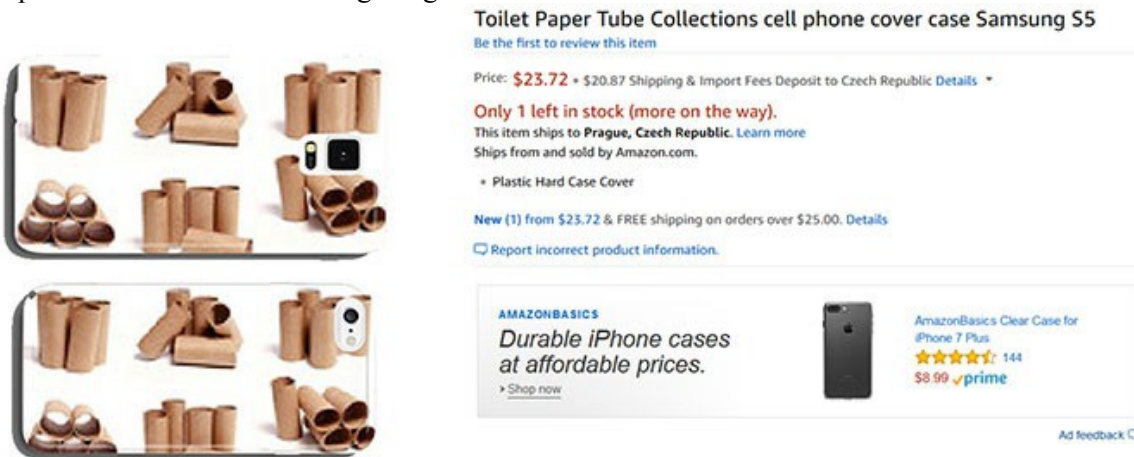
Answer: Previous likes you gave, subscriptions, search history, what others like, how long you watch similar content, sponsored videos, advertising, trends, time of day, hashtags...

All these factors are taken into account by an algorithm.

An algorithm is a procedure that allows you to arrive at a specific outcome in a finite number of steps.

No one knows exactly how the algorithms of social media apps and search engines work. Sometimes a video goes unexpectedly viral. Some users try to crack the algorithm, but that is not often successful either. Think, for example, of adding #fyp and #foryoupage in the hope that the system will then place it on other users' *for you page*.

In fact, even the algorithm doesn't really know what it's doing. It's a set of instructions that works blindly with data. Artificial intelligence is nothing more than a type of algorithm that can learn, but doesn't know what it's learning. You occasionally notice this when it produces strange results. For example, you could once buy an AI-generated smartphone case with the following image:

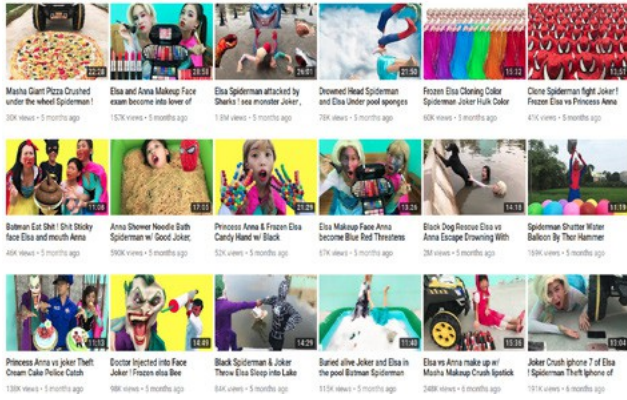


YouTube also uses algorithms to create new content. For example, there are countless cartoons that are automatically generated based on data about which elements are popular in other videos. Many videos are endless combinations of different objects or animals, such as dinosaurs in different colours.

But occasionally, it also generates frightening videos in which Spiderman, for example, is chased by a shark in a swimming pool, while Elsa from Frozen stands nearby laughing.



Because these videos are viewed so often, there are people who imitate them to make money. Human behaviour in the real world is thus determined by algorithms that generate content without any knowledge of what that world is actually like.



Michael Beil makes a similar observation about Hatsune Miku and the *Ievan Polka*, the song accompanying the *Leek Dance*⁴ :

Hatsune Miku is entirely virtual, both her voice and her performances; young people can use software to work with her voice and make her dance. As a result, new versions and covers of *Ievan Polka* appeared constantly, with people trying to recreate Miku's voice, dance style and clothes. For me, this is hyperreality in its purest form. When you try to imitate something that doesn't exist [...]

2.6.6 The loneliness of the otaku

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

According to the algorithm, the characters in *Hide to Show* are completely alone. But is this really

true? Let's pick out two elements:

The musicians are all in separate booths and cannot even make eye contact with each other, something that is often crucial in music.

The world they inhabit is virtual, meaning that any contact with reality occurs from a distant perspective or may not even be based on reality, as you have learned in the sections on *memes* and *simulacra*.



However, there is another kind of loneliness present in the performance. Hatsune Miku is a product of Japanese idol culture. This is a phenomenon in which mainly adult and older men devote their lives to pop groups consisting of young girls, the idols in question. The men often end up in this world out of a feeling of loneliness. A feeling that does not automatically go away, as the idols are always kept at a safe distance and must be accessible but unattainable. Fans also call themselves *otaku*, which means something like 'outsider'. The documentary *Tokyo Idols* sheds light on both the *otaku* and the idols.



Watch an excerpt from the documentary from 27:10 to 30:30. This excerpt shows a neighbourhood in Tokyo where everything revolves around *otaku*. You will see a performance of a song about this neighbourhood and hear an *otaku* speak.

F23: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UbgH6dXHn0k&t=2011s>

- In what ways is loneliness present in this excerpt?
- Is there also a sense of connection?