

Keynote: Echoes from the torn down fourth wall

Keynote held at 'SIMM-posium', November 6th 2024 @ RMC, Copenhagen

By Jacob Anderskov

...

Abstract

Drawing on findings and experience from the Artistic Research project "Echoes from the torn down fourth wall", this keynote will explore key perspectives on building bridges between "art music" (whatever that means) and community singing. The research project began with an inquiry into audience participation within improvised concerts and has reinterpreted familiar Danish song material in an art music setting where the audience sings along in songs they know. Topics will include proposals for understanding the social dynamics of participation and listening through the framework of 4e cognition; in this case, thinking of listening as embodied, embedded, enacted, and extended. The role of the spectator across different performance art domains will be examined, focusing on how the project has challenged notions and ideals of the spectator's separation (or lack thereof) from the musical event. Additionally, genre theory will be employed to rethink the distinctions and overlaps between "cultural" and "art" perspectives in the interpretation of inherited musical traditions. Approaches to possible renegotiations of musical traditions – whether through confirmation or destabilization – will also be discussed, partly in the Danish context of the project, but also extended more generally beyond this specific starting point.

Notes

- The keynote is a condensed and rewritten version of the dissemination in the Artistic Research 'exposition' – an online hybrid format article – published at Research Catalogue (ResearchCatalogue.net). The exposition is bilingual, in English & Danish, with open access/ no paywall. Direct link to exposition: <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3025944/3025945>.
- All videos shown during the keynote at the SIMM-posium can be found in the exposition via the above link.
- The headlines in the text were not read aloud in the keynote, but are included here for readability.

Content

Keynote: Echoes from the torn down fourth wall	1
Abstract	1
<i>Notes</i>	1
Pre-opening quote, slide 1	3
<i>Pre-opening quote, slide 2</i>	3
Keynote: Echoes from the torn down fourth wall	4
<i>Video 1: Spurven sidder stum bag kvist</i>	4
Context I – Flatlanders and power	5
Participation I	5
The Lure of Genre (Genre I)	6
Context II	7
<i>Video 2: Se nu stiger solen</i>	8
Participation II	8
Context III – the rift	8
We think we know what a title is (Genre II)	9
<i>Video 3: Der er ingenting i verden så stille som sne</i>	10
Context IV	10
Re/Cognition:	11
<i>Embodied listening, embedded listening, enacted listening, extended listening</i>	11
Nontranscendent reading – Nontranscendent listening (Genre III)	12
<i>We shall overcome, live</i>	12
Participation III	13
Jacob Anderskov biography	14

Pre-opening quote, slide 1

- *Shown right before keynote, but not read aloud*

“... The dream we were talking about concerns what it is in the work which produces its reader, a reader who doesn't yet exist, whose competence cannot be identified, a reader who would be ‘formed,’ ‘trained,’ instructed, constructed, even engendered, let's say invented by the work. Invented, which is to say both found by chance and produced by research. The work then becomes an institution forming its own readers, giving them a competence which they did not possess before: a university, a seminar, a colloquium, a curriculum, a course. If we trusted the current distinction between competence and performance, we would say that the work's performance produces or institutes, forms or invents, a new competence for the reader or the addressee who thereby becomes a countersignatory. It teaches him or her, if s/he is willing, to countersign....” - **Jacques Derrida**¹

Pre-opening quote, slide 2

- *not read aloud*

... Or, rewritten along the lines of the current project:

“... The dream we were talking about concerns what it is in the **concert** which produces its **listener**, a **listener** who doesn't yet exist, whose competence cannot be identified, a **listener** who would be ‘formed,’ ‘trained,’ instructed, constructed, even engendered, let's say invented by the **concert**. Invented, which is to say both found by chance and produced by research. The **concert** then becomes an institution forming its own **listener**, giving them a competence which they did not possess before: a university, a seminar, a colloquium, a curriculum, a course. If we trusted the current distinction between competence and performance, we would say that the **concert**'s performance produces or institutes, forms or invents, a new competence for the **listener** or the addressee who thereby becomes a countersignatory. It teaches him or her, if s/he is willing, to countersign....”

¹ Jacques Derrida, interviewed, in *Acts of Literature*, ed. by Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), 74–75.

Keynote: Echoes from the torn down fourth wall

In this keynote, I will explore perspectives on bridging 'art music' and 'participatory community singing', drawing on findings from the Artistic Research project **Echoes from the torn down fourth wall**.

Let me shortly explain the core of the project:

In a hybrid concert format created for the project, within the context of an abstracted approach to improvised concert music, several passages with community singing occur, where the audience sings along in familiar songs from the Danish songbook '**Højskolesangbogen**'.

Højskolesangbogen ('**The folk high school songbook**') is the most widely distributed songbook in Denmark. It contains the most canonized songs of Danish cultural heritage – some secular, some religious. Obviously, the book has participated in the canonisation of the same songs.

The songbook has been published since 1894 and has sold more than 3 million copies, in a country of less than 6 million people. More on the songbook later.

The artistic research project's concert format renegotiates and destabilises songs from this majority cultural heritage, in a way that is both empathetic and yet disloyal towards the tradition: the songs are not treated as sacred relics but rather as *found objects*; objects that belong to no one and owe no one anything; objects to which new meanings can be attached.

Let me also clarify that the project was not about renewing the *material* in Højskolesangbogen but renewing the *approach*, and the aesthetics.

The concert format aims for not collapsing into a regular sing-along format, not even during the sing-along passages.

However, the aspiration to have the audience sing along has proven to be an ongoing reality check in terms of how much abstraction the music could contain if the audience is still intended to participate.

In the Artistic Research project, considerations on artistic process and artistic outcome were central to the project's direction and dissemination. However, in this keynote I will focus primarily on the reflections, experience, and questions that arose from the project...

To demonstrate the projects practical, artistic dimension, let me show you a video excerpt from a documentation of the hybrid concert format. The song that emerges in this excerpt is about the Danish winter, which is dark, cold, and can frankly be quite depressing, and thus a song like this will also be a depiction of the Scandinavian psyche ...

Video 1: Spurven sidder stum bag kvist

Context I – Flatlanders and power

As some of you know, the Danish landscape is very flat. The Ice age created a landscape that was highly accessible, rather devoid of physical barriers, open to the flow of information, power, and trade in and out of virtually anywhere. For the same reason it could be argued that “the Flatlanders” in Denmark became globalised centuries before the term existed. The central administration in Copenhagen could control everything from power structures to folk music, even in the most remote areas.

In such a very remote area, in the western part of Jutland, I was born and grew up in a small village called Nørre Nisum, near the North Sea.

My parents were first generation academics, educated in Copenhagen in the 60's, and had moved there to teach at the local teachers training college. During my upbringing, I was surrounded by this rural environment, which was quite religious, and quite foreign to education. At the same time, the newspapers in our home were from Copenhagen, and the discussions in our home reflected an educated, secular, you could say globalised outlook.

The beforementioned accessibility of the landscape has a practical as well as a cultural dimension;

In the late Middle Ages, the Danish central administration had established the "Stadsmusikant" (town musician) system, granting chosen musicians an exclusive license to perform in each town. The system lasted until the mid 1800s. The "Stadsmusikant" system centralized control over music on a national level, and it limited local communities' power of definition over what music was, who could perform it, and how. While folk music traditions persisted, the top-down regulation weakened their roots considerably, and the disconnect is still noticeable in Danish music life today.

Similarly, I experienced the cut off cultural roots of my own parents, who as first-generation academics were reaching for new modalities of cultural consumption, including an interest in contemporary art and literature, quite unlike that of their parents.

More on this later. For now, I will relate the project to

- 1) how notions of the listener/ the spectator can be reflected upon within different art domains, starting with theatre, and
- 2) how to read the project from a genre theory perspective.

First, some words on theatre;

Participation I

In *The Emancipated Spectator*, French philosopher Jacques Rancière examines historical views on the audience's role in theatre. These include the critical position which argues that a spectator who remains passive and detached, occupies a disembodied, disengaged position, limiting the spectator's ability to *understand* the work:

“He or she who looks at the spectacle remains motionless on his or her seat, without any power of intervention. Being a spectator means being passive. The spectator is

separated from the capacity of knowing in the same way as he is separated from the possibility of acting.”

For theatre thinkers who have found the passive role problematic, two main types reactions have emerged, as Rancière notes:

One is exemplified in the Brechtian *Verfremdung*, which breaks the illusion of reality on stage, prompting the spectators to engage more critically with reality.

The other is a search for a ‘less distant’ theatre, whether through Artaud’s “*theatre of cruelty*”, or a *meta theatre*, both of which seeks to eradicate certain distinctions between audience and performers. Rancière writes:

“The project of reforming the theatre ceaselessly wavered between these two poles of distant inquiry and vital embodiment.”

Within this kind of thinking we find a dream of a *non-separation*, a non-alienated aesthetic experience, to not only watch but to interact. As Rancière writes,

“The principle of both kinds of criticism is found in the Romantic vision about truth as non-separation.”

More on this in a bit. Let me now also touch on a perspective about Genre Theory as found in the writings of Jacques Derrida and Susan Sontag.

The Lure of Genre (Genre I)

At the heart of my project is an encounter between genres, at once utopian and tangibly real. To grasp the complexity of this encounter, I will draw on thoughts and concepts by Derrida & Sontag on *genre and destabilisation*, that the project explores, through its artistic practice.

According to Derrida, contemporary artistic genres contain not only the repetitions and confirmations that allow us to recognise them as genres, but also the ongoing changes, ruptures, and destabilisations that arise from the artistic *ambitions* of each genre.

Within contemporary art, this destabilisation is, in a way, permanent, making it impossible to fully define contemporary artistic genres. In his Kafka essay “Before the Law”, Derrida writes:

“But is it not necessary for all literature to exceed literature? (..) What would be a literature that would be only what it is, literature? It would no longer be itself if it were itself.”

Or, according to Susan Sontag:

“... the successful overthrow of old standards does not require denying the failure of such art. As Cocteau says, “the only work which succeeds is that which fails.” (...)”²

² - Derrida: Before the Law.

- Susan Sontag, in Approaching Artaud. New Yorker Magazine, 1973.

These ideas apply beyond literature, to much of contemporary music history, including post-jazz, improvisation, and contemporary Western composed music – all of which are central to my own artistic practice.

The ideal of challenging established expectations is central to my own musical aesthetics, and thus, to my approach to the songs from Højskolesangbogen.

In contrast, the Højskolesangbogen tradition, has evolved slower by orders of magnitude. Even though new editions of the songbook have been published roughly every 15 years, and despite relevant inclusion of new songs in each edition, the overall singing approach remains rather unchanged.

Hence, deeply diverging positions are brought to the project's genre encounter – musically, artistically and culturally.

Context II

The movement behind the songbook, the Danish **Folk high school movement** (Højskolebevægelsen) emerged in the mid-1800s, and included a vision of educating common people for democracy. Denmark's democratic constitution was introduced in 1849, yet for 60 more years Danish democracy remained inaccessible to: women, the poor, servants, prisoners, and the mentally ill.

Højskolesangbogen (The Folk High School Songbook) was first published in response to a growing interest in communal singing and national cultural identity. Many composers from the generation around Carl Nielsen deliberately sought to capture a "Danish" sound in their songs. The musical result in the songbook is – not unlike what was seen in Finnish literature with the so-called "collection" of the Kalavala epic – that relatively few composers in a particular generation came to define the sound of Danish prehistoric musical identity, whether or not this sound was specifically related to Danish folk music. The point here is not that the music was not good, nor that it does not sound 'Danish', but that the sound of "Danish identity" is a constructed prehistory, shaped by the circumstances outlined above, in the period between 1875 and 1925.

The cultural position in the folk high school movement was educational, but also highly identitarian. To put it polemically, Nordic cultural history and identity was seen as a source of an inherent wisdom, that no international contemporary thinking should be allowed to contaminate.

As a simultaneous, opposing factor, the Modern Breakthrough ('det moderne gennembrud') unfolded in a more all-perpetrating way in Denmark, than in our neighbouring Scandinavian countries.

Initiated by Georg Brandes, the Modern Breakthrough called for an international, contemporary outlook. For good or bad, the reception history of the Modern Breakthrough in Denmark cemented a strong high–low dichotomy in certain Danish cultural circles, where the international, the modern, was perceived as having high rank, while the local, the traditional, was delegitimised, or considered culturally unimportant.

As a second detour, high or low, local or international; Here is another video documentation from a concert experiment – this time from an earlier phase in the project timeline, and thus included on the released album from the project.

Video 2: Se nu stiger solen

Participation II

In Rancière's diagnosis of theatre as separation, the underlying analysis hinges on certain notions of equivalence and opposition: "... the equivalences between theatre and community, between gaze and passivity, exteriority and separation; the opposition between collective and individual, image and reality, activity and passivity".

As a music professional, with a background in both European and Afro-American music forms, I regard this discussion as highly related to George Lewis's distinction between *Eurological* and *Afrological* approaches to music. For example, where and when is a clear separation between audience and performers ideal? In which venues, genres, or socio-cultural contexts?

Is the audience's interaction perceived as disturbance or contribution? Is there room for dancing, coughing, singing along?

From post-WWII music philosophy, one could add relations to

- a post-Cagean view, challenging the boundaries between music and noise, art and life, artwork and disturbance.
- Pauline Oliveros' Deep Listening practices, where the composition can work as a liberating instruction for the audience to participate through musical reaction.
- The Rock music concert formats, including the abandonment of the ideals of separation and distance, within and beyond the 1960s youth rebellion culture.

Though not directly situated in any of the beforementioned practices, the "*Echoes from the torn down fourth wall*" project has been dealing with similar considerations: participation vs. detachment, the collective vs the individual, the expert vs the untrained listener, etc.

The project is obviously neither pro- or against Ranciere, nor post Artaud, George Lewis or Oliveros. But considerations on how participation conditions the possible experiences of art, and with which potentials, is crucial in the project.

Based on Hartmut Rosa's concept of *resonance*, my research project can also be rearticulated as seeking to give audience and performers access to an encounter with something *uncontrollable* that we can engage with. Neither audience nor performers have control over the situation or the outcome, and hence will have potential for experiencing *resonance* in the encounter.

Context III – the rift

To get back to the Danish flatlands, let me propose the following claim:

The seismic *rift* between

- the folk high school movement's idea of Nordic identity as heritage and,
- the perception of the Modern Breakthrough as an international commitment,

seems to exist up until today.

I consider the political discussions even today on governmental support for the arts and the higher arts educations as a highly related schism. This includes the related discussions on provincialism versus elitism.

My own upbringing straddled both sides of this divide. The learning culture that I grew up in contained equal doses of non-local academia as well as an abundance of folk high school mentality, including outspoken anti-elitist positions.

I participated in community singing as a child – in school, at communal events, and so forth. The songs and the folk high school approach to singing them was abundantly present in my childhood. To this day, I can *smell* the change of the seasons in my childhood landscape, when I hear or sing these songs.

On the other hand, my academic parents were more influenced by Piaget or Bourdieu than by the folk high school movement. They read Copenhagen newspapers daily, and they would take me to contemporary art museums whenever we visited bigger cities.

Seen against this backdrop, the “Echoes from the torn down fourth wall” project may appear as my attempt to bridge a divide that I experienced first-hand, between two very diverging visions of the role of culture in our lives, and of the meaning of art in contemporary society.

My intention is not to take a stance on the old conflict outlined here. Rather, I would like to point out that the discrepancies between, on the one hand, the concept of **Art** as practised in higher arts educations today, and on the other hand, Højskolesangbogen as an institution, can trace its roots back one and a half century, to the period when the Modern Breakthrough and the folk high school movement both emerged as very different responses to the big questions of that era.

Today, we witness daily how the Danish discourse around Højskolesangbogen, and the community singing phenomenon, is deeply separated from the conversation about what constitutes art and art music. A mutual blind spot, one could almost say.

Let us take another look at that separation, - once again with a little help from Derrida:

We think we know what a title is (Genre II)

Derrida articulates various conceptions of what an artwork is. In “Before the Law,” Derrida outlines several axioms we apparently agree on when reading a text, including:

- 1) the text has “its own identity, singularity, and unity,” and that these are “inviolable” ...
- 2) “the text has an author”; ...

3) “we think we know what a title is.”³

Derrida’s axioms can obviously be applied to much contemporary music, and to most of the songs in Højskolesangbogen.

However, the axioms also highlight conflicting preconceptions in the project’s genre encounter.

For instance, we think we know what it means for a song to have a title. But crucial to the project is the ambition to transform these songs to such an extent that it raises the question of whether we truly know what a title is – or even what it means that a song has a beginning and an end, or a membrane that separates it from the rest of the universe.

Let me reinstate that the covered material in the project is a **Majority** cultural assemblage. The project is *not* trying to protect the traditional material against criticism or change, but contrarily, aims to renegotiate, possibly even destabilise, the canonised cultural material that it deals with.

Nonetheless, I Think I know what a video is. Here is another one.

[Video 3: Der er ingenting i verden så stille som sne](#)

Context IV

From early on in my own musical career, I gravitated towards an aesthetic within postjazz, free improvisation, new music, and contemporary composition. One thing that all these practices could agree on, was the total passivity of the listener: When encountering music by e.g. Anthony Braxton, or Joelle Leandre, or Karlheinz Stockhausen, we rarely experience that the audience starts singing or humming along. Of course, audience participation is not a new phenomenon, but within the aesthetics that I worked in, it was an otherness, close to unthinkable.

In stark contrast to this continuum, the songbook Højskolesangbogen seems to remain, even today, rather aesthetically untouched by new developments in music over the last century – despite well-reasoned regular additions of new songs.

However, what I do find deeply interesting about the Højskolesangbog songbook, is the extensive mass of shared references that a Danish audience is deeply familiar with.

The point in the project is not simply that communal singing is juxtaposed with a poly-tonal, texture-oriented improvised music. The point is that, *by* juxtaposing the two phenomena, new ways of experiencing both musics become accessible to participating audience members. The familiar songs will seem new to the listener, by being situated in completely new landscapes. The songs are thus not simply rearranged but rather act as *foreign elements* in a different soundscape.

³ Derrida, “Before the Law,” 184–188.

Re/Cognition:

Embodied listening, embedded listening, enacted listening, extended listening

To dive deeper into a reflection on the possible experiences in the project, let me try to explore some **embodied cognition** perspectives and terminologies on this, and on the investigations in the project. Let us consider in which ways a 4E-cognition vocabulary can describe listening experiences, audience roles, genre, and memory, within the project's concert format.

(1)

The audience's **participation** – through their vocal cords, and a state of alert listening, anticipating 'whether now is the time to sing along' – directly conditions their participation in the concert as a corporeal activity and experience, an **embodied listening**.

The audience's cognitive, emotional, and aesthetical understanding of the event is thus to a high degree perceived through the body, blending a cognition aspect as well as a genre aspect.

I would find it relevant to further investigate this from a 4E cognition perspective, across genre blending concert formats, as a prism through which to understand music and musicking in general.

Questions could include:

- How do bodily experiences shape our perceptions in hybrid artistic encounters?

(2)

The body not only feels the music but recalls – often subconsciously – how this music corresponds to previous sing-along activities within the same songs, which Emily Akuno yesterday called "music's associative powers".

Symbolic layers and elements in the music are being *recognised* as pointing to something that the audience already *bodily* knows. The symbol-reading part of the perception is **embedded** both in the listener's earlier interaction with the songs, and in the listener's overall cultural baggage. Thus, we can call it **embedded listening**.

To pose this as a question:

- How is the cultural-historical situatedness of the aesthetic experience present as a bodily reality for the listener?

(3)

From an embodied cognition perspective, listening and understanding are also inseparable from the audience's **active, enacted** participation. The listener not only perceives but also performs their experience (as in **enacted listening**), through their participation – not only as a metaphor but concretely, as actively singing. The audience's perception cannot be separated from this *action*.

Posed as a question:

- How does the audience's own actions condition what is perceived as the sound, the meaning, the genre of the music?

(4)

Likewise, the very songbook Højskolesangbogen, as a physical artefact, becomes understandable as a **tool** that shapes our **cognition** of what is going on. Beyond being a songbook that we refer to, Højskolesangbogen in itself functions as a cognitive system, outside of ourselves, defining our listening within a larger context of information, culture and emotions (as in **extended listening**).

In other words,

Thinking about the songbook as a cognitive tool, or as an **apparatus** implies that our understanding not only of the musical genre, but of musical and cultural entities more generally, is conditioned by and *created* through cultural conventions, institutions – and **objects**.

Højskolesangbogen, the apparatus, just like the Western concept of “contemporary art,” *then* constitutes and determines what we can hear in the music we encounter.

Posed as a question:

- In what ways do other artworks, and cultural artefacts function as extended cognitive tools? How do they define our perceptions and experiences of genre fluidity?

Nontranscendent reading – Nontranscendent listening (Genre III)

Another significant intersection between the aesthetic domain of the project and Derrida’s thinking is the question of **nontranscendent** reading – or in this case, listening.

Derrida speaks – critically – of the tendency towards a transcendent reading, where the reader seeks that which the text depicts, outside the text – in Derrida’s own words “... **that search for the signified**, which we put here in question.”⁴

This discussion extends to the question of listening.

Can the listener choose to not consider what the sound refers to? In what contexts is such a **nontranscendent listening** ideal, and when is it even possible – sensorially, cognitively, culturally speaking?

In the context of the hybrid concerts in the ‘*Echoes from the torn down fourth wall*’ project, a schism emerges:

How does the listener relate to that which has been ‘designated’, signified (signifié)?

The question could be re-articulated as follows:

In the project, is it cognitively possible for a Danish listener to engage in a not-culturally-embedded, nontranscendent listening?

Is it possible in other contexts?

Or is there always a *text beyond the text* when it comes to music, namely the interaction of music with our memory, or with the state of the world?

I will try to illustrate this point by inviting you to sing along with me ...

We shall overcome, live

⁴ Derrida, in *Acts of Literature*, 43.

Participation III

In Rancière's discussion of the audience's passivity versus its participation lies the foundation for positions that we encounter across art museums, theatres and education today. Driven by terms such as inclusion, participation, and outreach, wide-reaching renegotiations are currently taking place in the aesthetic fields. Some of these positions have tended to regard any passive audience role as alienating, and any performer competence as elitist.

In their article "Participation and Receptivity in the Art Museum – A Phenomenological Exposition," Simon Høffding, Mette Rung & Tone Roald argue convincingly that we risk flattening our understanding of what constitutes the aesthetic experience if we impose too normative value systems on the dichotomy between *active engagement* on the one hand and '*passive perception*' on the other. Instead, they suggest allowing many different modalities of viewing, interacting, and listening to coexist in our cultural institutions – both the actively engaged and the passively contemplative.

To rephrase: In relation to the participatory agenda prevalent in many artistic and cultural domains these years, it can seem as if we know what participation is, while it seems considerably more difficult to define what art is.

I find it a pressing question in contemporary art institutions whether we from inside the current paradigm risk devaluating art as such or the aesthetic experience itself under the banner of "participation".

It may intuitively sound like a 'greater good' to prioritise the audience's interaction over its observation, or its co-creation over contemplation. But in instrumentalising art like this, do we risk undermining the societal understanding of the existential meaning of art? Is it possible that we may forget what art can offer us, as art?

At the same time, within the project "Echoes from the torn down fourth wall", as in many other cases, I do not see this discussion as an either-or but very much as a both-and. The goal in the project is for the audience, through their involvement, to gain access to experiencing this music, as art, and as participators. And to offer them modes of listening that are at the same time contemplating and participating.

In short, the key question is not whether the audience is active or passive, nor does the project regard participation as a *demand*, but rather as an *invitation*. I am interested in whether the concert situation allows the audience to resonate more deeply than they are used to, with musical forms that they might otherwise find alienating.

It is the project's claim and hope to show how this is possible without diminishing the music's artistic, musical depth.

Thank you.

...

Jacob Anderskov biography

Jacob Anderskov (he/him) is an educator and artistic researcher, a pianist, a composer and a bandleader from Copenhagen. Over the years, he has led four large scale Artistic Research Projects, all of which are published as expositions at www.ResearchCatalogue.net, the latest one being the project disseminated in this keynote.

Anderskov has released 30+ albums as a bandleader and co-leader since his debut in 2001. He has received numerous awards and has been described by the international press as an outstanding voice in contemporary music.

Anderskov's oeuvre spans from improvised works in small groups to almost thoroughly composed material for larger ensembles. His music often incorporates improvisation, collective instant colouring, and other new ways of bridging the continuum between the composed and not-predefined music.

Institutional affiliation & current professional roles

Professor MSO, RMC, Copenhagen.

Pianist, composer, band leader, educator, artistic researcher.