# JANA DE TROYER

Selection of works
(2019-2022)

# ||: Focus | Distraction :|| (2022, ca. 4')

Interactive installation for a distracted visitor, an eye motion tracker and tourist pictures (work in progress)

The outside world is constantly changing, but how aware are we about those processes? We are glued to our screens, staring into the online universe for hours while we disconnect from our "offline" surroundings. Are we still in sync with them? *||: Focus | Distraction :||* challenges the audience to look deep into the screen, whilst also enjoying a multitude of instagrammable panoramic views and soundscapes.

The project started with the idea of working with the thematics of our average attention span and the impact contemporary technology has on it. According to an often-cited Microsoft paper, our attention span might have become shorter than that of a goldfish. I set out to build an audiovisual installation in which I challenge the audience to stay focused as long as possible and to have them "fight" the distractions that pop up on the screen. How long can they manage?

I started to think further. I wanted to examine if we actually stop noticing slow changes in the outside world whilst intensely staring onto our screen? And then more questions popped up: is the usage of streaming services, social media and co distracting us from dealing with the pressing problems of modernity? If our attention has become one of our most valuable commodities — not only for ourselves, but also as currency for the marketing machine —, how can we deal with that? And above all: are humans and goldfish sitting in the same... um, goldfish bowl?

*||: Focus | Distraction :||* was developed in October 2022 in the framework of the SubNetAIR residency in collaboration with the Center for Human Computer Interaction (HCI) in Salzburg.

# Inneres Insektenballett (2022, 13'30)

video installation for 3 screens, 6 speakers and 11 robotic insects

*Inneres Insektenballett* is a playful exploration of underlying anxiety levels attributed to the ungraspable speed of the contemporary rat race. Based on the structure of a musical composition, 11 little robotic bugs perform, dance and generate sound. Whilst following their particular patterns, they cooperate and collide inside various objects they are in. Their movements resonate with their direct environment and create a sound spectrum going from drilling noises to peaceful meditative vibrations, and back. As the piece evolves, the individuals' choreographies merge and collective sonic and visual patterns come to live. Meanwhile, the spectators are invited to reflect on their own habits and the ways in which these might be quite similar to the ones of the boxed-in performers on the screen.

Originally an installation for three screens and six speakers, the piece premiered in the old electricity plant in Lauenburg (Germany) during De Troyer's fellowship at Künstlerhaus Lauenburg in the Summer of 2022. The particular sound world and specific placement of the speakers made the room come back to life for a brief moment, paying tribute to a mechanical past from which most of us are estranged now. A reduced version for one screen and two speakers was created at the same time. Here an extra emphasis lies on the relations across the original three screens and their antsy protagonists.
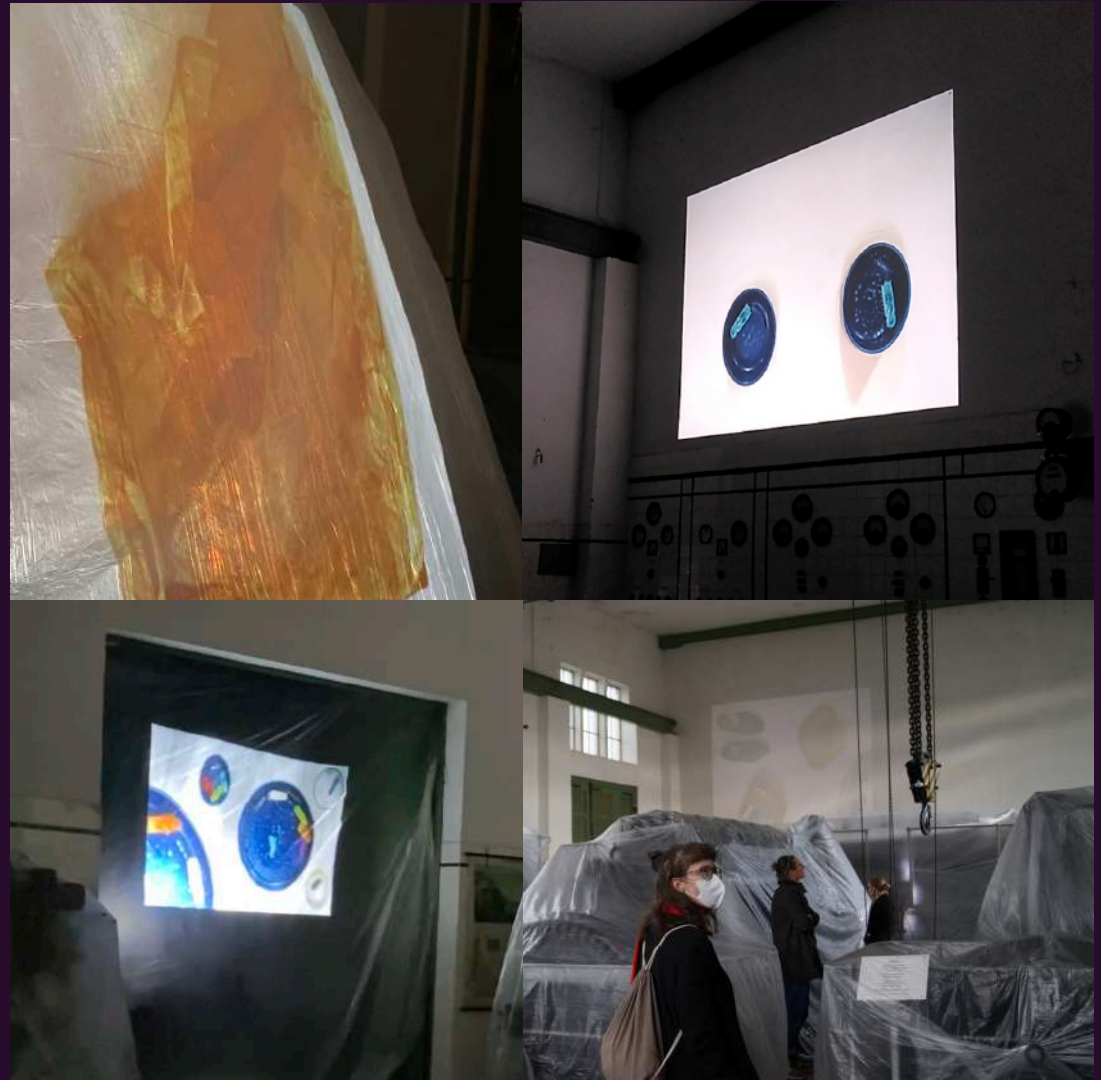


[Video link](Video link)

# The machine doesn't want to take my money (2022, 8')

for grand piano and financial resources
written for Tina Reynaert

*Hey Jana, I'm looking for special, crazy, innovative compositions by female composers who are now working and creating. Have you already composed something for a pianist? Or would you like to do it? You can take it broadly: pianist, speaking pianist, performance — the piano as a whole.*

This was the premise of *The machine doesn't want to take my money.* Perhaps it does seem like a bit of a weird choice that I decided to work with money as a central topic. But since I had been a freelancer for about half a year at that point, I got to dive into the world of funding, tax declarations and the financial reality of beginning artists. A reality many creative minds have and had to deal with.

So instead of avoiding it, I made money the star of the show. In this composition different forms of money are used to prepare the piano. The instrument is divided in three sections for these preparations: in the low register, the pianist is asked to use their credit card; in the middle register, coins are bouncing on the strings, creating a metallic sound with a little bit of a natural delay; in the high register, bank notes are woven between the strings, creating a characteristic (and slightly irritating) sound effect of the bank notes quickly vibrating against the strings. However, at what point the pianist plays in which section was determined by an external source: the stock prices of the Belgian BEL20 from January 1991 until March 2022.

Video link

# Putzzwang (2021, 6-7')

## for window cleaner and live-electronics
**written for There is no air in Space**

*Putzzwang* was specially written for a concert at the j3fm Kunstraum in the Summer of 2021. The composition is a short performative work in which the performer meticulously cleans the window, following very specific instructions. The occurring rhythms and sounds are recorded, modified and fed back in — creating a massive poppy soundscape. The merry music stands in big contrast with the overly compulsive actions of the cleaner.

The piece originally processed a new feeling I had at the start of the pandemic, where I felt like I couldn't get clean enough and worried if I was infected. I later noticed that making window cleaning so explicitly the topic of the piece also opens a discussion on deeper topics, such as gender stereotypes and the minimum wage, and lets the audience reflect on the payment and appreciation of cleaning personnel. Interestingly enough, the age and gender of the performer also recontextualises the thematic focus of the work and can instigate further discussions.

# Data, please! (2021, 4')

interactive browser-based installation

in collaboration with Steffen Reichelt
Produced for BROWSER2021 and My Behavioral Surplus

Our online behaviour is subject to marketing mechanisms. Clicks, likes, watch time… are transformed into algorithms, and constantly monitored and updated in order to upkeep personalised content and user engagement. The retrieved information is then monetised through targeted advertising.

Meanwhile, most people's webcam usage has risen exponentially. We open our cameras through video conferences, live streams and the capture of our daily lives in "stories". Intimate personal details like our living rooms and facial expressions are shared with our online community, but we easily lose sight of the processing chain our images travel through from one device to the other.

Actively accessing this feed could provide cooperations with a wealth of new information, ready to be fed to their algorithms. Could this be the next step in the growth of the hungry data machines? And, where do we as individuals draw the line?

In a playful way, De Troyer and Reichelt explore the possibility of webcam-based user tracking with the interactive audiovisual installation Data, please! They invite the visitors to engage with their body data in the digital space.
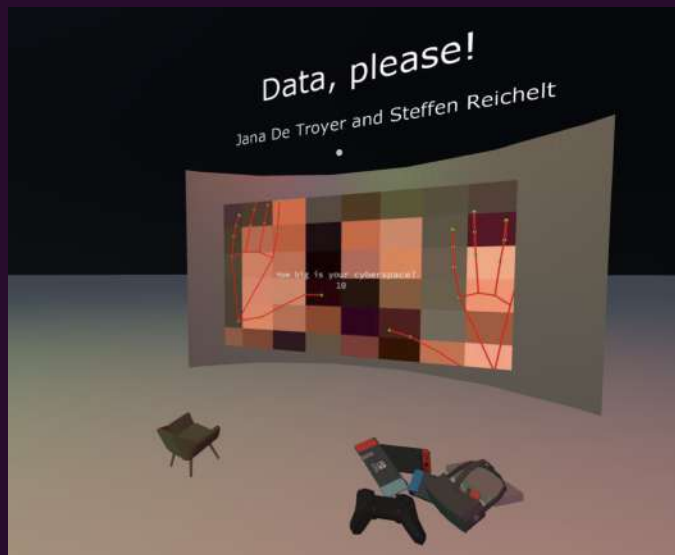
website

# Celebraler Kurzschluss (2021, 5'33)
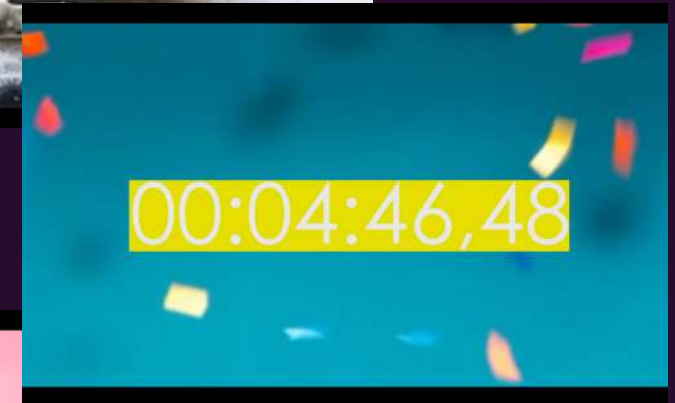
audiovisual composition

A typo? No! Celebraler Kurzschluss is a reference to a brain overload (literally: "ce(l/r)ebral short circuit"). It is a 5-minute "minimal" piece that works with the shifts in perception in our aural and visual senses. I consider it minimal because of the straightforward concept and the limited amount of materials: the composition consists of 11 sounds, 11 pictures and a countdown clock.

The concept is quite simple. I gathered 11 audio samples of celebratory moments: cheering, bumping glasses, a party whistle… They were cut down to the smallest particles one could still perceive, and arranged into a row. The row was then duplicated dozens of times. The resulting sonic material is played back at a very high tempo, but slows down greatly as time evolves.
The visuals underwent a similar process: I took 11 stock photos that I associated with the sounds, wrote a code that played back the pictures at a very high speed, and made them gradually slow down.

Fairly clear so far, right? An interesting and surprising result of this process is the way our perception shifts whilst listening to the samples slowing down, and the question how highly individual these shifts take place in different audience members' brains. At the start the music sounds very machine-like. As the tempo decreases, we can perceive specific timbres and later start distinguishing the sources of the samples. Similarly, the pictures start as quick flashes of colours, but later on our brains begin to pick up more and more information and start puzzling the pieces together.

<u>Video link</u>

## SHADOWS ARE ONLY TWO-DIMENSIONAL (2021, 4')

audiovisual composition

One of my favourite working methods is starting with a title, a sentence that I like, and see where I end up with it. This was also the case for *SHADOWS ARE ONLY TWO-DIMENSIONAL*. I read a variation of this phrase somewhere in a text, and it stuck with me. I was curious to see what can be seen as shadows in a sonic context and started reading about topics such as acoustic shadows, their scientific explanation and what in Dutch is called *bijgeluiden* (which translates quite unfortunately as *noise*). I found out that the phenomenon of acoustic shadows had implications in the U.S. civil war and influenced the outcome of some battles, such as the one called *Seven Pines*; and how buildings and other big objects can work as a kind of low pass filter for ears located further away. These readings became the bases for this composition.

The audio draws its sounds from field recordings from "unwanted" extra noises, like rattling from cutlery standing on top of a washing machine or the release of air from my water bottle. They slowly become more filtered as if a bigger and bigger object moves before them (like an acoustic eclipse).
The video materials come from recordings at the Niendorfer Gehege (forest) in Hamburg and refer to the battle of Seven Pines, where many lives were lost partly due to the acoustic shadows that covered up battle sounds and therefore did not alarm nearby troops to come help out.

Video link

# MIRЯOR VIEW (2020, 15-20')

interactive web-based composition

I coded *MIRЯOR VIEW* during the first months of the pandemic in 2020 as my final project for my master's degree in Contemporary Performance and Composition (CoPeCo). The piece brings together my practices as a saxophonist, improvisor, composer and coder. It is the creative result of research conducted on audience participation and on the influence of social media on society. It is also the central work of my master's thesis called *Social Media Composing: Using Social Media Phenomena as a base for Musical Creation*.

I wanted to work with the fear of missing out (FOMO), an older psychological principle that has become more known since the rise of social media. I decided to combine this phenomenon with the concept of EdgeRank (Facebook's former algorithm that selected the content on the user's feed) and shaped the interface in the form of a (self-help) questionnaire. Both social media and questionnaires work with narrowing down and profiling people depending on their choices. They can both act as a mirror for oneself to position them in the world.

With *MIRЯOR VIEW* I wanted to explore alternative possibilities to showing one's work in a period of social distancing and massive online concert viewing. This interactive web-based composition acts as an answer to the more passive YouTube live streams that were omnipresent at the time.
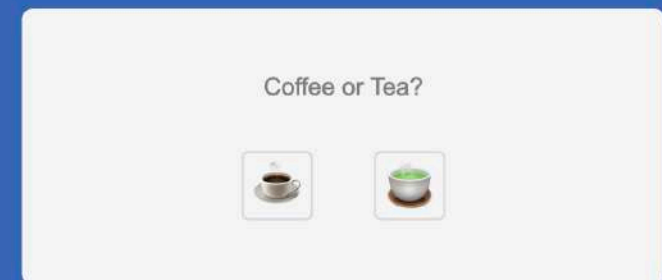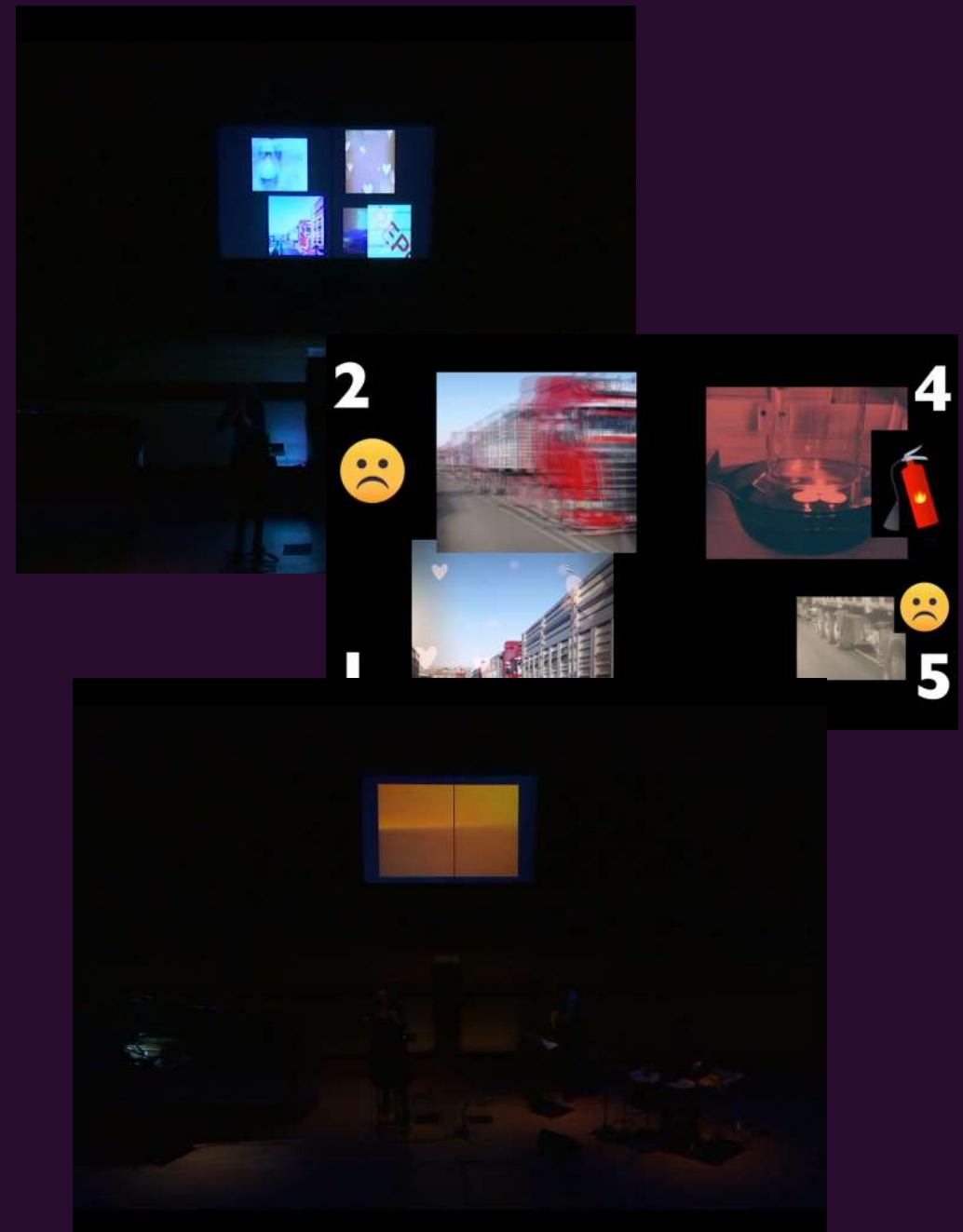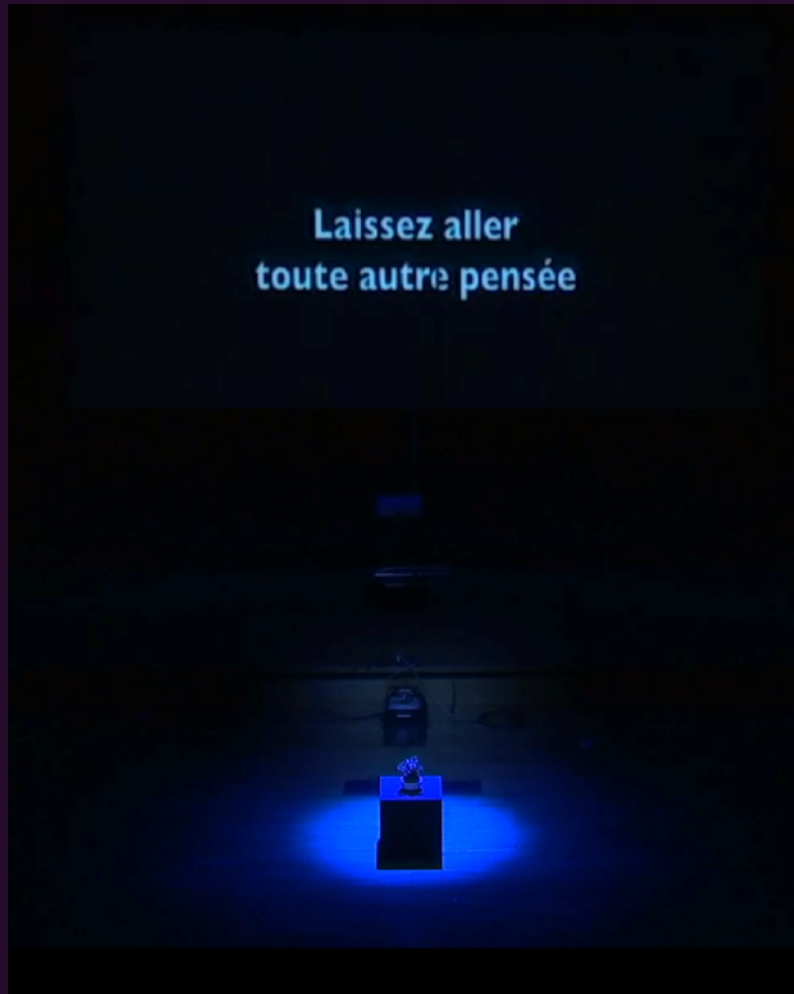
# FMO_1 (2020, 7')

## for four players and TikTok Content

*FMO_1* is part of a series of works exploring the usage of social media phenomena as a base for musical creation (see also *FMO_INTER* and *MIRЯOR VIEW*). For this work I wanted to experiment with utilising social media content for creating a composition. I dug into the popular social network platform TikTok and viewed the users' reactions on the Australian bushfires happening at the start of 2020. It was curious to see the wide variety of reactions on the natural disaster: going from playful fire extinguisher videos to dramatic animal rescue missions.

I wanted the score to be aligned with the main idea of using social media content. Therefore I developed a video score that uses an alternative notational system with emojis, TikTok videos and filters as indicators of musical gestures. An audience-friendly version of the score, stripped from its instructions, can be projected on stage during the performance.

*FMO_1* was premiered by Kelsey Cotton (vocals), Ryszard Alzin (piano), Giorgos Stavridis (percussion, objects) and Jana De Troyer (saxes) in the Edgar Varèse Hall in Lyon (FR) in January 2020.

Laissez aller
toute autre pensée

# FMO_INTER (2020, 7')

for quadraphonic speaker set-up, audience phones and YouTube Live Stream

*FMO_INTER* is an exploration of concert hall spatialisation through combining "external" and "internal" playback sources, respectively represented by a standard quadraphonic concert hall set-up on the one hand, and the streaming of channels through the audience's electronic devices on the other. The piece is part of a series of works exploring the usage of social media phenomena as a base for musical creation (see also *FMO_1* and *MIRЯOR VIEW*). For this composition I decided to work with ASMR-like sounds, to further develop the ideas I had for *Intimate Space Study 1a* and to integrate smartphones into the concert hall. I wanted to see how it would be for the spectators to have their phones play an active part in the music and to explore the necessary parameters to do so.

Content-wise, the work focuses on the question how to still find inner peace in a fast-paced world full of distraction. It plays with contrasts of natural and industrial sounds - placing them in opposite speaker set-ups, and therefore creating an overarching soundscape in which both sides sonically melt together.



De prachtige geluiden
die ik eerder op de dag
dankbaar had opgenomen,

## Fashionista's (2019, 8'30)

**for prepared electrical guitar quartet**
written for Platform 2019, in collaboration with Zwerm and The New What Now.

In *Fashionista's* I explore the possibility of moulding the art of knitting into a contemporary music piece. The players are asked to prepare their instruments with craft materials, to hit their guitars with needles and to sonically embody the evolution of clothes-making: from traditional handwork to industrial production. I carefully picked the objects that are used for the preparation. All of them are in some way related to needlework. The range varies from using strings of wool and security pins to more specific materials such as needle point protectors and stitch holders.



More information and trailer

# DU-O (2019, 7')

for two kissers, two instrumentalists and one spotlight

As I was walking down the Große Petersgrube in Lübeck in 2018, I crossed a young couple making out on the street. Although I have nothing against the public display of affection in general, I was triggered by the sound of their lips touching. It was something I have had before: the sound of other people kissing somehow triggered a form of misophonia for me.
I reflected on how it is possible that these affectionate sounds could evoke such unpleasant feelings, and if it would help me come clean with it, if I would explore them more. So, I decided to compose a work "based on the sound of a kiss".

First, I sonically explored different types of kisses and created a sound database that I wanted to work with. Next, I drew data from user interactions on the digital dating platform Tinder as a base for building a serialist framework. I constructed mathematical rows based on my swiping preferences and the public data of the people I matched with (such as age, distance and their pictures). This process resulted in 6 variations of 1 serialist row.

The variations were then meticulously notated — including instructions on sound, duration, loudness and additional gestures. The performers are not only creating sounds, they are also performing a short shadow play on stage. Hidden behind a semi-transparent tarp and supported by a spotlight, they depict a small love story with its initial insecurities, passion and final challenges.

The composition's mathematical nature combined with the spontaneousness and intimacy of the act of kissing serves as a musical reflection on the paradox of human dating through electronic devices.