

What's Love Got to do with it?

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- [Accompanying presentation](#)
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Introduction

The Rise and Fall of the Human

Earlier this month, Europe commemorated the 75th anniversary of D-Day, the Allied invasion of northern Europe which ultimately led to the end of the second 'world' war, and the resulting postwar project to rebuild Europe in such a way that the partisan interests of its nation states could never again threaten the fundamental rights of its human citizens.

For me, and I suspect for many others, there was quite a cognitive dissonance seeing the leaders of the retreat from the European project - Donald Trump's 'isolationist' US, and Theresa May's 'Brexit' Britain – standing side-by-side with the European leaders fighting to keep the historic union alive.

Of course, the world we live in now is quite a different one to the one that even our recent ancestors knew. For one thing, in the intervening years since the end of the war, the human population has exploded. In 1945, there were c. 2.5 billion people on the planet. In just 75 years, that figure has tripled to 7.7 billion now, and is likely to have quadrupled to 9.6 billion by 2050.

This sudden rise of the human in terms of our sheer unsustainable numbers on the planet's limited resources is paradoxically coinciding with challenges to the institutions (e.g. the United Nations, European 'welfare state' systems, the EU itself) which were set up to guarantee the rights necessary to underpin this explosion of human population.

The second half of those 75 years has also been characterised by neoliberalism, an international consensus on economic policy emphasising market deregulation, and limitation of state interests. For its critics, forty years of neoliberalism has been 'in practice

an assault on humanism, [enforcing] the reduction of human nature to economic competition, and [suppressing] all attempts to experiment with alternatives.’¹

And now, ‘our house is on fire’.² Along with the stark reality of our current climate emergency, the collapse of the neoliberal project in 2008, with the promise of markets’ self-regulation betrayed by the state bailouts of the banks³, has led us into a unique and unsettling period of ‘hysteresis’⁴ - a simultaneously stagnant and chaotic phase of a transition into a new world order. Having evolved over millennia from bands to tribes to chiefdoms and finally to states only five and a half thousand years ago,⁵ we now find ourselves ill-equipped to make the next evolutionary leap into the global geopolitical order that neoliberalism had promised us. In place of the emancipation of the human condition, we find its substitute: ‘countless forms of melancholy’,⁶ some of which arise as part of the paradox of digital hyper-connectivity and corresponding social isolation.⁷

Tech giants thrive on the affordances of global networks, while nation states retreat to the soil of their geographical boundaries and reinforce those borders to keep the future out rather like the medieval villagers building walls to keep the cuckoo in. That bird has already flown. Globalisation is increasingly both an unavoidable technical reality whilst simultaneously a geopolitical and ecological uncertainty.

The European post-war promise of peace feels threatened precisely because neoliberalism taught us to forget the one thing that could help us deal with the current uncertainty, and that we had only so recently learned – our humanity.

If we want to reclaim it, we have to remember what love is.

I Want to Know What Love Is

Theories of love often start with a reference to the ground-breaking work that John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth developed from the 1960s⁸ and which has led to the widespread recognition of ‘attachment theory’, a theory which argues that ‘our adult romantic and other intimate relationships develop out of, or are scaffolded by, our early experience of

¹ Paul Mason, *Clear Bright Future: A Radical Defence of the Human Being* (Allen Lane, 2019), 1404.

² Greta Thunberg, ‘Our House Is On Fire’ (January 2019).

³ Mason, *Clear Bright Future*, 2203.

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, ed. Jack Goody, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 83.

⁵ Jared Diamond, *The World Until Yesterday: What Can We Learn from Traditional Societies?* (Allen Lane, 2013), 12.

⁶ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presse Du Reel, 1998), 12.

⁷ Jean Twenge, *Igen: Why Today’s Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy--And Completely Unprepared for Adulthood--And What That Means for the Rest of Us* (New York: Atria Books, 2017).

⁸ E. J. M. Bowlby, *Attachment: Volume One of the Attachment and Loss Trilogy*, Revised edition edition (Vintage Digital, 1969); John Bowlby, *Separation: Anxiety and Anger: Attachment and Loss Volume 2*, New Ed edition (Vintage Digital, 1973); John Bowlby, *Loss - Sadness and Depression: Attachment and Loss Volume 3*, New Ed edition (Vintage Digital, 1980).

mother–infant relationships’.⁹ A healthy attachment to our mother gives us the ‘secure base’ we need to launch ourselves in to the world and form other attachments, but if that maternal attachment is not secure, it can have profound and complex ramifications on our psychological development, and our experience of the world.

Romantic love, by contrast, is to do with the attachments we form with those to whom we find ourselves sexually or romantically attracted. This gives us two distinct types of love, which are similar in many ways but also quite different.¹⁰ As well as these more singular types of intense love, we also have substantial networks of friends and family whom we may also love.¹¹

At the heart of all these diverse kinds of close relationships – if they’re functioning healthily - is the sense that our parents, our life partner, our close friends and family, see us for ‘who we are’; the real ‘us’.

Dan Siegel describes this ‘sense that our internal world is shared’ with another as ‘feeling felt’.¹² Or we might recognise it as the ‘unconditional positive regard’ found in the person-centred approach to psychotherapy of Carl Rogers¹³ and his followers, characterised by, ‘an outgoing positive feeling without reservations, without evaluations’.¹⁴

Although Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is ‘not nearly as rigid’¹⁵ as its title suggests, having these basic needs of ‘feeling felt’ or being loved unconditionally are important foundations upon which the higher orders of needs – esteem and ultimately self-actualisation¹⁶ - can be established; it is hard to imagine having a sense of wellbeing whilst simultaneously feeling unloved.

What is Love Anyway?

Social bonding is not something that is restricted to humans – all mammals have evolved similar ways of strengthening the bond between mother and infant, which extends to developing cooperative ‘communities’.¹⁷ The means through which these strong attachment bonds are formed and sustained are complex, but include the part of the brain which mammals possess, but which other animals – reptiles, for example – don’t: the limbic system.

⁹ Professor Robin Dunbar, *The Science of Love and Betrayal*, Main edition (London: Faber & Faber, 2013), 16.

¹⁰ Dunbar, 17.

¹¹ Dunbar, 14.

¹² Daniel Siegel, *Mindsight: Transform Your Brain with the New Science of Kindness* (S.I.: Oneworld Publications, 2011), 10.

¹³ Carl Rogers, *Client Centred Therapy: Its Current Practice, Implications and Theory*, New Ed edition (London: Constable, 1951).

¹⁴ Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, New Ed edition (London: Constable, 1961), 62.

¹⁵ Abraham H. Maslow, *A Theory of Human Motivation* (S.I.: Wilder Publications, 1943), 27.

¹⁶ Maslow, 20–23.

¹⁷ Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon, *A General Theory of Love*, Reprint (Vintage Books, 2001), 25.

'The limbic area lies deep within the brain',¹⁸ and 'drapes itself around the [Reptilian Brain] with a languid ease',¹⁹ suggest Thomas Lewis et al. Dan Siegel explains that, 'it evolved when small mammals first appeared around two hundred million years ago,' [and] 'works closely with the brainstem and the body proper to create not only our basic drives but also our emotions'.²⁰

In Siegel's 'hand' model of the brain, if you make your hand into a fist, the limbic area is where your thumb is, tucked underneath your fingers and sitting on top of your wrist. He elaborates:

'The limbic regions help create the "e-motions" that "evoke motion," that motivate us to act in response to the meaning we assign to whatever is happening to us in that moment. The limbic area is also crucial for how we form relationships and become emotionally attached to one another.'²¹

The limbic system is described as an 'open-loop arrangement' that only functions healthily in an individual when it is attuned to another's.²² Siegel refers to this as a core part of our 'resonance circuitry' which explains 'how we can come to resonate physiologically with others—how even our respiration, blood pressure, and heart rate can rise and fall in sync with another's internal state. This is the pathway that connects us to one another'.²³ In other words, neurobiology is interpersonal: 'the internal states of others—from joy and play to sadness and fear—directly affect our own state of mind'.²⁴

This kind of interpersonal 'limbic regulation' is an important factor in maintaining homeostasis. When it is disrupted, the results can be catastrophic, especially for dependent animals. Universally, an infant mammal separated from its mother will cry in protest,²⁵ but if it fails to be reunited with them, will sink into the second stage of separation, despair, from which it may not recover.²⁶ Limbic regulation is therefore significant for our general health and wellbeing,²⁷ and it is also an important way of understanding the various questions about the nature of love that poets and song writers have posed over the years, and which have found their way into the songs which structure this presentation.²⁸

¹⁸ Siegel, *Mindsight*, 17.

¹⁹ Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, *A General Theory of Love*, 24.

²⁰ Siegel, *Mindsight*, 16.

²¹ Siegel, 16.

²² Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, *A General Theory of Love*, 85.

²³ Siegel, *Mindsight*, 61.

²⁴ Siegel, 71.

²⁵ Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, *A General Theory of Love*, 76.

²⁶ Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, 78.

²⁷ Siegel, *Mindsight*, 27.

²⁸ Siegel, 188.

What's music got to do with it?

I believe there are a number of related reasons why music might have something to do with it.

Like interpersonal attunement, music is a system which requires us to 'tune in' to the internal world of others, through the process of musical entrainment, 'a phenomenon in which two or more independent rhythmic processes synchronize with each other'.²⁹

It is likely, therefore, that the Mirror Neuron System (MNS) – also part of Siegel's 'resonance circuitry' – is implicated in 'feeling felt' both emotionally and musically,³⁰ and in music, this leads to the phenomenon of 'self-other merging', where the corresponding release of endorphins help to 'create and strengthen social bonds amongst interacting group members',³¹ according to Bronwyn Tarr et al. In other words, the simple act of being musical with other people is sympathetically entangled with the neurobiological mechanisms which underpin social connection.

Musical Communication

Unless we are practicing music on our own, music is generally something that we do with other people, and usually involves collaboration to make a good sound together. Because music is what Daniel Barenboim terms a 'simultaneous dialogue' between voices – 'each one expressing itself to the fullest while at the same time listening to the other'³² – it means accounting for the 'other', not just one's own expression. This naturally leads to a situation where our own expression 'feels felt' by others, whether that's the group leader, other members, or indeed an audience.

As a communicative medium, music also has what Ian Cross and Ghofur Woodruff refer to as a 'socio-intentional' dimension which helps to 'establish a common cognitive context for the act of communication', using 'performative actions and sound structures that could be interpreted as affording cues about shared intentionality that direct attention in interaction'.³³ Rather than necessarily communicating information (language is much better at that), the act of 'musicking' helps us to communicate our social intent.

²⁹ Martin Clayton, Udo Will, and Rebecca Sager, 'In Time With The Music - The Concept of Entrainment and Its Significance for Ethnomusicology', *ESEM CounterPoint*, 1 (2004): 1.

³⁰ Istvan Molnar-Szakacs and Katie Overy, 'Music and Mirror Neurons: From Motion to 'e'motion', *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* 1, no. 3 (2006): 235–41, <https://doi.org/10.1093/scan/nsl029>.

³¹ Bronwyn Tarr, Jacques Launay, and RIM Dunbar, 'Music and Social Bonding: "Self-Other" Merging and Neurohormonal Mechanisms', *Frontiers in Psychology* 5, no. 1096 (2014): 1, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.01096>.

³² Daniel Barenboim, *Everything Is Connected: The Power Of Music* (London: Phoenix, 2009), 20.

³³ Ian Cross and Ghofur Eliot Woodruff, 'Music as a Communicative Medium', in *The Prehistory of Language*, by Rudolf Botha and Chris Knight, vol. 1 (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2009), 8, https://www.amazon.co.uk/Prehistory-Language-Studies-Evolution/dp/019954588X/ref=sr_1_5?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1545911099&sr=1-5&keywords=prehistory+of+language.

In participatory music, another dimension often comes into play, that of 'non-auditioned' participation. While previous experience is always beneficial, participants in a 'non-auditioned' group are welcomed for who they are and what they can bring to the group i.e. 'encouraging people to join in regardless of the quality of their contributions'.³⁴ This is significant, because it represents a fundamentally 'unconditional' acceptance of everyone's contribution. For many, especially older musicians who may have grown up believing that they aren't "good enough" to take part in musical activities because of previous negative experiences at school,³⁵ this in itself can be a powerful affirmation. Rather than being judged on the quality of sound they can currently produce, participants can 'feel felt' before they even produce a note.

Also, although some music may use words or lyrics, it is predominantly a sonic experience, where meaning is communicated through non-linguistic means. Our imagination may be captivated by the beauty of sounds in space, or our bodies may be moved to dance by the rhythms created through music, and music's capacity for creating 'strong' experiences³⁶ is well-known, as is its capacity for affecting our emotions.³⁷

Communicative Musicality

As well as being predominantly non-linguistic, a significant part of music's power might also be considered to be pre-linguistic, in the sense that it is a form of communication that language cannot be a substitute for. Being profoundly moved by music may render us literally speechless, because it speaks to a part of us deeper than language.

These important aspects of music's power point toward music's function as a form of 'communicative musicality'³⁸ which lies at the heart of the bond between mother and infant. The prosodic communication - known variously as 'baby-talk', 'motherese' or 'infant-directed speech' (IDS) - which occurs between mother and infant in all known human cultures serves a number of key developmental functions, and is explicitly musical in nature.³⁹ Hence, one's most formative experiences of being loved or 'feeling felt' are contained in these musical exchanges with one's primary carer before we have learned the

³⁴ Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 31–36.

³⁵ Caroline Bithell, *A Different Voice, A Different Song: Reclaiming Community through the Natural Voice and World Song* (Oxford ; New York: OUP USA, 2014), 51.

³⁶ Alf Gabrielsson, *Strong Experiences with Music: Music Is Much More than Just Music*, 1 edition (Oxford ; New York: OUP Oxford, 2011); Alexandra Lamont, 'University Students' Strong Experiences of Music: Pleasure, Engagement, and Meaning', *Musicae Scientiae* 15, no. 2 (July 2011): 229–49.

³⁷ John Sloboda, *Exploring the Musical Mind: Cognition, Emotion, Ability, Function*, First Edition, Later Printing (OUP Oxford, 2004); Patrik N. Juslin and John Sloboda, eds., *Handbook of Music and Emotion: Theory, Research, Applications*, Reprint edition (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2011); Daniel Västfjäll, Patrik N. Juslin, and Terry Hartig, 'Music, Subjective Wellbeing, and Health: The Role of Everyday Emotions', in *Music, Health and Wellbeing* (OUP Oxford, 2013).

³⁸ Stephen Malloch and Colwyn Trevarthen, *Communicative Musicality: Exploring the Basis of Human Companionship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Communicative-Musicality-Exploring-basis-companionship/dp/0199588724>.

³⁹ Steven Mithen, *The Singing Neanderthals: The Origins of Music, Language, Mind, and Body* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 74.

rudiments of language, and goes some way to explaining why we can be so profoundly affected by musical experiences which transcend our ability to describe them in words.

Evolutionary biologists now seem to concur that, far from the ‘useless’ trait which Steven Pinker dismisses it as in evolutionary terms,⁴⁰ music serves an important evolutionary function around promoting pro-social behaviour and cooperation across large groups.⁴¹ The size of social groups amongst apes - our nearest primate relatives – is restricted to the small number of other individuals a relationship can be maintained with by physical ‘grooming’,⁴² whilst our hominid ancestors typically cooperated across much larger groups.

Part of the reason for this difference, Robin Dunbar explains, derives from the ‘vocal grooming hypothesis’ which suggests that musical communication in the form of ‘enhanced vocalization’ may have evolved as ‘an expression of mutual interest and commitment that could be simultaneously shared with more than one individual’.⁴³

As a species, musical communication with those around us helps to reassure us that we are under no direct threat from them, and hence helps us to experience others in a positive and loving way rather than as potential threats to our health or security.

Stephen Mithen refers to this kind of primal cooperative communication system as ‘holistic, multi-modal, manipulative musical and mimetic’.⁴⁴ Or ‘hmmmm’ for short. Music in this sense is part of the metaphorical glue that bonds societies together, enabling cooperation. As such, when we sing or make music together, we are participating in a form of social bonding that is at least as old as our species, and probably much older.⁴⁵

Fellowship of Hill and Wind and Sunshine

Although detailed studies have yet to be undertaken to test the hypothesis that musical entrainment and interpersonal neurobiology are entangled in the way I suggest, when people talk about their experiences of music, they certainly point to such a connection.

In 2018, I led 3 ‘scratch’ choirs of 50-60 singers onto the summits of the Lake District fells in Northern England as part of a project to commemorate the gift of land to the nation by a group of local mountaineers. The ‘Fellowship of Hill and Wind and Sunshine’ sang a song cycle on each of the 14 summits over three days.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Steven Pinker, *The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language: The New Science of Language and Mind*, New Ed edition (New York: Penguin, 1995).

⁴¹ Mithen, *The Singing Neanderthals*, 229; Robin Dunbar, ‘On the Evolutionary Function of Song and Dance’, in *Music, Language and Human Evolution*, ed. Nicholas Bannan (OUP Oxford, 2012), 201–14.

⁴² Mithen, *The Singing Neanderthals*, 146; Dunbar, ‘On the Evolutionary Function of Song and Dance’, 212.

⁴³ Leslie Aiello and Robin Dunbar, ‘Neocortex Size, Group Size, and the Evolution of Language’, *Current Anthropology* 34, no. 2 (April 1993): 187.

⁴⁴ Mithen, *The Singing Neanderthals*, 183.

⁴⁵ Mithen, 241–43.

⁴⁶ National Trust, ‘Songs on the Summits 1918-2018’, National Trust, accessed 14 March 2018, <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/borrowdale-and-derwent-water/features/songs-on-the-summits-1918-2018>.

We used a research method called Sensemaker^{©47} to invite participants to share a story about their experience, and subsequently compared these with the stories of singers who hadn't been involved in the project.

When asked to interpret their story against three equally-weighted dimensions of 'me', 'my people' and 'my place', most of the singers – from both groups – said that their story was about 'my people' i.e. connecting with the other singers. This tendency was most noticeable in the female respondents, but still very noticeable in all of the stories.⁴⁸

For the mountain singers, this came as a surprise, as we were expecting a stronger emphasis on 'my place' because of the connections the project was making with a specific – and very beautiful – landscape. More of the mountain singers' stories *did* attribute meaning to 'my place', but not at the expense of 'my people' – if anything, the potent shared experience of the mountain location could be seen as another resource to amplify the social bonding effect of the group singing.

Similarly, when interpreting their stories against the equally-weighted dimensions of 'physical', 'spiritual' or 'emotional / mental' health, the vast majority of singers located the significance of their experience in the spiritual and emotional dimensions.

For the mountain singers, this was again a surprise, owing to the challenging physical nature of climbing mountains to sing on them. Although there *was* more emphasis in the mountain singers' stories on the physical dimensions of the activity, it was not at the expense of the spiritual / emotional dimensions of the activity.

They talked about the sense of feeling 'uplifted' by the group singing, and the resulting sense of 'communitas'⁴⁹ - invoking aspects of 'deep social mind'⁵⁰ and mutual 'subjectification',⁵¹ driven by the power of what Hannah Arendt refers to as social 'appearance'⁵² i.e. 'showing up' for each other. This uplifting sense of unity and common purpose through the music is perhaps what helped to divert their attention away from any aches and pains they might have been experiencing as a result of the hard physical effort required to climb the mountains.

Is this love that I'm feeling?

A recent report exploring the independence and mental wellbeing of older people concluded that group activities should be at the heart of any effective approach, and top of

⁴⁷ Dave Snowden, 'SenseMaker® - Cognitive Edge', Cognitive Edge, accessed 2 December 2016, <http://cognitive-edge.com/sensemaker/>.

⁴⁸ David A. Camlin, 'Group Singing as Healthy Public', in process.

⁴⁹ Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*, 1 edition (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 149.

⁵⁰ Louis Cozolino, *The Neuroscience of Human Relationships: Attachment and the Developing Social Brain*, 2 edition (W. W. Norton & Company, 2014); Andrew Whiten, 'The Place of "Deep Social Mind" in the Evolution of Human Nature', in *What Makes Us Human?*, by Charles Pasternak (Oneworld Publications, 2007), 146–63.

⁵¹ Gert J. J. Biesta, *Beautiful Risk of Education*, 1 edition (Boulder: Routledge, 2014), 17.

⁵² Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, trans. Margaret Canovan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 50; David A. Camlin, 'Assessing Quality in Socially Engaged Musical Performances', in *Reflective Conservatoire* (Reflective Conservatoire, London: Barbican-Guildhall, 2018).

the list of group activities was group singing. The committee behind the report, 'discussed the evidence on singing and noted that it is unclear whether it is the singing itself that produces the benefit, the group-based nature of the activity or *something else*.'^{53 54}

When we explored the stories of the singers from the Fellowship project – and their interpretations of them – in a focus group of respondents, a similar elusive quality of the experience was revealed:

- We talked a lot about the feeling, about how sometimes-- well, certainly for me, the stronger the feeling and the sensation was about that [social] connection, the less able I was to articulate it in the stories.
- You become more and more interconnected as people and with the place and with the sound. And all of a sudden, something starts happening in your brain. I was driving home thinking, "What is that feeling like?"
- Singing with others takes me out of myself into another space. Singing on Great Gable was an almost mystical experience. I felt my precious sense of self drifting away on a wave of harmony.

This is a common experience when it comes to talking about the powerful, almost transcendental effects of music on the self – Mercedes Pavlicevic refers to these kinds of 'optimal' experiences as 'magic moments' where 'the group is in peak flow,' and the 'social-musical improvisation [seems] to be known within and between all minds and bodies as one, complex, phenomenon'.⁵⁵ Elsewhere she suggests these moments occur when 'identities are dissolved (or shared) in the interests of being people together in music in this place and in this time'.⁵⁶ Another of the respondents in our study suggested, 'the choir knits us together. We sing, we laugh, we cry and all is held.'

In this sense, when they perform, the choir are not just performing musical 'works'– they are also literally performing the relationships which underpin the music and give it its vibrancy.⁵⁷ This is not to suggest that group singing is simply a musical kind of 'relational aesthetics' in the sense that Bourriaud describes, with Art as 'a site that produces a specific sociability'.⁵⁸ Rather, the performance of relationship is so much a part of the musical 'moment' that we might think of the musical works and the human relationships which

⁵³ My emphasis

⁵⁴ NICE, 'Older People - Independence and Mental Wellbeing', Guidelines, NICE Guidelines (London: National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 17 December 2015), 25, <http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng32/resources/older-people-independence-and-mental-wellbeing-1837389003973>.

⁵⁵ Mercedes Pavlicevic, 'Let the Music Work: Optimal Moments of Collaborative Musicing', in *Where Music Helps*, by Brynjulf Stige et al. (Ashgate, 2013), 102.

⁵⁶ Mercedes Pavlicevic, 'Between Beats: Group Music Therapy Transforming People and Places', in *Music Health and Wellbeing*, by Raymond MacDonald, Gunther Kreutz, and Laura Mitchell, 1 Edition (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2013), 197, <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199586974.001.0001/acprof-9780199586974-chapter-015?print=pdf>.

⁵⁷ David A. Camlin, 'Organisational Dynamics in Community Ensembles', in *Together in Music*, by Helena Daffern, Freya Bailes, and Renee Timmers (Sheffield: Oxford University Press, in development).

⁵⁸ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 15.

underpin them as an ‘imbrication’,⁵⁹ a creative tension of co-subjectivity, united through the paramusical effects of such a union.

This idea of relationship imbricated within the music itself resonates so strongly with the idea of ‘feeling felt’, that the inference is hard to resist: what if this elusive ‘something else’ turns out simply to be love? A complex entanglement of interpersonal neurobiology amplified through musical entrainment?

However...

I Still Haven’t found what I’m looking for

Music as Polyvalent System

If we think of music as a system ‘able to sustain [...] polyvalent significance’⁶⁰, we recognise that it operates across a number of inter-linked dimensions, and pinning its potency down to any one of them is potentially to miss the complex ways in which it achieves its effects. It is perhaps the elusive and slippery character of its meaning which *gives it* its potency. Yes, its power may derive from the effect of the sounds in the air resonating with our emotions, *or* the interplay of our neurobiology as we ‘feel felt’ through the process of entrainment, *or* through the power of expressing our personal or cultural identities and histories, *or* the uplifting effect of ‘happy hormones’ coursing through our nervous system.⁶¹ Or all of the above and more. Interdisciplinarity is therefore an essential ‘turn’ if we are to advance our understanding of music’s power from the ephemeral language of ‘magic’ to a more sophisticated articulation of its complex and polyvalent potency.

As a researcher, I would love... to be able to validate the truth of this hypothesis, that our neurobiology becomes entangled with others’ through the process of musical entrainment,

⁵⁹ in much the way Robin Nelson talks about ‘praxis’: Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

⁶⁰ Cross and Woodruff, ‘Music as a Communicative Medium’, 2.

⁶¹ Eckart Altenmüller and Gottfried Schlaug, ‘Music, Brain and Health: Exploring Biological Foundations of Music’s Health Effects’, in *Music, Health and Wellbeing*, by Raymond MacDonald, Laura Mitchell, and Gunther Kreutz (OUP Oxford, 2013), 532–941; Günther Bernatzky et al., ‘Music as Non-Pharmacological Pain Management in Clinics’, in *Music, Health and Wellbeing* (OUP Oxford, 2013); Daisy Fancourt et al., ‘Singing Modulates Mood, Stress, Cortisol, Cytokine and Neuropeptide Activity in Cancer Patients and Carers’, *Ecancer* 10, no. 631 (5 April 2016), <https://doi.org/10.3332/ecancer.2016.631>; Fancourt et al.; Stefan Koelsch and Thomas Stegemann, ‘The Brain and Positive Biological Effects in Healthy and Clinical Populations’, in *Music, Health and Wellbeing* (OUP Oxford, 2013); Gunther Kreutz, Cynthia Quiroga Murcia, and Stephen Bongard, ‘Psychoneuroendocrine Research on Music and Health: An Overview’, in *Music, Health and Wellbeing* (OUP Oxford, 2013), 2; Kai Macdonald and Tina-Marie Macdonald, ‘The Peptide That Binds: A Systematic Review of Oxytocin and Its Prosocial Effects in Humans.’, *Harvard Review of Psychiatry* 18, no. 1 (2010): 14, <https://doi.org/10.3109/10673220903523615>; Valerie Salimpoor et al., ‘Anatomically Distinct Dopamine Release during Anticipation and Experience of Peak Emotion to Music.’, *Nature Neuroscience* 14, no. 2 (2011): 257–62, <https://doi.org/10.1038/nn.2726>; Tarr, Launay, and Dunbar, ‘Music and Social Bonding: “Self-Other” Merging and Neurohormonal Mechanisms’.

and that we feel it when it occurs, in the ‘magic moments’ of uplift and transcendence which characterise the experiences of those who participate in it.

But I also recognise the methodological complexity of doing so. And perhaps more than being able to *measure* this complex interdependence, as a musician I would more simply love for everyone who wants it to be able to mobilise the power of music in their lives, to experience how music can help us to connect with others, and ‘feel felt’. Because, frankly, we *need* as many ways as we possibly can to feel connected to our fellow humans, to re-establish our common humanity in order to face our future with a global spirit of *communitas*.

What the World Needs Now

Re-humanisation

Poised on the edge of a ‘post-human’ world, ‘music(k)ing’⁶² provides an increasingly rare opportunity to experience an idealised form of empathic human relationship that we can mobilise in our everyday lives. Similar to Bourriaud’s ‘interstices’, music(k)ing offers us ‘free spaces and periods of time whose rhythms are not the same as those that organize everyday life, and they encourage an inter-human intercourse which is different to the “zones of communication” that are forced upon us.’⁶³

Moreover, if neoliberalism killed the human, the human that can be re-claimed in a ‘post-human’ world has the potential to be one where our humanity can be presupposed on the basis of our common neurobiology, rather than on more contingent sociocultural or biological characteristics such as gender, race, belief, bodily capacity or sexual orientation which have been activated historically by a more paternalistic conception of Humanism as a means of discrimination and subjugation. Human rights may be continually under threat, but the fact that they are also continually contested is an indication of how far the Humanist project has come.

Similarly, the tensions between aesthetic and participatory dimensions of artistic creativity - of music especially – reveal not just how much of our humanity can be recovered when we emphasise the participatory dimension, but also how much the aesthetic ‘turn’ of the last few centuries has given us ever more sophisticated ways to manipulate human-produced sound to achieve more potent effects for listeners and participants. To do so is, as Shannon Jackson expresses it, ‘not only to take a community stance on the arts but also to take an aesthetic stance on community engagement.’⁶⁴

As social prescribing comes online, there is enormous potential for music to make a difference in the lives of many people across our fragmented and polarised societies. My

⁶² Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*, First Edition (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998); David J. Elliott, *Music Matters: A New Philosophy of Music Education* (New York / Oxford: OUP USA, 1995).

⁶³ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 16.

⁶⁴ Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2011), 212.

particular area of interest and practice – group singing – has potential in the formation of ‘healthy publics’⁶⁵ and especially for the prospect of ‘mutual recovery’⁶⁶ where it is not just those with a medical diagnosis, but their health and social care professionals, family, and indeed, the wider community whose health and wellbeing might benefit from the collective act of singing together.

However, there is also a risk, that group singing, or collective ‘music(k)ing’ more generally - especially if we’re talking about it in terms of its capacity for supporting bonds of trust and attachment, and more nebulous qualities like love – can be dismissed by its critics⁶⁷ as simply ‘feel good’ activities which ‘[neutralize] the capacity of critical reflection’ or worse, ‘do good’ activities which ‘risk becoming overly instrumentalized, banalizing the formal complexities and interrogative possibilities of art under the homogenizing umbrella of a social goal’.⁶⁸

In this case, the greater risk is that the real power of music becomes subverted into a pale shadow of its full potential, a proxy for people’s actual rights as human beings, and simply a return to a more instrumentalised version of the all-too-familiar ‘social impact of the arts’ paradox – as Claire Bishop expresses it - ‘a cost-effective way of justifying public spending on the arts while diverting attention away from the structural causes of decreased social participation, which are political and economic (welfare, transport, education, healthcare, etc.).’⁶⁹

For ‘musicking’ to be radical and progressive, we cannot let it simply become a means of *coping* with the privations of living in the attenuated conditions of late capitalism. In order to fully harness music’s potential for social change and human potential, we need to continue to resist the ideological drive to co-opt ‘everyday creativity’⁷⁰ into another part of the life-support system for an economic order which is already past its sell-by date.

Instead, we have to believe that it gives us a glimpse into the ‘universe next door’ that we might *change* our present reality into. In this way, we might consider it to be a political and dissensual act of ‘re-humanisation’ - ‘a division inserted in [the] “common sense”’⁷¹ of the neoliberal consensus, which ‘suggests possibilities for exchanges other than those that

⁶⁵ Stephen Hinchliffe et al., ‘Healthy Publics: Enabling Cultures and Environments for Health’, *Palgrave Communications* 4, no. 1 (15 May 2018): 57, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-018-0113-9>.

⁶⁶ P. Crawford et al., ‘Creative Practice as Mutual Recovery in Mental Health’, *Ment Health Rev J* 18 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.1108/MHRJ-11-2012-0031>; P. Crawford et al., *Health Humanities*, 2015 ed. edition (London ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 137–52.

⁶⁷ including Claire Bishop: Claire Bishop, ‘The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents’, *Artforum*, February 2006, 179–85.

⁶⁸ Jackson, *Social Works*, 47.

⁶⁹ Jennifer Roche, ‘Socially Engaged Art, Critics and Discontents: An Interview with Claire Bishop’ (American Community Arts Network, 2006), double-session.net/indexhibitv070e/files/bishopinterview.doc.

⁷⁰ Jo Hunter, David Micklem, and 64 Million Artists, ‘Everyday Creativity’ (London: 64 Million Artists, June 2016), <http://64millionartists.com/everyday-creativity-2/>.

⁷¹ Jacques Ranciere, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2003), 69.

prevail within the system.⁷² Literally, ‘singing the rights we do not possess’⁷³ will help us to re-establish our humanity as we navigate an uncertain future as a dominant species co-existing on a fragile planet.

Ultimately, we need to view our musicality as a uniquely human characteristic that we can put to service as part of our evolution beyond the constraints of the current political orthodoxy of nation states, and which will support our emergence as a global species, able to transcend the geographical, cultural, religious and political boundaries which continually threaten to divide us. We need to view our musicality as something which helps us to retain that precious quality which makes us unique – our common humanity, and our capacity for empathy and love.

All You Need is Love

⁷² Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 16.

⁷³ David A. Camlin, ‘Singing The Rights We Do Not Possess’, in *Community Music: Beitrage Zur Theorie Und Praxis Aus Internationaler Und Deutscher Perspektive*, by Alicia Banffy-Hall and Burkhard Hill (Munich: Waxmann, 2017), 137–48.

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