

POSTHUMAN MUSIC

Expression of Interest | Erik Lindeborg

Musicianship is experiencing an ecological crisis of its own making. Through misreading the rise of digital copying in the 1990s as a legal problem rather than an ontological shift, musicians responded to the historic moment by accepting a drastically contracted role for their works as tokens of exposure rather than sites of value, while continuing to work in familiar ways.

The operationalisation of increasingly capable generative systems has undermined another dimension of scarcity—creative distinctiveness. When the digital landscape becomes statistical substrate for algorithmic mining, the work's boundedness dissolves once it is articulated. Generative AI makes it impossible to ignore the ontological collapse of the musical work precipitated by its digitisation.

I am a musician, researcher and technologist searching for sustainable musicianship in the digital media age. Alongside running a label and building a studio, I have developed embedded music systems anchoring digital music in the physical world. My practice has evolved from jazz performance to transdisciplinary artworks that foreground relational musicking while decentering mastery and style.

My proposal (documented in the portfolio as "PosthumanMusic") builds on site-specific music systems that turn landscapes into instruments using phone sensors and earbuds. Performance distributes agency between biotope, musician, algorithm, and cloud infrastructure.

I use Smithson's site-nonsite dialectic to theorize eco-musical use of AI. One-directional hashing and possible-world decoding mediate between latent space and lifeworld, letting AI traverse statistical representations of sited performances without mimicking biological behavior.

Musical output from generative models is narrowly functional. It lacks intention, authorship, or context, and does not participate in the relational, mnemonic worlding that human music enacts. AI music may acquire memory and emotional resonance through its listeners, but does not present its own world in that relation.

The missing world in AI music delineates a domain where the distinct character of human creativity becomes most visible. There, musicianship reappears as a relational practice embedded in social and ecological contexts—an orientation obscured by modernist aesthetics casting musicians as heroic makers of masterpieces. In a post-AI world, the autonomous posture becomes untenable.

Simultaneously, the infrastructure of AI systems enters the ecology—another level of reality in Nicolescu’s sense. The twenty-first-century eco-musical field includes non-biological agents. Our engagement with them must carefully avoid collapsing relational and embodied musicking into statistical substrate. Otherwise our work becomes a tool that further restricts the unconditioned space for creativity.

This non-extractive posture presents an opportunity to take algorithmic epistemology seriously. Rather than treating generative models instrumentally, we can let them operate on their own terms. Relational musicking and statistical recombination can cooperate without collapsing into a reductive transaction that turns relationships into statistics in exchange for musical mimicry.

My project enacts this cooperation as a framework for studying distributed creativity, by translating microstates between epistemic regimes. The “Site” is performance in the landscape—material, geographic, legible and embodied. The “Nonsite” re-enters the biological regime, but displaced—mediated, re-materialized, legible but disembodied.

The machine’s internal representation is statistical, emergent, illegible and disembodied. Within this “Pseudo-site,” unknowable paths are traced through the statistical residue of embodied performance.