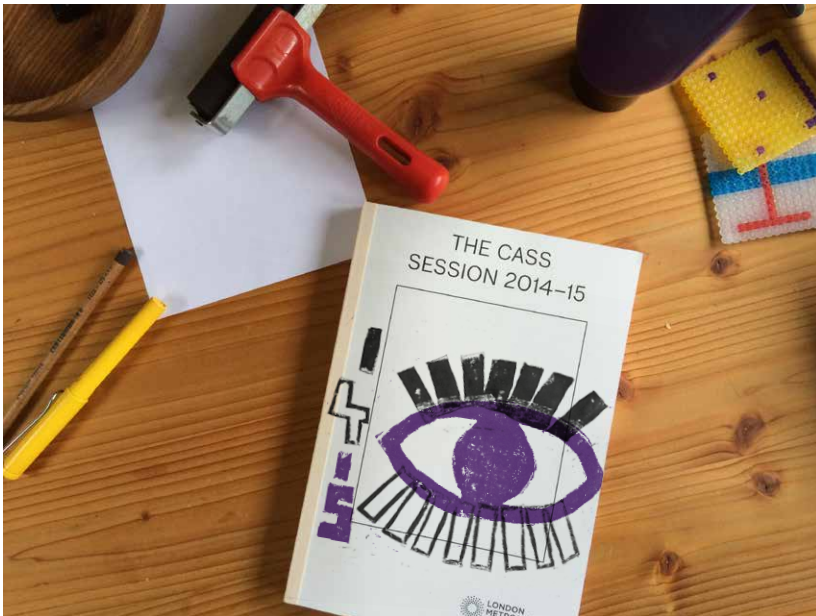


Musarc:
Materialising the social

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Musarc

Materialising the social

Joseph Kohlmaier

Musarc is one of London's most progressive amateur choral ensembles. The group is at the heart of a multi-disciplinary teaching project that originally emerged from the architecture school of the Cass in 2008. Over the last seven years, the choir has worked with a wide range of national arts organisations, and commissioned composers and artists to create unusual and provocative work that explores new processes in composition, and tries to define an expanded framework in which music and performance can happen.

In contrast to traditional discussions about the relationship of music and architecture (in terms of acoustics, structure or technology), Musarc's original engagement with the city and the built environment

was more concerned with the materialisation of social and political processes that are not immediately visible in architecture. This aspect of the ensemble's work has been growing in importance, and finds a fertile and complex environment among all the other creative disciplines that are brought together at the Cass today.

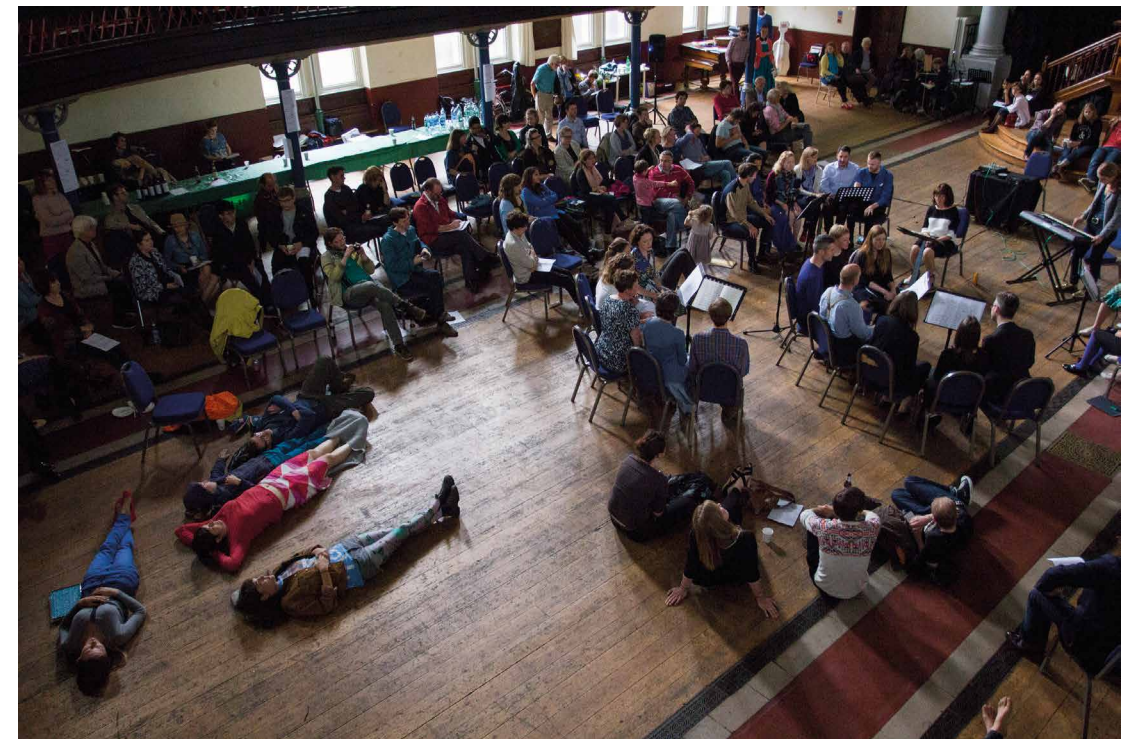
It is not necessarily straightforward to define what constitutes 'music'. In 1920, a little-known figure of early modernism and a contemporary of Schoenberg, Josef Matthias Hauer, framed this question with an interesting paradox. For Hauer, music was essentially a mental and spiritual event. The actual realisation of music – that is, the performance itself, when the idea of music is transferred

between people – is a kind of disturbance. What we call 'music' is just a temporary appearance; imperfect and uncertain, always different, in progress, an approximation of something that is of a very different nature and substance.

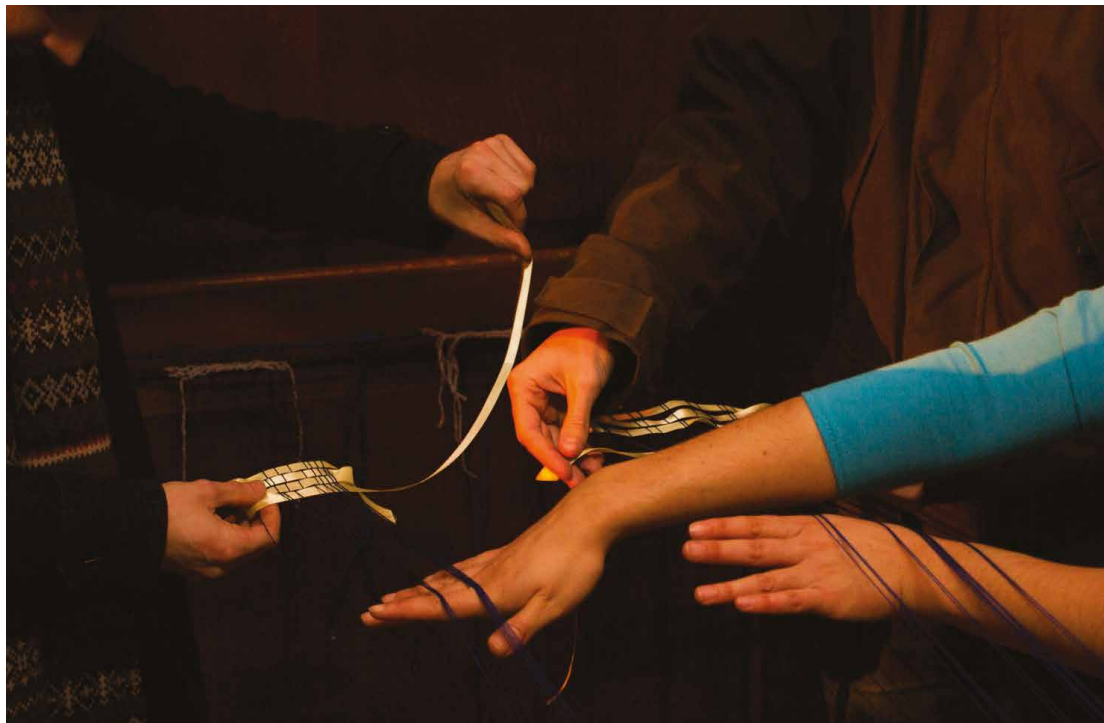
Some of the most important aspects of Musarc's work are normally found at the periphery of making music and performance. Field Studies, one of Musarc's most successful teaching programmes, originally started as a field recording course for architects and artists. Today, it is simple acts like eating together, the 'performance' of establishing a temporary society in an immersive learning environment, and the unusual contributions from artists, tutors and speakers who come from anthropology, choreography,



Musarc performing at MK Gallery in response to the gallery's exhibition *How to Construct a Time Machine*, March 2015



MATERIALISING THE SOCIAL Musarc performing Terry Riley's *In C* and Lin Chi-Wei's *Tape music*. *Score for Musarc* (2015) at the Round Chapel, Clapton, June 2015. Lin Chi-Wei's score is 200m long and reeled into a tight spiral of singers



Musarc Christmas concert, Christ Church Spitalfields, December 2015. The audience weaving on a loom constructed in between church columns by artist and choir alto Jessica Smulders-Cohen

performance art and improvisation, which draw an international audience to the programme.

Musarc's performances too are structured in ways not traditionally found in concerts. These include olfactory elements and sharing food; sculpture, participatory gestures, and unusual spatial configurations that break down the barriers between musicians and audience, and sometimes respond to specific spaces and what we find in them, particularly when the choir works with museums and galleries.

In July 2014, Musarc performed *Synonyms: Five or six noise-making rifts* with Ed Atkins at the Serpentine Pavillion. The choir's Christmas concert took place at Christ Church Spitalfields, and included the premiere of three new commissions through Sound and Music's Portfolio

project, and a screening of Laure Prouvost's *How to make money religiously*, which features Musarc's voices and was first presented as part of the artist's show *For Forgetting* at the New Museum, New York, 2014. In March 2015, Musarc returned to MK Gallery with Melanie Pappenheim, where we performed a programme in response to the gallery's exhibition *How to Construct a Time Machine*. In April, Musarc performed Lin Chi-Wei's seminal *Tape music* at Cafe OTO. For Musarc's final concert, Musarc Folk Meet on a Midsummer Day Until Dusk, in June at the Round Chapel, Chi-Wei produced a new version of the piece which involves reeling a 200m-long score into a tight spiral of singers. The concert also included a performance of Alvin Lucier's *I am sitting in a room*; a choral version of Terry Riley's *In C*, which

the ensemble first performed at MK Gallery in March; and *Any's responses*, a recent commission from performer/composer Neil Luck.

In October 2015, Musarc will be going to Antwerp with Melanie Pappenheim and the choir's music director Cathy Heller Jones for a weekend of workshops and performances, and to record four of Neil Luck's works written for the choir between 2010 and 2015 with avant-garde music label Entr'acte.

MUSARC

To find out more about the choir and how to join the ensemble, visit:

www.musarc.org



THE NONSENSICAL REALM Seminars with David Toop, Stefan Kraus and Joseph Kohlmaier at Field Studies, Easter 2015. Musarc's work explores acts outside, or at the periphery of, conventional teaching and learning methods such as improvisation, performance, or eating together



Musarc at MK Gallery, March 2015.

Photos on this page and pp. 356–358 by Yiannis Katsaris