

## ARTISTIC RESEARCH AND THE DOCUMENTATION OF SOCIAL CRISES: POSTHUMANIST APPROACHES TO COLLECTIVE AFFECTIVE STATES IN WARTIME MUSIC

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**SUMMARY.** Traditional research methods often struggle to capture embodied, affective, and relational layers of experience emerging during crises such as war. Arts-based research and artistic research offer practice-led epistemologies aligned with posthumanist praxis. This article examines how artistic research can document and transform collective affective states in crisis, using the author's composition *Wartime Reflections II. Resonances* as a case study. A practice-led inquiry integrates the score, composer's notes, and documentary elements (voice messages, textual fragments). The analysis employs "musical lenses" (form, rhythm, dynamics, timbre, polyphony/harmony) and draws on theories of collective affect (Durkheim), anticipatory grief (Rando), resilience (Masten, Ungar), learned helplessness (Seligman), despair (Freud, Kierkegaard), *communitas* (Turner), and moral elevation (Haidt). The resulting five-part model—Premonition, Resilience, Exhaustion, Despair, Uplift—shows how music functions not only as representation but as method for structuring and sharing crisis experience.

**Keywords:** artistic research, arts-based research, posthumanism, collective affect, resilience, cultural trauma, wartime music.

### Introduction

In times of social crisis, the modes of experiencing and articulating collective experience undergo radical transformation. Wars, pandemics, and ecological disasters foreground embodied, affective, and interpersonal modes of perception that defy rationalist or distanced-objectivist interpretation. In such contexts, research demands approaches that integrate subjectivity, participation, aesthetic sensitivity, and complex interaction with lived experience. Within this frame, artistic research assumes a pivotal position — a method

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of investigation conducted through the creation of artwork as a means to understand and alter lived experience. In times of instability, artistic practice emerges not only as a means of representation but also as a form of knowledge production, generating a space for new modes of subjectivity, ethical awareness, and interpersonal connection.

This study adopts a post humanist perspective as a praxis-oriented framework that legitimizes embodied, interconnected, and multimodal epistemologies and acknowledges the role of art in overcoming the consequences of crises. This article aims to examine and test the potential of documenting social crises through arts-based research, specifically via artistic action implemented within the model of artistic research. As a case study, the article considers the musical composition *Wartime Reflections II. Resonances*, in which the experience of war is captured and reinterpreted through artistic means. In this approach, social crises are conceptualized as a contextual field of artistic practice, where music functions as a method of documentation, empathy, and collective reflection.

Thus, this research integrates artistic practice and analytical reflection within a posthumanist and ABR paradigm. The analysis of *Wartime Reflections II. Resonances* demonstrate how art not only documents but also transforms crisis reality, enabling the preservation of ephemeral states, the documentation of experience, and its exploration and representation.

### **Arts-Based Research and Artistic Research in the Posthumanist Context: Methodological Foundations**

In response to the challenges of the modern world — the growth of social crises, the transformation of the nature of knowledge, the blurring of the boundaries between the subject and the object of research — methodologies based on artistic practice are gaining increasing legitimacy in scientific discourse. Among them, arts-based research (ABR) and artistic research (AR) have gained particular importance — approaches that, although they share beliefs in the epistemological potential of art, differ in their conceptual foundations, fields of application, and methods of legitimizing the result.

ABR emerged within the context of the social sciences and humanities, particularly in education, sociology, psychology, and cultural studies. As defined by Elliot Eisner and Tom Barone, ABR is an approach that “uses the expressive qualities of the arts as means through which to explore and understand the world”<sup>2</sup> and to communicate research findings. Here, art not only illustrates knowledge but actively generates it through its capacity to engage affect, intuition, imagination, and polysemy. Patricia Leavy, in her development of the *music-*

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<sup>2</sup> Barone, T., and E. W. Eisner. *Arts Based Research*. SAGE, 2012, p. 1

as-method framework, presents music as a mode of knowing and interpreting social experience: “Music can be understood as a form of thinking, as a way of coming to know”<sup>3</sup>. Core features of ABR include an emphasis on affective and embodied experience, the ethical engagement of the researcher, interpersonal sensitivity, and critical reflexivity.

Henk Borgdorff defines AR as “research in and through the arts, where artistic practice is both the subject and the method of research. It is embedded in artistic practice, and it employs methods and means that are characteristic of the arts, in order to formulate research questions and generate new knowledge and insights”<sup>4</sup>. Michael Schwab introduces the concept of *exposition* — “a new form of publication, a multimodal presentation of AR that combines text, image, sound, video, and performance in order to expose the process of thinking in practice”<sup>5</sup>. In *Intelligent Action* (2024), Timothy Ridlen defines AR as a means of “reconceptualizing the epistemology of the sensible,” which “does not merely supplement theory but generates its own forms of knowledge”<sup>6</sup>.

Despite their differences, ABR and AR are increasingly viewed as part of a continuum. Within the scope of this study, artistic research is interpreted as a specific form of ABR implementation that combines artistic creation with social reflection. A musical composition created by the researcher herself not only communicates experience but also serves as a method of understanding it.

In this context, a posthumanist perspective serves as an overarching philosophical framework that defines the foundations and potential of such an approach. As Francesca Ferrando notes: “Posthumanism should be intended not only as a philosophical inquiry but also as praxis, which implies inclusiveness, relationality, and openness in the production of knowledge”<sup>7</sup>. This operational perspective enables a rethinking of the role of art in times of crisis.

## **Investigating Collective Affective States through the Project *Wartime Reflections II. Resonances***

Methodologically, the analysis of the composition is based on the integration of several layers of working with material. First, the core research questions addressed are: how can music structure the experience of collective

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<sup>3</sup> Leavy, P. *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*. 2nd ed., Guilford Press, 2015, p. 76

<sup>4</sup> Borgdorff, H. *The Conflict of the Faculties: Perspectives on Artistic Research and Academia*. Leiden University Press, 2012, p. 46

<sup>5</sup> Schwab, M.I. and H. Borgdorff, editors. *The Exposition of Artistic Research: Publishing Art in Academia*. Leiden University Press, 2013, pp. 10–13

<sup>6</sup> Ridlen, T. *Intelligent Action*. Rutgers University Press, 2024, p. 88

<sup>7</sup> Ferrando, F. “Towards a Posthumanist Methodology: A Statement.” *Frame: Journal of Literary Studies*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2012, p. 9

affective states, and what compositional strategies are capable of representing their dynamics? Second, the source base includes the original score, the composer's working notes, and documentary elements embedded in the piece (such as voice messages and textual fragments). Third, the analytical tools are drawn from the framework of "musical lenses", as proposed within the ABR tradition<sup>8</sup>. Finally, the ethical dimension is of particular importance: the integration of documentary materials and collective voices is treated as an act of sensitive representation that resists reduction or generalization.

The project *Wartime Reflections II. Resonances* is the second part of the author's research cycle dedicated to the musical interpretation of crisis experience. The first composition in the cycle (*Wartime Reflections I. Seven Basic Emotions in Wartime*) was inspired by P. Ekman's theory of basic emotions<sup>9</sup> and focused on individual affects arising from the experience of war. In contrast, the second part shifts attention toward collective states that emerge within society during prolonged and traumatic events.

### Theoretical Approaches to Investigating Collective Affective States

Building on these foundations, the author of this article poses the question: how can music structure and represent the experience of collective affective states during times of social crisis—specifically, in the context of full-scale war? To address this, a set of interdisciplinary theories from sociology, cultural theory, psychology, affect studies, and trauma studies is brought into dialogue.

Central to the conceptualization of collective affect is É. Durkheim's notion of *collective effervescence* as supra-individual emotional states that circulate through society much like an electric current: "a sort of electricity is generated from their closeness"<sup>10</sup>. Unlike individual emotions, collective affects are relational, embedded in social structure and communication. T. Rando's concept of *anticipatory grief* is instrumental for understanding pre-crisis states. She defines it as "the phenomenon encompassing the processes of mourning, coping, interaction, planning, and psychosocial reorganization that are stimulated and begun in part in response to the awareness of the impending loss of a loved one and the recognition of associated losses in the past, present, and future"<sup>11</sup>. Anticipatory grief thus encompasses not only emotional pain but also efforts toward psychological adaptation and reconfiguration of future expectations.

<sup>8</sup> Leavy, P. *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*. 2nd ed., Guilford Press, 2015

<sup>9</sup> Ekman, P. "An Argument for Basic Emotions." *Cognition and Emotion*, vol. 6, no. 3–4, 1992

<sup>10</sup> Durkheim, É. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Translated by Karen E. Fields, Free Press, 1995, pp. 210–211

<sup>11</sup> Rando, T. A. *Clinical Dimensions of Anticipatory Mourning: Theory and Practice in Working with the Dying, Their Loved Ones, and Their Caregivers*. Research Press, 2000, p. 24

On a social level, it may manifest as a diffuse sense of foreboding that lacks a specific form but already permeates communication and behavior.

From a broader socio-cultural perspective, J. Alexander's theory of *cultural trauma* is crucial. It defines trauma as "a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion"<sup>12</sup>. Rather than a purely psychological process, it is mediated through collective memory, where art, media, and institutions shape its representation. In wartime contexts, collective states such as anxiety, resilience, exhaustion, despair, or uplift function not only as affective responses but as elements in the larger dynamics of cultural trauma, wherein society comes to understand itself through experiences of loss and solidarity.

Following the outbreak of an acute crisis, *resilience* emerges as a dominant affective vector. In the social dimension, resilience is not viewed as an individual trait but rather as a property of adaptive systems arising through interaction between people and their environments. As Ann Masten emphasizes: "Resilience does not come from rare and special qualities, but from the everyday magic of ordinary, normative human resources in the minds, brains, and bodies of children, in their families and relationships, and in their communities"<sup>13</sup>. A similar systemic perspective is advanced by M. Ungar, who understands resilience not as an individual characteristic but as a process that arises within "social ecologies." It emerges from interactions between individuals, their families, communities, and cultural environments — where both internal resources and external conditions of access play crucial roles. Successful navigation and alignment of this access — whether material, social, or psychological—require trust, reciprocity, and regularity in social contact<sup>14</sup>.

At the same time, resilience is not an inexhaustible resource. Prolonged exposure to crisis conditions inevitably leads to exhaustion, which manifests as a gradual loss of motivation and a decline in emotional responsiveness. In a broader perspective, this condition can be related to the concept of *learned helplessness*, introduced by M. Seligman: "Uncontrollable events undermine the motivation to initiate voluntary responses that control other events"<sup>15</sup>. On a collective level, this is expressed through muted reactions, a sense of "frozen time," and a loss of initiative.

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<sup>12</sup> Alexander, J. C., R. Eyerman, B. Giesen, N. J. Smelser, and P. Sztompka. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. University of California Press, 2004, p. 1

<sup>13</sup> Masten, A. S. "Ordinary Magic: Resilience Processes in Development." *American Psychologist*, vol. 56, no. 3, 2001, pp. 234–235

<sup>14</sup> Ungar, M., editor. *The Social Ecology of Resilience: A Handbook of Theory and Practice*. Springer, 2012, pp. 13–18

<sup>15</sup> Seligman, M. E. P. *Helplessness: On Depression, Development, and Death*. W. H. Freeman, 1975, p. 36

Overcoming this phase does not occur in a linear manner. *Despair*, as the fourth affective state, represents the culmination of emotional tension, when individual voices multiply and accumulate, producing a condition of existential overload. In the psychoanalytic tradition, beginning with S. Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), melancholia is described as a state in which "in mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty, in melancholia it is the ego itself"<sup>16</sup>. S. Kierkegaard, in turn, defines despair as "the misrelation in the relation of a synthesis that relates itself to itself"<sup>17</sup>, that is, an awareness of the dissonance between potentiality and the actuality of being, which blocks the capacity to act. On a collective level, this marks a phase of emotional rupture, where verbal expression loses its power, and sound—crying, whispering, vocal distortion—emerges as the primary mode of articulation.

The final stage of the model draws on V. Turner's concept of *communitas*: "Communitas breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality, at the edges of structure, in marginality, and from beneath structure, in inferiority"<sup>18</sup>. This refers to an experience of informal, egalitarian community that arises in liminal situations and disrupts conventional social hierarchies. Also relevant in this context is Jonathan Haidt's concept of *moral elevation*: "Elevation is elicited by acts of virtue or moral beauty, it causes warm, open feelings in the chest, and motivates people to be better themselves and to do good deeds for others"<sup>19</sup>. Such elevation becomes a state of transformation, healing, and the restoration of meaning.

Based on the integration of these theoretical approaches, a five-part model of collective affective states was developed, which serves as the structural foundation of the compositional concept in *Wartime Reflections II. Resonances*. The model encompasses the following stages:

- *Premonition* – an experience of anxiety that has not yet taken shape, but is already present;
- *Resilience* – affective mobilization, coordination, solidarity;
- *Exhaustion* – fatigue, emotional numbness, automatism;
- *Despair* – a state of extreme tension, compounded pain, and loss;
- *Uplift* – quiet healing, hope, and moral renewal.

<sup>16</sup> Freud, S. "Mourning and Melancholia." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14, edited and translated by James Strachey, Hogarth Press, 1957, p. 244

<sup>17</sup> Kierkegaard, S. *The Sickness unto Death*. Translated by Alastair Hannay, Penguin, 1989, p. 66

<sup>18</sup> Turner, V. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Aldine, 1969, p. 96

<sup>19</sup> Haidt, J. "The Moral Emotions." *Handbook of Affective Sciences*, edited by R. J. Davidson, K. R. Scherer, and H. Hill Goldsmith, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 864

This model underpins the compositional thinking in the piece, which is further analyzed as a sequence of research acts: the artwork functions not only as a medium of representation but also as a method of documenting, interpreting, and collectively experiencing social reality. The subsequent analysis reveals the compositional strategies employed in each section, as well as the representational and narrative functions that, as Patricia Leavy observes, art is uniquely capable of fulfilling by preserving a multiplicity of voices and meanings without reducing complex reality.<sup>20</sup>

### **Analytical Dimension: Compositional Strategies in *Wartime Reflections II. Resonances***

Each of the composition's five sections functions as a distinct research module, in which the choice of instruments (flute, violin, cello, percussion, piano, and voice), timbral solutions, articulation, and rhythm serve not only aesthetic but also research-oriented aims — exploring how sound can structure collective psycho-emotional states. Documentary elements are integrated as components of artistic-research representation. The piece unfolds not as a narrative, but as a sequence of affective inquiries, inviting empathy, recognition, and shared reflection.

**Premonition.** The first section conveys an emerging, undefined anxiety. Calm string and flute textures are gradually disrupted by piano and percussion gestures that intensify into a dominant layer. Glissandi, crescendos, and timbral contrasts create a sense of escalation. This module embodies collective tension that has not yet taken form—what psychology terms anticipatory grief and sociology interprets as collective affect in Durkheim's sense.

**Resilience.** In contrast, the second section is rhythmically dense and motoric. Pulsating rhythmic exchanges among instruments evoke coordinated action: individual voices retain autonomy while joining a unified structure. Repetition and synchronization generate an acoustic field of mobilization. The compositional logic aligns with Ann Masten's concept of "ordinary magic" and the origin of resilience in "normative functions of human adaptive systems".<sup>21</sup>

**Exhaustion.** The third section marks a turning point: sound becomes minimalist and slowed. Quiet *sul ponticello glissandi* in strings resemble sirens, the flute sustains static tones, while the piano's sparse texture suggests emptiness. A spoken warning — "Attention. Elevated danger. Please proceed

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<sup>20</sup> Leavy, P. *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*. 2nd ed., Guilford Press, 2015, pp. 121–122

<sup>21</sup> Masten, A. S. "Ordinary Magic: Resilience Processes in Development." *American Psychologist*, vol. 56, no. 3, 2001, pp. 234–235)

to the nearest shelter.” — creates a documentary effect. The section reflects collective exhaustion, where anxiety and apathy coexist.

**Despair.** The fourth section becomes an acoustic space of compounded pain, where individual voices merge into a shared affective field. Its compositional core is formed by emotionally spoken phrases by the performers, all beginning with “How many times...”. This element references the work of Kharkiv-based artist Hamlet Zinkivskyi, created in 2022 on the façade of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building in Brussels. Only the initial phrase is used in the composition, functioning as an open framework. The composer proposed several continuations, while performers were invited to create their own based on personal experience. From this multitude of individual voices there emerges a collective utterance in which the personal and communal are inseparable. The voices overlap, forming a chaotic, unstable polyphony — shifting between cry, whisper, and vocal deformation, culminating in a trembling timpani tremolo. After the climax, the sonic mass dissipates and contracts and the phrase gradually reduces to a single word — “How?”. Despair is presented not as a singular emotion, but as a process of meaning disintegration, where language loses its power and sound becomes the final form of expression. Here, music functions as a form of affective deconstruction and collective exposure of inner pain.

**Uplift.** The final section introduces calm and transformation. Beginning with cello pizzicato, a 12-tone series dissolves into a gentle dialogue with the flute, forming a sonic space of light and fluidity. This module enacts Turner’s *communitas* — non-hierarchical unity in liminal states — and Haidt’s moral elevation, where witnessing acts of virtue evoke empathy and prosocial motivation. The result is quiet healing and a gradual return to the capacity to feel.

Each section operates as an analytical environment where timbre, rhythm, and voice act as tools for voicing and transforming collective experience. This aligns with findings on the therapeutic and social dimensions of music in a transcultural perspective, as articulated by Tortop and Ghvinjilia: “Music offers them a means to convey their experiences or emotions which can be therapeutic. This artistic expression of pain and strength aids individuals and communities in processing their emotions, moving towards healing, and attaining closure regarding their traumatic experiences. In other words, music that always incorporates elements from diverse cultural backgrounds can effectively depict the multifaceted nature of shared trauma”<sup>22</sup>. In this framework, sound does not merely reflect affective states but creates the conditions for their collective experience—thus realizing the posthumanist potential of art as a form of ethical sensitivity, testimony, and action.

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<sup>22</sup> Tortop, H. S., and G. Ghvinjilia. “War and Music: A Discourse Analysis of Ukrainian Musicians’ Messages from a Transcultural Perspective.” *Journal of Music Theory and Transcultural Music Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2024, p. 67



## Conclusion

This article has examined the potential of art as a form of understanding and documenting collective experiences of crisis through the methodological framework of *ABR* and *posthumanist praxis*. It has been argued that in times of war, pandemic, and other social disruptions, traditional research methods often prove inadequate for capturing the affective, embodied, and relational dimensions of experience. In this context, music emerges not merely as a medium of expression but as a tool for conceptualizing and transforming collective states. From a broader perspective, this aligns with the idea of cross-cultural and transcultural dialogue facilitated by musical works, since “Music works naturally transcend national boundaries and illustrate the universal impact of war and the experience that binds different peoples and nations together”<sup>23</sup>.

Drawing on the work of P. Leavy, F. Ferrando, H. Borgdorff, A. Masten, É. Durkheim, and others, this article has proposed a model in which artistic practice functions as both an analytical and representational act. At the center of this inquiry is the author’s musical composition *Wartime Reflections II. Resonances*, which enacts the principles of *AR* and operates as a sequence of compositionally structured research modules.

The five-part model of collective affective states — *Premonition*, *Resilience*, *Exhaustion*, *Despair*, and *Uplift* — enabled the embodiment of socio-psychological dynamics through timbral, rhythmic, vocal, and structural means. Each section not only represents an affective condition but creates the conditions for its shared experience and reflection. In this way, the composition demonstrates the potential of music as a method of preserving transient states, documenting lived experience, and facilitating further inquiry and representation.

In a wider perspective, the article proposes a model that integrates artistic practice with theoretical reflection, where *posthumanist sensitivity* to relationality and multiplicity is not merely a philosophical orientation but a methodological foundation. Such an approach opens new horizons for artistic research as a form of public engagement, documentation, and critical reflection in a world shaped by crisis.

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<sup>23</sup> Tortop, H. S., and G. Ghvinjilia. “War and Music: A Discourse Analysis of Ukrainian Musicians’ Messages from a Transcultural Perspective.” *Journal of Music Theory and Transcultural Music Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2024, pp. 79–80

Supplementary materials, including the performance recording and score excerpts, are available upon request.

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