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Jakob Bragg

editorial: post- afterness-

A common thread within artistic discourse over the last three-quarter century is the idea of ‘afterness’, that is, post—insert practice/aesthetic/ideology/buzz word here. In a time where one (many) has instantaneous access to almost all cultural output of almost all cultures, much of our artistic framework is based around either a reaction or continuation of this vast repository of musical and artistic artefacts.

As an example,¹ from modernism, we move to postmodernism, and from this, post-postmodernism or even Metamodernism.² More recently terms such as ‘digimodernism’, ‘automodernism’, and ‘altermodernism’ have been used.³ In each, there is an embrace of subversion, of fracture, of disruption and hijacking,⁴ a reaction against standardisation and commercialism, against postmodernist ideas of ‘plenty, pastiche, and parataxis’.⁵ In the postmodern works of Yoko Ono, the lines between audience and performer, between the private and intimate, between the body and the social are all blurred.⁶ In what has been described as ‘altermodern’, Lindsay Seers works are deeply autobiographical, navigating body, race, memory, and childhood. In both, there is a rupturing of tradition and exploration of the hyper-now.⁷

1 It’s worth adding that reducing art to linear narratives like these is often problematic and irons out many fringe and ‘outsider’ practices and practitioners. The narrative of modernism here is simply used as an example.

2 See Vermeulen, T., and van den Akker, R. (2010) Notes on metamodernism. *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 2(1).

3 See Kirby, A. (2009) *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Reconfigure Our Culture*. Bloomsbury; and Samuels, R. (2009) *New Media, Cultural Studies, and Critical Theory After Postmodernism: Automodernity from Zizek to Laclau*. Palgrave Macmillan.

4 See Harris, M.D., and Okediji, M. (2000) *Transatlantic Dialogue: Contemporary Art In and Out of Africa*. Ackland Art Museum, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

5 Vermeulen and van den Akker, Notes on metamodernism.

6 Mackie, V. (2012) *Instructing, Constructing, Deconstructing: The Embodied and Disembodied Performances of Yoko Ono*. In Starrs, R. (Eds.) (2012) *Rethinking Japanese Modernism*. Brill.

7 Tate. (n.d.) Lindsay Seers: ‘I turned myself into a camera’. [Online] Available at: <<https://>



Figure 1 *Cut Piece* (1965) by Yoko Ono, a seminal work of postmodernism. Members of the audience are invited to cut away pieces of Ono's clothing. Minoru Niizuma 2015.



Figure 2 *Extramission 6 (Black Maria)* (2009) by Lindsay Seers. This appeared in the 2009 Tate Triennial curated and entitled 'altermodern' by Nicolas Bourriaud.⁸ Video still, Lindsay Seers 2009.

www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/lindsay-seers-12601/lindsay-seers-i-turned-myself-camera> [Accessed 11 October 2023].

⁸ See <<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/altermodern>>

This framework is most pertinently articulated in political, environmental, and socio-cultural spheres with terms like post-industrialisation⁹, post-colonialism, neo-liberalism, neo-Marxism, post-Holocene, and post-truth frequently used across a variety of different fields of commentary. Each attempt to frame current concerns as a consequence or development of a past or on-going concern. The concept of the post-Holocene or Anthropocene frames the reality that humans have irrevocably altered the composition of the planet's environment.¹⁰ Although this terminology is still debated across academic disciplines, it remains a provocative way of describing the unknown new territory that humankind—really an extractive European minority—has violently pushed the planet into.

In the musical arts, the idea of 'afterness' is possibly most recently exemplified in the Tim Rutherford-Johnson's aptly entitled book *Music after the Fall: Modern Composition and Culture since 1989*.¹¹ Here, Rutherford-Johnson traces a development of new music in broad areas of social liberalisation, globalisation, digitisation, the Internet, late capitalist economics, and the green movement, positing 1989 as the marker for a significant shift in artistic and socio-cultural ideas. Rutherford-Johnson discusses works that embrace a web-based interconnected world, mixed-media, a new wave of environmentalism, and shifting attitudes to race, gender, access, and sexuality.

Although some these artistic epochs seem rather small and condensed when compared to grand narratives of say the Italian Renaissance, the Long Century, and the Classical Period, what I'd argue is within each of these human constructs of arbitrary time, the lived experience was probably one of a multitude of smaller and interlinked narratives. Within central Europe of the Classical Period, with the rising influence of the Mannheim School—one exemplified by melodically dominant violins, written out accompaniment parts, and stylistic tremolos and crescendi¹²—one may have possibly referred to the works of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Joseph Haydn as post-Mannheimian. Now this might be somewhat tongue-in-cheek, however when reflecting on practice, concerns, and trends of a given time, an individual's lens of view will naturally be warped by the short-term ramifications of the current and recent past.

✱

9 With ideas of the third industrial, fourth, and even fifth industrial revolution proceeding the more familiar first two of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

10 Sutoris, P. (2021) The term 'Anthropocene' isn't perfect – but it shows us the scale of the environmental crisis we've caused. [Online] Available at: <<https://theconversation.com/the-term-anthropocene-isnt-perfect-but-it-shows-us-the-scale-of-the-environmental-crisis-weve-caused-169301>> [Accessed 11 October 2023].

11 Rutherford-Johnson, T. (2017) *Music after the Fall: Modern Composition and Culture since 1989*. University of California Press.

12 Kennedy, J., Kennedy, M., and Rutherford-Johnson, T. (Eds.) (2012) Mannheim School. In *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*. Oxford University Press.

In 2023, our world feels increasingly framed by the decline of Americo-European dominance and a return to a multi-polar world, by the more routine epidemics including a very recent Covid-19 pandemic, by a decline in globalisation and mobility, the resurgence of the Nation State, and an increased likelihood of a future ‘hothouse’ earth.¹³ Culturally, art and music are part of these shifts. Inflation and stagnation have seen the rise of more DIY spaces and projects, an increase in the self-produced, the local, and the community-led, an embracing of even newer technologies, the use of non-human intelligences, and a re-thinking of past hierarchies and structures including notions of ‘composer’, ‘score’, ‘concert’, and ‘audience’.



Figure 3 ame’s Dai Hall in Huddersfield, situated in the disused and soon to be demolished 1970s Piazza Centre. Ryoko Akama 2020.

What is presented here is perhaps not so much of a post- or afterness-, but more of a beyond-ness. There is less of a linearity traced between what came before and now (artistically, musically, aesthetically), but instead a clear sense of artistic research that embraces a shift from previously accepted paradigms. These articles include discussions about moving beyond the gendered voice, beyond solely human art making, beyond the traditional audience-packed concert hall, and beyond notions of what the ‘composer’ is and can be.

13 See Betts, R. (2018) Hothouse Earth: Here’s what the science does – and doesn’t – say. [Online] Available at: <<https://theconversation.com/hothouse-earth-heres-what-the-science-actually-does-and-doesnt-say-101341>> [Accessed 12 October 2023].

The first is conversation between Charlie Sdraulig, Marco Fusi, Winnie Huang, and Gwen Rouger on Sdraulig's work *one to one*; a work for a single performer and a single audience member. Here, the notion of what a classically trained performer does and the role the audience play is radically transformed. The discussion explores ideas of trust, exchange, dialogue without words, shifting roles, and the idea of a 'socio-musical personae'.

In March of 2023, I had the opportunity to interview Henry McPherson on his recent works in his rural North Yorkshire home. This has evolved into a hybrid conversation and article in which McPherson articulates the cultural juncture of improvisation and composition, the nature of listening and forgetting, processes of collage making, and thoughts upon homage.

The third contribution is a reflection on practice, on listening, on situating, and on musicking. Anthony Stillabower shares his 'musical ideals, cultivated by listening and playing', the role of his voice as both a vector and filter in which music is then mapped from.

Following this is an exchange between myself and curator Sasha Elina. We discuss about moving the concert out of the hall and into the woods, the role of 'space', about exile, and the impacts of war upon a curatorial practice with an international scope.

Next, Maria Sappho reflects on two recent works that navigate the posthuman reality where artificial and fungal intelligence systems collaborate, the role of virtual realities, and how traditional hierarchies are disrupted. Sappho embraces the idea of an x-practice, a blurring between the virtual and physical, between the human and nonhuman. This is embodied in her 'transspecies orchestra' *The Mushroom Grove* and the 'telematic orchestra' of the Glasgow Improvisors Orchestra.

In *Looking for Butterflies*, Kate Holden explores ideas of 'femme timbre' and 'queer timbre' of the voice through extension, replication, archetypes, and traversing roles. They seek to rupture the mythos of particular artistic lineages and embrace the blurring of sex, roles, and personhood through a multi-model practice of text, voice, video, and movement.

Interspersed throughout is an image essay by Colin Frank. 'Posts Posted on Posts', playfully explores landscape, design, access, and imagery through eight photos taken from across the UK.

The voices here reflect an internationally diverse snapshot of music making, somewhat loosely affiliated with the researchers and artists of CeReNeM, University of Huddersfield. They embrace the exploratory, the non-hierarchical, the social, and the hybrid, in a landscape warped post-pandemic, post-capitalist, and conflict resurgent.

I must express my immense gratitude to all the contributors, for their labour, ideas, generosity, and patience.



Charlie Sdraulig, Marco Fusi, Winnie Huang, Gwen Rouger

a fragility, which connects: music as a social encounter

The following is a discussion between Charlie Sdraulig, Marco Fusi, Winnie Huang, and Gwen Rouger made during April of 2023. Charlie Sdraulig's work *one to one* is an intimately staged sequence of three performances, each for one performer and one audience member at a time, comprising: *one to one* (2018-19) for vocalising violinist and audience for Marco Fusi, *tend* (2019) for gesturing, vocalising performer and audience for Winnie Huang, and *enfold* (2019-20) for pianist on an amplified, old upright, and audience for Gwen Rouger. The discussion relates the project's origins, collaborative workshops, interactive performance experiences, and more. Gwen Rouger's original text in French has been included with the English translation provided by Frédéric Dufeu and Charlie Sdraulig.

CS: *one to one* casts music making as a nonverbal exchange between one performer and one audience member (audient)¹ at a time. Broadly, Gwen, Marco, and Winnie attune their sounds and movements with each audience's breathing, postural shifts, facial expressions, and so on. By attending to attending, the intent is to offer a space for all involved to exercise their empathetic imaginations.²

I started the project in 2018, in collaboration with Marco for his residency at Stanford University. At the time, I was reading literature on interpersonal coordination in relational sociology, social psychology, and music studies.³ I think these

1 We use this term merely as a concise way of expressing the singular form of 'audience'.

2 For a concise overview of the project as well as its conceptual and theoretical basis see Sdraulig, C. and d'Heudières, L. (2022) Attending to attending: performing audience personae in contemporary music. *Tempo*, 76(300), pp.18-32. For an in-depth account of this project's development, including details concerning compositional techniques and interactive strategies see Sdraulig, C. (2020) Composing social dynamics [Doctoral Thesis]. [Online] Available at: <<https://purl.stanford.edu/tc871kt6643>> [Accessed 25 April 2023]; and Sdraulig, C. (Forthcoming) One to one: composing social dynamics. *Perspectives of New Music*. I sincerely thank Brian Ferneyhough (adviser), Jonathan Berger, Jaroslaw Kapuscinski, and Erik Ulman for supervising my research on this project at Stanford University.

3 See for example, Clayton, M., Sager, R. and Will, U. (2004). In time with the music: The concept of entrainment and its significance for ethnomusicology. *ESEM CounterPoint*, 1, pp.1-19.;

interests derive from my experiences as an accompanist: I had to learn how to sight read my collaborators just as well as my piano parts—anticipating, leading, or reacting to a breath, a nod, or a glance. Successfully building trust and rapport was an unalloyed joy, so I grew to love music making as a social, multi-modal process. Influenced by the work of Oliveros, Saunders, Wolff, and others, I have subsequently spent over a decade composing interactive cuing systems;⁴ however, before *one to one* these typically involved the performers exclusively and did not consciously draw from a multidisciplinary well.

I was emboldened to bring audience members into the fold—to appraise their behaviours as a performance of a kind—thanks to Gwen.

GR: I first met Charlie when we were both students at the Royal College of Music in London. A few years after this, I started playing his solo piano piece, *collector*.⁵ I realised that successfully presenting the work involved not only playing it, but also devising a format, which clearly communicated what I found wonderful in his music: intimacy and the *inframince*.⁶ To these ends, I created my performance entitled *Caravane*, in which I play Charlie's *collector* for one spectator at a time, within a small caravan located in a public space (see Figure 1). In this intimate situation, one can readily perceive the fragility, humility, and kindness that I sense in his music. The aforementioned notion of *inframince* refers to Marcel Duchamp and his statement 'the spectator makes the picture'.⁷ *Inframince* is an aesthetic of such nuance that it leads, or even forces, people to actively expand their perception. Thus, it rehabilitates the importance of the spectator, highlighting their crucial role in the success of an artistic endeavour. The *Caravane* format exemplifies and amplifies this idea—it is only natural that each performance will be as unique as each spectator. In *enfold* (and the other pieces of the triptych), Charlie develops these concepts more profoundly by notating how I might modify my playing according to the attitudes of each individual spectator. The relationship I create with them is part of the musical work.

Collins, R. (2005) *Interaction Ritual Chains*. Princeton University Press; Harrigan, J. (2013) 3 Methodology: coding and studying nonverbal behavior. In Knapp, M. and Hall, J. (2013) *Non-verbal Communication*. Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. pp. 25-68.

4 See Sdraulig, C. (2013) *Interaction in line, breath and process*. [Online] Available at: <<https://www.charliesdraulig.com/s/Interaction-in-line-breath-and-process.pdf>> [Accessed 25 April 2023].

5 Sdraulig, C. (2014-15) *collector*. Australian Music Centre.

6 This term is sometimes translated as 'infrathin' in English. See Manning, E. (2017) For a Pragmatics of the Useless, or the Value of the Infrathin. *Political Theory*, 45(1), pp. 97-115. For example, here is Manning's description of a politics of the infrathin: 'a quest, in registers more-than-human, for the most minor of variations. A commitment to the creation of modes of existence that practice a pragmatics of the useless. A care for ecologies of practice that value the effects of what can but barely be perceived, if it can be perceived at all.' Manning, For a Pragmatics of the Useless, 98.

7 Duchamp, M. and Cabanne, P. (1976) *Ingénieur du temps perdu : entretiens avec Pierre Cabanne*. P. Belfond. p.122.

GR: J'ai rencontré Charlie au Royal College of Music à Londres pendant nos études. Quelques années plus tard, j'ai voulu jouer sa pièce pour piano solo *collector*. Être une interprète de sa pièce, c'était jouer sa musique en tant que pianiste mais aussi concevoir un contexte de représentation propice à transmettre ce que je trouvais magnifique dans sa musique, l'intimité et l'inframince. Il fallait créer une forme artistique qui permette de transmettre cela au public. C'est pour cela que j'ai créé ma performance intitulée *Caravane*, dans laquelle je joue la pièce *collector* de Charlie pour un unique spectateur dans une petite caravane placée dans l'espace public (see Figure 1). Y est perceptible à l'intérieur une fragilité, une humilité et une bienveillance que je ressens présents dans sa musique. La deuxième notion est l'inframince, en référence à Marcel Duchamp et sa phrase « C'est le regardeur qui fait le tableau ». C'est une esthétique tellement infime qu'elle pousse, voir 'oblige' à étendre sa perception. Par cela, elle réhabilite l'importance du rôle de celui qui perçoit dans la réussite du moment artistique. La forme pour un unique spectateur amplifie cette notion et c'est naturellement que se crée à chaque fois une performance différente avec l'unique spectateur. Dans *enfold* (et les autres pièces du triptyque), Charlie développe plus profondément cette idée en indiquant dans la partition des changements de jeu suivant les attitudes de l'unique spectateur. La relation créée avec lui fait partie de l'œuvre musicale.



Figure 1 Gwen Rouger performing *Caravane* at Archipel Festival, Geneva, Switzerland. Greg Clement 2022.

CS: Gwen performed *collector* in a concert hall once, but I recall that she was unsatisfied with the performance situation. We discussed alternatives—small groups joining her up on stage, gathering around the piano, or sitting beside her in a side-by-side arrangement akin to four-hands playing or piano lessons, and so on. Gwen then went away and independently fleshed out the beautiful *Caravane* concept. Her subsequent reports on audience members' diverse behaviours, her insistence on a palpable sense of feedback, but acknowledgement that *collector* did not explicitly offer space for and guidance on these interactions, all prepared the ground for *one to one*.⁸

⁸ The piece was not expressly composed for the caravan after all; *collector* was commissioned

MF: In the course of the Stanford Residency where the violin piece⁹ was conceived and first performed, working with Charlie was for me a deeply meaningful experience. As opposed to the traditional praxis of learning new performative routines and instrumental techniques, I had to develop a whole new set of skills. This was indeed possible thanks to Charlie's willingness to share the readings that informed/inspired *one to one*, and to extensively workshop how the piece's materials could be adapted and shaped within each performance.

The sonic and gestural materials in the piece are extremely effective. The vast majority of the instrumental gestures do not require classical violin training to be performed, as they are comprised of simple actions—drawing the bow vertically and horizontally on the strings and rubbing one's fingers on the body of the instrument—that any person with basic musical training can reproduce (see Figure 2).

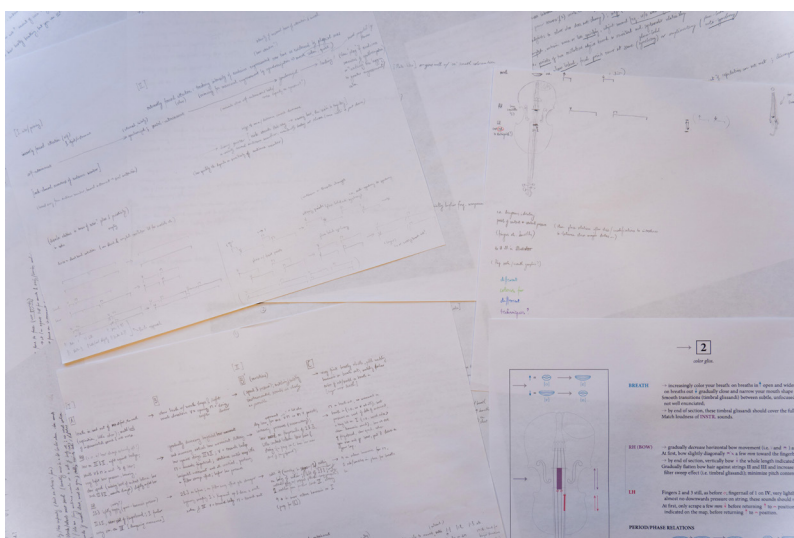


Figure 2 Sketches relating to the sounds, gestures, form, and notation of *one to one*. Charlie Sdraulig 2023.

I believe the simplicity of these gestures has a wide-reaching significance for both the performer and audience. The performer does not see themselves as representative of a classical artistic ‘high’ tradition of violinists but instead is encouraged to explore anew their instrument, in a naïve, playful and almost childish fashion. Equally, the audience is not intimidated or confronted by conventionally virtuosic playing at close range.

CS: Yes, I composed the piece with my sister, Nonni's old student violin in

and first performed by Zubin Kanga—the open score aspects of the piece focus on the perception-action cycle of the pianist as they tenuously touch and sound the keyboard.

⁹ For the score and a trailer see Sdraulig, C. (2019) *one to one*. [Online] Available at: <<https://www.charliesdraulig.com/#/one-to-one/>> [Accessed 25 April 2023].

hand! I knew early on that the mutual entrainment (i.e. interdependent coordination) of Marco's and an audience's respiratory cycles would be the primary interactive focus of the piece. As such, Marco's breath accompanies his bowed sounds, before it eventually replaces the bow entirely by vibrating the strings like an aeolian harp. As someone with no string playing experience, it was a delight to figure out and test these techniques—I imagined that their simplicity would help to close some metaphorical relational distance between Marco and an audience (i.e. it is easy to envisage making these sounds yourself and their unassuming character might allow your attention to wander to other subtle behaviours, as well as interpersonal dynamics). However, actually realising the piece successfully requires extreme sensitivity and extensive performance experience, which Marco, Gwen, and Winnie all have in abundance.

MF: During our first meetings Charlie was fully capable of demonstrating all the instrumental techniques adopted, as well as explaining their connection with the related physical elements of the performance (i.e. the performer's breathing). Violinists learn early on to associate their bowing cycles with the patterns of their breathing, inhaling on the upbow and exhaling on the downbow, and this connection is manifest in *one to one*, both in Charlie's demonstrations and in my performances. Performer and audience alike feel the deep and primordial connection between bowing and breathing, and how these cycles operate in a similar way.

Charlie's playful exploration of this connection seems to me to have facilitated the very process of conception and composition of *one to one*. Through a process of double-mirroring Charlie understood how to imitate his breathing with the violin gestures, and then how to modify the respiratory cycle to make it closer to what bow and strings can do. Observing this process happening in the course of our first sessions was of great importance for my own approach.

CS: I did not realise breathing and bowing are linked in this way in violin pedagogy, but I am delighted to hear it! Perhaps I picked up the idea from my sisters' practice when I was growing up—my youngest sibling, Eliza is a professional cellist—and it lodged somewhere deep in my mind? I was drawn to breathing as a vital, rhythmic basis for people's activities—a common interactive ground with the audience, who after all does not enter the performance space with a violin in hand. This kind of rhythmic interpersonal coordination matters because it can facilitate pro-social effects, such as empathy and rapport, even if it is nonconscious.¹⁰ However, clearly respiratory cycles are just one of many possible shared rhythms—the

10 For a review and discussion of relevant literature, see Sdraulig, Composing social dynamics, 6-11. Among others, I cite Codrons, E., Bernardi, N., Vandoni, M. and Bernardi, L. (2014) Spontaneous Group Synchronization of Movements and Respiratory Rhythms. PLoS ONE, 9(9), e107538.; Gallotti, M., Fairhurst, M. and Frith, C. (2016) Alignment in social interactions. Consciousness and Cognition, 48, pp. 255-256.; Hove, M., and Risen, J. (2009) It's All in the Timing: Interpersonal Synchrony Increases Affiliation. Social Cognition, 27(6), p. 957.

piece I wrote for Winnie explores a wider array of behaviours and patterns of relating.

WH: My own first experiences of Charlie’s music was through participating as an audience member for the performance of *collector* in Gwen’s *Caravane* concept, and then also experiencing *one to one* performed by Marco Fusi. As an audience member for both works, I was deeply intrigued and moved on both occasions, wondering about how the pieces ‘worked’, wanting to know if there was a code or key that unlocked how they are performed. As a violinist, I was very jealous of Marco as I knew that asking for another *one to one* for a different violinist would not be something that would interest Charlie. I was however delighted to get to know Charlie as a friend, learning that we shared a similar background, sharing similar aspects of secondary and tertiary schooling in Melbourne, Australia. In these friendly chats, it became apparent that how the audience thinks, feels and reacts to a performer was something we were both very invested in, as well as curious to play with. I myself was developing my own skills as a gestural performer and my past was full of work experiences, musical and non-musical, that dealt specifically with interpersonal exchanges requiring a multitude of verbal and non-verbal communications. In sharing these stories with Charlie, the possibility of creating a *one to one* experience that was not with the violin, but rather just with human gestures seemed intriguing.

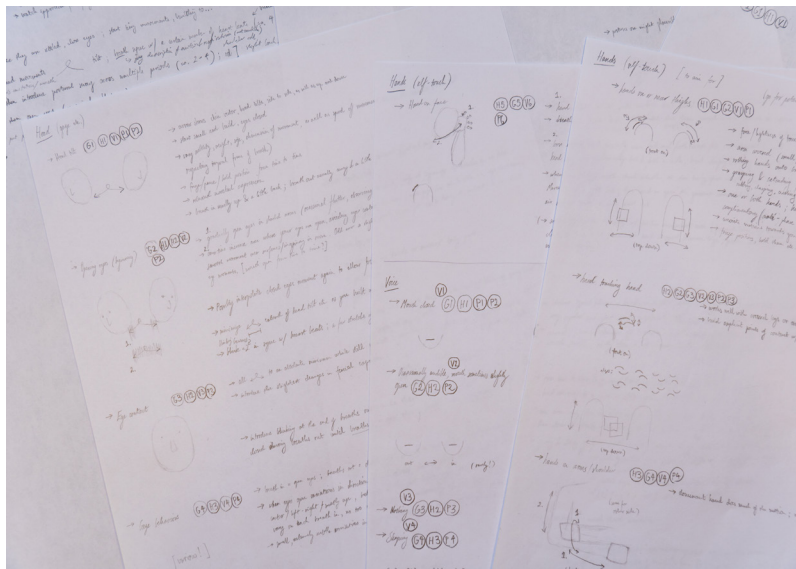


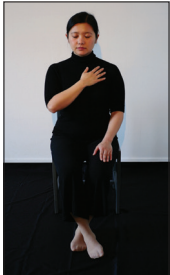
Figure 3 Sketches of gestures and choreographic routines from *tend*. Charlie Sdraulig 2023.

CS: Indeed, Winnie’s background drew the project in a direction I would have never considered otherwise. The timing of our collaboration was extraordinarily fortunate! Winnie’s accomplishment and expertise in gestural performance, as well as a well-honed capacity for ‘reading’ people, led to a piece about observing, listen-

ing, and attending attitudes. Accordingly, I developed a series of choreographic routines, which cover many of the behaviours Winnie is likely to encounter in audients: changes in gaze direction and duration, blinking frequency, head tilts, self-adaptors, postural shifts, leans and sways, etc.

WH: The preparation relating to the creation of the piece was made in a few different stages. Each stage started with some brainstorming either by Charlie himself or as a joint conversation between us. Then Charlie would go away and create a segment of the piece, either a concept, a notation, or some overall structure of a part of the piece (see Figure 3). When he wanted to review these aspects, he would send me what he had created, I would read it, work on it, and perform what I translated from those pages over the course of a few months. (see Figure 4).

8
anti-phase beats



8.1 Suddenly adopt all the behaviors given below, with **naturalistic** movements; **synchronize** your $\uparrow\downarrow$ in an **anti-phase 1:1** relation with AUD's $\uparrow\downarrow$ (see temporal relations below):

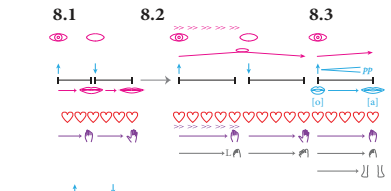
- Eyes \odot on \uparrow and \odot on \downarrow ; reciprocate AUD's gaze behavior, but without conscious blinking or head movement; subtle positive facial expressions *ad lib.* (range of motion ≤ 0.2 inches (≤ 5 mm));
- $\uparrow\downarrow$ inaudible; but open \odot and close your mouth \odot with soft clicks and small saliva sounds; (range of motion ≤ 0.1 inches (≤ 3 mm));
- Contract your dominant hand on \uparrow ; expand your dominant hand on \downarrow (range of motion ≤ 0.2 inches (≤ 5 mm));
- Sense your \heartsuit , but avoid synchronizing with them just yet; ask yourself *how many (N) \heartsuit does each \uparrow and \downarrow roughly last?*

8.2 \rightarrow Gradually lengthen your $\uparrow\downarrow$, phase and **synchronize** them with $N+2$ \heartsuit ; maintain this new relationship; simultaneously:

- Sometimes, just after you open your eyes \odot , consciously **synchronize** your **blinking** with a few \heartsuit in a row;
- Gradually reintroduce some \heartsuit , tilting your head and leaning (swaying) left and right in support; the maximum range of motion for all these movements should be ≤ 1 inch (≤ 2.3 cm).
- Perform contracting, curling motions with your toes \heartsuit on \uparrow , and expanding motions \heartsuit on \downarrow ; **restrict movements to one foot at a time**—the side your head is tilting toward (range of motion ≤ 0.2 inches (≤ 5 mm)).

Later, for a whole \uparrow , synchronize your **blinking** with every \heartsuit and **lightly press** (no lifting) your index and middle fingers \rightarrow into your upper chest at the same time (range of motion ≤ 0.1 inches (≤ 3 mm)).

8.3 \rightarrow Then, **end** this routine with an audible \uparrow through your \odot while calmly moving your dominant hand up to just in front your mouth and uncrossing your ankles—each foot underneath its respective knee \heartsuit \heartsuit .



(e.g. AUD, $\uparrow\downarrow\uparrow\downarrow$ (etc.?)

Figure 4 Section 8 from the performance materials for *tend*. Charlie Sdraulig (score and video), Winnie Huang (video), Marco Fusi (video) 2019.

During these sessions we mainly discussed how each gesture could be delivered and how that would be interpreted by the audience member. We discussed this based on perspectives of how every gesture could be experienced by both performer and audience member. How every gesture is layered with connotations, expectations, social cues and possible meaning. How it looks, what it could mean, what it could lead to, what is the atmosphere it creates and how this could differ when put into context with the rest of the piece. We discussed the scale of the gesture, how fast or slow, or how large or small it could be. We analysed how the changes of each of these scales could generate different reactions from the audience and discussed if that was something we wanted. We discussed the feeling these gestures could evoke and how to generate certain feelings and avoid more negative feelings or atmospheres. In changing these atmospheres, ‘temperatures’ as Charlie called it,

we were trying to care for the audience, to fine tune each moment we shared, to tend to them, resulting in the title of this piece in the *one to one* trilogy—*tend*.¹¹

CS: In the early stages of a project, I have overarching creative intentions, but they are nebulous until I can reach some understanding of my collaborators in a few of their manifold presentations (e.g. as a performer, as a friend, etc.) and they learn something about me. This understanding takes time—it accumulates in different ways, speeds, depths, etc., every time.

The composed socio-musical personae Winnie, Marco, and Gwen adopt in performance largely complement their behavioural histories and capabilities as I understand them, rather than conflicting with or remaining indifferent to them. However, these personae are not fixed ‘characters’, but complexes of behavioural-relational tendencies that are dynamically adapted in the face of unpredictable audient actions. These pieces ask so much of the performers and I feel an immense responsibility to support them, however I can. Beyond typical performance materials, this means building time into each piece for the performers to learn something about the audient in front of them—mirroring the initial stages of our collaborative process (or more-than-passing interactions in general?). I also offer demonstrations of techniques in workshops, discuss possible scenarios and responses, act as a test audient to strengthen flexible on-the-fly problem solving in this situation, etc. Winnie has described some of this process for *tend*, when we were figuring out how she might reciprocate and coordinate with audient behaviours that heighten quietude, positive involvement, and rhythmic rapport. The preparation of the other pieces followed a similar path.

MF: Before facing strangers, I performed individual sections of the piece for Charlie to receive feedback - verbally and, more often, while playing. Charlie would purposefully modify his behavioural patterns to draw my attention and provoke reactions, ultimately training me to develop an almost instinctual ability to read and adapt to physical cues from the audient. Reassured by the observation of my increased ability to adapt and morph the materials in the course of performances, Charlie introduced the first audients, initially selecting people that were, to an extent, aware of the peculiarities of the piece (see Figure 5). This turned out to be a double-edged sword: some of the first audients were almost too willing to follow my musical and physical cues, fostering in me an excessive confidence in my *one to one* performing abilities; on the other hand, some of these initial audients seemed to be aware of my attempts to trigger reactions and quite reluctant to comply, at times making it quite hard to predict the results of any performance in this ‘controlled’ environment.

11 For the score and trailer see Sdraulig, C. (2019) *tend*. [Online] Available at: <<https://www.charliesdraulig.com/#/tend/>> [Accessed 25 April 2023].



Figure 5 Marco Fusi rehearsing *one to one* in the Listening Room at the Center for Computer Research in Music and Acoustics (CCRMA) at Stanford University. Dave Kerr 2019.



Figure 6 Gwen Rouger demonstrating the setup for *enfold* during the Kinetic produced INTIMATE festival at Partisan in Manchester, UK. Winnie Huang 2020.

CS: During the workshops Marco is describing, I was learning at the same time as him! After all, this was the first piece in the sequence, and I had not made anything involving the audience in this way before. Marco was learning to attend to attending in this specific way, to effectively expand his role from a performer to something hybridised—a performer-audient perhaps?¹² I was learning how to provide useful support, getting to know the piece in some of its many possible realisations, whether it worked like I imagined, and making any necessary adjustments. By the time I worked with Winnie and Gwen, I was confident in the project’s basic premises—I was ready to expand the scope of interactions and mediations, including ASMR-like amplification in Gwen’s piece (see Figure 6).

GR: We met several times to workshop the piece and play parts of it for one another, since Charlie is also a pianist. I recall that at some point he asked about headphones: should the spectator and I have our own separate stereo sets, or should we share one set, so one ear hears the amplified sound in mono and the other stays in contact with reality? I mention this because Charlie’s choice of the latter option reveals a wonderful quality of the piece: one is able to listen to the instrument as closely as possible (thanks to extreme amplification) and at the same time remain sensitive to what is happening in the environment and the space between the spectator and pianist.

GR: Nous nous sommes vus à plusieurs reprises pour transmettre la pièce et répéter entre pianiste, puisque Charlie est pianiste lui-même. Je me souviens qu’il a eu un moment la question des écouteurs: fallait-il que nous ayons le spectateur et moi-même les écouteurs sur les deux oreilles ou sur une seule et avoir une oreille qui soit au contact de la réalité. Je mentionne cela car le choix qui a été fait d’une seule oreille révèle une volonté magnifique de cette pièce: pouvoir être à l’écoute au plus près de l’instrument (par une amplification extrême) et en même temps sensible à ce qui se passe dans l’environnement et dans l’espace entre le spectateur et la pianiste.

CS: Yes, in *enfold*, Gwen shares headphones with the audient.¹³ She reveals resonances and creaks specific to the piano in front of her by gently tapping, scraping, brushing, etc. (see Figure 7). As Gwen’s familiarity with the instrument grows, she reciprocates and translates compatible ambient sounds as well as audient behaviours—thereby tracing a contingent, whimsical network of diverse associations and mediations, which draws attention to interdependencies both within and outside of the performance space.¹⁴

12 This discussion of role hybridisation and fluidity is fleshed out in Sdraulig, C. and d’Heudières, L. (2022) Attending to attending: performing audience personae in contemporary music. *Tempo*, 76(300), pp.18-32.

13 For the score and trailer see Sdraulig, C. (2020) *enfold*. [Online] Available at: <<https://www.charliesdraulig.com/#/enfold/>> [Accessed 25 April 2023].

14 For more detail, see this video presentation for the University of Leeds’ Vibrant Practices:

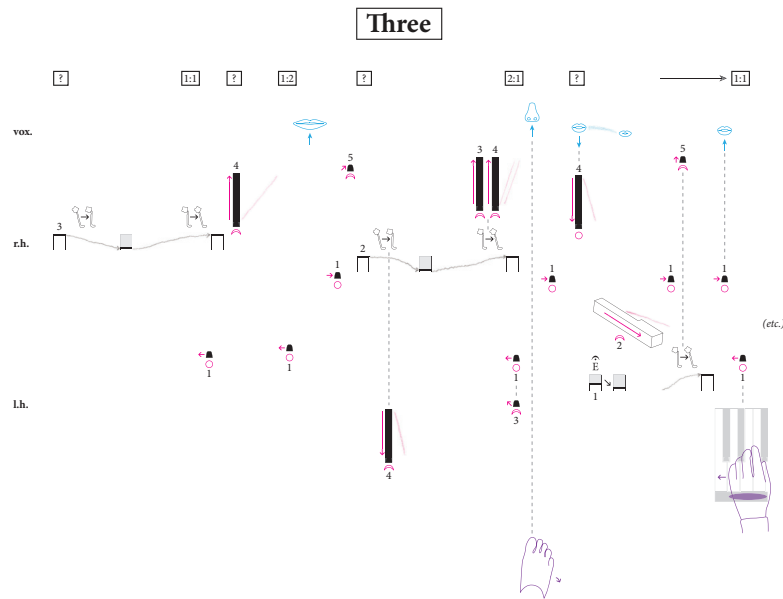


Figure 7 Notated practice model for section Three of *enfold*. Charlie Sdraulig 2019-20.

GR: Interdependency is situated in listening. When I play Charlie’s music, I always have a strong sense of back-and-forth between my listening and the spectator’s: the more I listen, the more the spectator listens, which changes how I play and in turn makes me listen more deeply than before, etc... Then with the instrument: the more I listen to the piano (which is different every time), the more my performance adapts to its peculiarities and it is often at this point that the piano offers me more. The same goes for the ambient environmental sounds to which my playing also responds: the more attentively I listen to them in all their fine detail, the more ‘magical’ synchronicities occur.

There is a great generosity within Charlie’s compositions because they offer a genuine invitation to each spectator to expand their perception, by integrating them within the unfolding of the work. This stance seems all the more important to me nowadays, as artistic productions are sometimes too seductive, intrusive and falsely participative.

GR: L’interdépendance se situe dans l’écoute: quand je joue la musique de Charlie, c’est toujours très fort pour moi de ressentir ce va-et-vient entre ma capacité d’écoute et celle du spectateur: plus j’écoute, plus le spectateur écoute, ce qui me fait jouer différemment et me met à nouveau dans une écoute plus profonde etc... Ensuite avec l’instrument : plus j’écoute le piano (qui est à chaque fois différent), plus mon jeu s’adapte à ses particularités et c’est comme si à ce moment là le piano m’offrait davantage. Il en va de même avec les sons de l’environnement avec lequel mon jeu d’adapte: plus j’y suis attentive, dans une écoute fine de celui-ci, plus des synchronicités

Material Agency and Performative Ontologies symposium: Sdraulig, C. (2021) ‘enfold’: Tracing networks. [Online] Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKm1xW5IXeg>> [Accessed 25 April 2023].

'magiques' ont lieu.

Il y a par ailleurs, une grande générosité dans son écriture car c'est une vraie invitation au spectateur à étendre sa perception, en l'intégrant au déroulement de l'oeuvre. C'est une posture d'autant plus importante pour moi à notre époque, où les productions artistiques sont parfois trop séduisante, intrusive et faussement participative.

CS: To date, no performer has as much experience performing my music as Gwen does—it is such a joy to make art with old, brilliant friends and deepen our practices together. Our workshops were delightful four hand piano duets in the basement of the Cité internationale des arts in Paris in late 2019. Our playing was liberally interspersed with murmured conversation due to the high amplification levels needed to test out certain techniques and develop the listening strategies Gwen has mentioned. Near the end of my residency at the Cité, Marco and Winnie then joined us for some runs to test audiences.

WH: In the final workshop session with Charlie, we presented the piece to a few people at the Cité. We were very fortunate in being able to speak with the audience members at length about their experience and that helped me better understand whether what I set out to achieve in fact worked on each of them individually.

Since this experience in Paris, I have performed this work over 80 times individually. In Manchester just a month before the international lockdown due to the pandemic in 2020, and then in Lucerne in November 2021 just as Europe was starting to completely lift all restrictions.



Figure 8 Winnie Huang rehearsing *tend* in the Clubraum KKL during Lucerne Festival Forward. Lucerne Festival/Priska Ketterer 2021.

Each experience has been unique and each experience has allowed me as a performer to create something very bespoke for that particular shared movement with the audience. We had considered safety to be very important to the audience and so after the first initial performances in Paris, we had decided to make a set of statements that were to be read to the audience before they enter the *one to one* experience. The list of statements assured the audience of their right to leave at any moment, clarified that they would not be touched, and explained the general logistics of the piece (dark room, dim lighting) so that they were mentally prepared for what they would be experiencing. As these performances were sold as a one-to-one experience in a designated time slot, the audience were generally already interested and curious, and therefore did not need so much convincing as they had already chosen to come based on the little information the festivals were providing. After the experience, each audience was also encouraged to fill in a survey with a few questions, allowing the performers (and festival managers) a good understanding of how they experienced the piece.

CS: As Winnie mentions, we take great care to ensure each audience feels welcome, informed, and safe. Typically, we have chosen not to explicitly forewarn people that the pieces are interactive for several reasons.¹⁵

First, in writing these pieces, I wanted to ensure that minimal or non-participation is always an option. If after extending a nonverbal invitation, the performer discerns that an audience does not want to engage, there are built-in contingencies to accommodate them—for instance, the performer may largely withdraw within themselves and play prepared routines. The performers never give instructions or push an audience to do anything in particular and there is no judgement from any third party.

Second, sometimes an audience with foreknowledge of how the pieces function has treated the performers as puppets or playthings. We do our utmost to treat each audience with respect by accepting and responding to their individual differences—we expect audiences to do the same. By embracing uncertainty and offering space for unpredictable interactions, the performers make themselves vulnerable—hence the extensive performance materials, preparation, support, and workshops. Consequently, just like an audience, Gwen, Marco, and Winnie also have the right to stop their pieces and leave the room at any moment.

Third, divulging everything beforehand spoils the joy of discovering emergent interactive possibilities! If all goes well, the social dynamics become highly interdependent—a performer adjusts to an audience, just as the audience adjusts to a performer and both roles become hybridised or blurred through bidirectional nonverbal exchange. I hope it is not too much of a leap to think here of analogies to quotidian social situations. We always enter situations with different backgrounds,

¹⁵ Evidently, we do not actively hide this dimension—scores, articles, trailers, etc., are publicly available.

histories, expertise, etc., as well as incomplete knowledge about one another's intentions, goals, feelings, thoughts, etc. These become clearer (if at all) over time through behavioural interactions. A good faith engagement tends to lead to more positive outcomes. Your contributions to interactions close some paths or open others—in part, this accounts for the variety of responses the pieces received in our audience surveys.

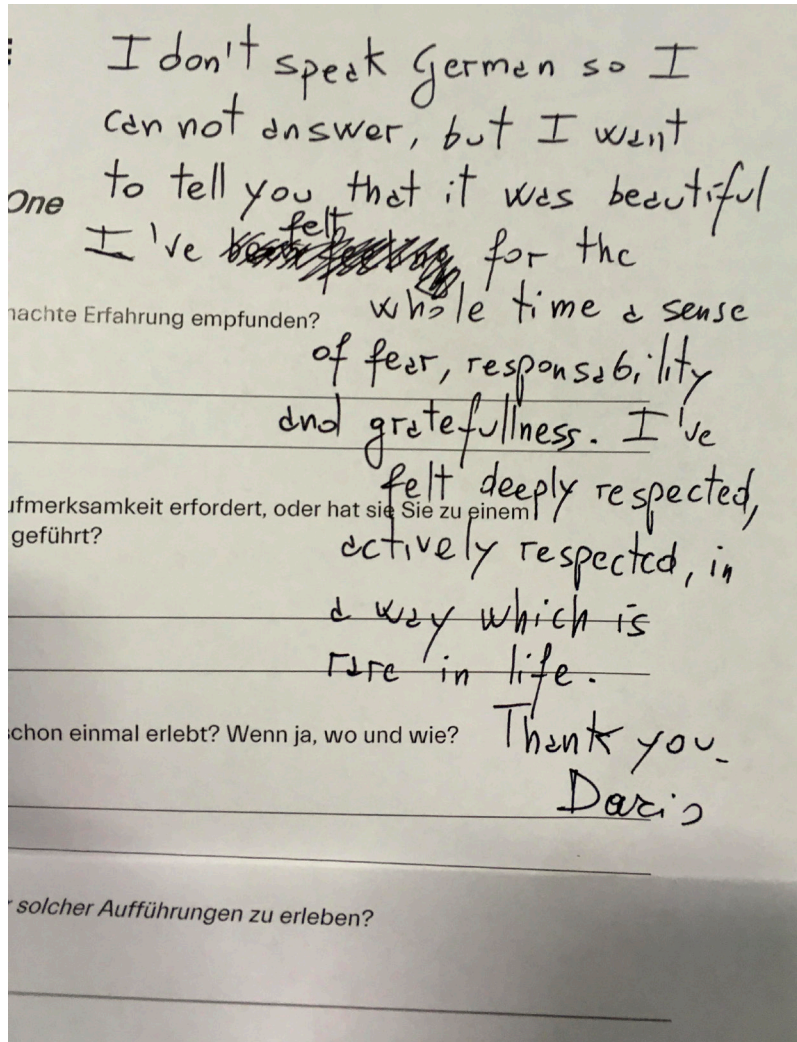


Figure 9 Survey response from Winnie Huang's performances of *tend* during Lucerne Festival Forward. Winnie Huang 2021.

WH: Yes, some audiences thought they were merely watching a show, a passive participant of a silent physical performance. Others thought they were meant to mirror exactly what I was doing, or that I was copying what they were doing. Some thought they were meant to create something alongside what I was providing. Most understood it as somewhere between all these possibilities (see Figure 9). Many participants enjoyed the shared moment, being very present with another person, a moment to slow down, breathe and be with another. Others found the shared

moment very confrontational, that eye-contact for such a duration of time (around 9-15 mins) very difficult, and that they felt they were being watched which might have been the inverse of what they thought they were attending. Most people were very engaged, curious, and mentioned in the survey that they wanted to know more about the work or that they wanted it to be longer.

For me as the performer of *tend*, I found each experience exhilarating. To me it is like a conversation, a dialogue without words. I wanted to provide a positive experience for each audience. Positive not meaning simply nice or calm. I wanted to understand what the person might have been expecting by reading their body language and challenging that within a safe zone. To provoke in a fun and curious way, and to test their expectations within a safe space. Although I would be performing for many hours on end, this was never tiring for me, in fact quite the opposite, I thrived on the energy this type of performance afforded me.

My preparation was mainly a quick review of the skeleton of the piece by leafing through the score, but most importantly reading through the notes of the score to remind myself of the overall goals and values of the piece. During the ongoing performances, my general approach never really left the goal of creating a conversation, however I felt more confident with how I was communicating with audiences after each day of performances through reading the feedback forms. It was clear through their writing that whatever energy, state, atmosphere or rather ‘temperature’ I was trying to show them, something was working very well. Although some might leave confused, it was always with a curiosity to want to experience it again or to have had more time. The positive feedback (see Figure 10) allowed me to deliver consequent performances with even more ease, ‘tending’ to the audiences with the knowledge that it was creating results within the positive spectrum I was aiming for.

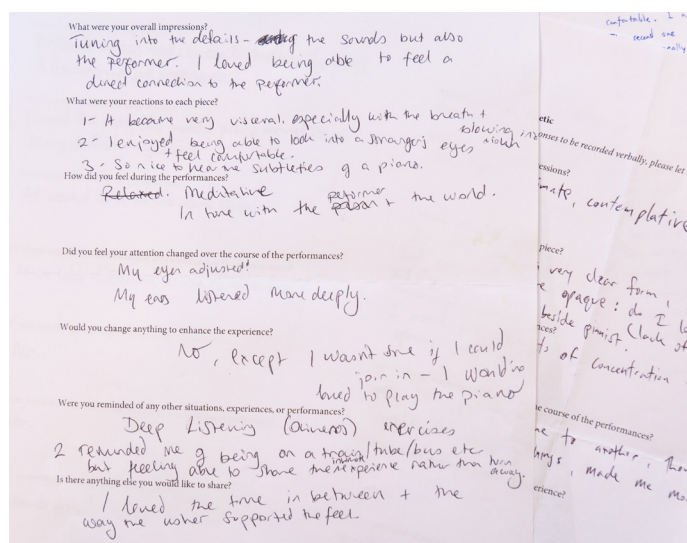


Figure 10 Survey responses following performances of the complete sequence during the Kinetic produced INTIMATE festival at Partisan in Manchester, UK. Charlie Sdraulig 2023.

I look forward greatly to the next time I can perform *tend* again. I believe it will remain a work I will perform often and an experience that will always leave a great impression on audiences around the world. It has been an incredible experience working with Charlie on this piece and a deeply human experience performing it every time.

GR: Whenever I play *enfold*, it is as if I am perpetually playing it for the first time. I need to slow down to open up to others. At the premiere, this is what I was feeling: ‘on the first day, I am sitting in the dark, facing an old, out of tune, upright piano, within a tent located in the basement of the Partisan Collective cultural centre in Manchester. In it, everything is relational. My playing depends on the instantaneous reactions of the piano, the spectator and the environment. You might as well say that everything is unknowable in advance. I am the artist who is responsible for the realisation. So, gently but deliberately, I call upon my knowledge and experience as a musician, invite the spectator to sit close to me, and I play. Over the course of the performances, I feel a slow progression from being determined to give something, to accepting that I alone can no longer know what to give. I don’t play the piano anymore; I play with it. I welcome the spectator as a partner and if they do not take up this role, I wait for them, at the risk of creating a void. There is an intense concertation of attention. Ambient sounds from the surrounding basement cease to be irritating distractions and instead become fresh impulses for my playing. *enfold* enacts an encounter which induces a transformation of beings. After three days, the final spectator leaves the tent. I cannot exit. A heightened sensitivity to the infinitesimally small has messed with my bearings and I need time. There is something powerful in these sounds, these gestures, this communication at the limits of perceptibility. Perhaps it is a fragility, which connects.’¹⁶

GR: Quand je joue enfold, c’est comme une perpétuelle première fois, dans un temps lent de l’ouverture à l’Autre. Lors de la création, voici ce que je ressentais: « Premier jour de création, je suis assise dans la pénombre, en face d’un vieux piano droit désaccordé, sous une tente placée dans le sous-sol du centre culturel Partisan Collective à Manchester. Dans celle-ci, tout est relationnel. Le jeu musical et pianistique dépend des réactions instantanées du piano, du spectateur et de l’environnement. Autant dire que tout est inconnu. Je suis l’artiste qui a la responsabilité de la prestation. Alors, avec douceur mais volontaire, je fais appel à mes acquis et mon expérience de musicienne, j’invite le spectateur à s’asseoir près de moi et je lui joue du piano. Au fil des performances, je ressens une progression lente de ma détermination à donner, vers une acceptation de ne plus être celle qui sait. Je ne joue plus du piano mais avec lui. J’accueille le spectateur comme un partenaire et si il ne prends pas ce rôle, je l’attends au risque de créer un manque. Il y a une concentration intense de réception. Les bruits de l’environnement sonore du sous-sol ne sont plus des parasites mais des impulsions pour mon jeu. Enfold impose la rencontre qui induit la transformation des êtres. Après trois jours, le dernier spectateur sort de la tente. Je ne peux pas la quitter. Une intensité accrue de l’infiniment petit a bouleversé mes repères sensoriels et j’ai besoin de temps. Il y a dans ces sons, ces

16 A version of this text first appeared in Sdraulig, *Composing social dynamics*, 63-64.

gestes, cette communication à la limite du perceptible quelque chose de puissant. Peut-être est-ce une fragilité, qui relie. »

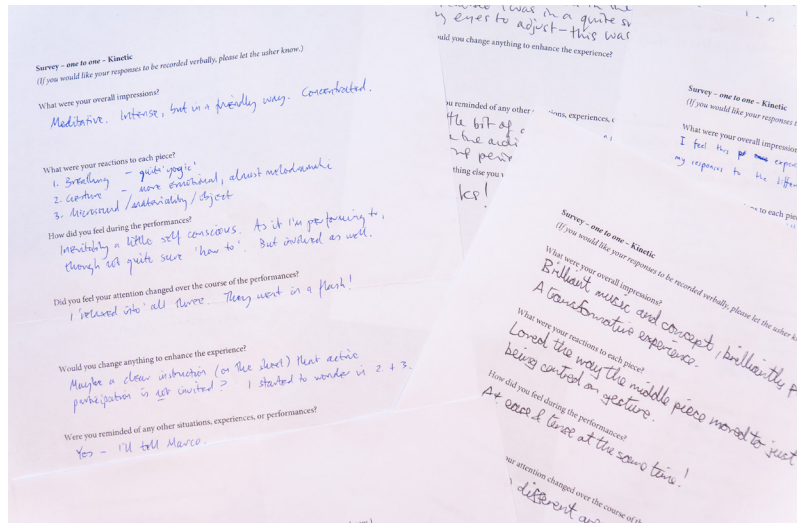


Figure 11 More survey responses following performances of the complete sequence during the Kinetic produced INTIMATE festival at Partisan in Manchester, UK. Charlie Sdraulig 2023.

MF: During my *one to one* performances I have experienced a wide variety of reactions, and a significant range of interactions with the various audience members (see Figure 10). I have discovered that my acquaintance with the audience plays an important role in the development of the performance. Friendship or familiarity with the audience allows me to establish the degree of trust and openness necessary for a good level of synchronisation very early on. Conversely, while performing to strangers, the greatest difficulty is often to assess as accurately as possible their degree of comfort throughout the performance, in relation to the space, proximity to the performer and non-orthodox sounds produced.

The musical expertise of the audience is another parameter that influences the performance. In presenting *one to one* to other musicians, I have often encountered some difficulties in diverging their attention from the technical and instrumental aspects of the performance. Their ‘professional’ listening mode makes a physical engagement much more difficult, restricting my ability to interact with their breathing cycle. At times, in order to overcome these difficulties, I often stretch the durations of each gestural unity, to satisfy their analytical and technical curiosity, and then try to profit from their subsequent drop in vigilant attention, to direct their perception towards the functional elements of the performance.

An interesting aspect of *one to one* is that, by being conceived for one audience member at the time, it is not possible for Charlie to observe performance runs, and he is therefore not able to provide external feedback and suggestions for improvements. I perceived this lack of supervision as somehow problematic, especially when playing the piece several times in a row, when performing habits and routine can start to dilute concentration and commitment. Ultimately though, looking at the suc-

cess that our performances on *one to one* (the violin piece as well as the whole cycle) encountered around the world, I believe that Charlie's confidence in the performers he worked with was a key factor. I felt that his attitude was of absolute trust towards me, and I rose to a different level of responsibility and engagement through repeated performances, becoming almost a guardian of the experience that Charlie imagined and can never fully enjoy as an innocent audient anymore. I took it upon myself to promote the works, and I (almost) believe that the intimacy that the *one to one* cycle offered to us and to our audients in 2019 was an (almost) prophetic answer to the loneliness, fear and loss of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

CS: Gwen, Marco, and Winnie put in the work and made the pieces their own. The trust we built up together was thoroughly earned. From our discussions and workshops, I knew they would be brilliant. Our debriefs after performances and the survey feedback they received merely reinforced this sense.

In the future, I can imagine extending similar approaches to small groups of performers and audience members, but I firmly believe an intimate setting is necessary for these kinds of nuanced bi- or multi-directional nonverbal dynamics to be legible. At a certain distance, minute but meaningful behaviours become imperceptible—a small shift of weight, a slight relaxation of shoulders, an eyebrow twitch, etc. With too many people involved, cognitive load or task saturation becomes an issue for the performers (i.e. too many cues to track), unless you lump people in groups or attend to only the most obvious cues; however, this can undermine the quality of interactions and lead to superficial engagements. Further mediation might open up other possibilities, but digital latency is often too high or variable (e.g. video conferencing). Nonverbal co-regulation unfolds with precision in the order of tens of milliseconds, so the 'lag' does not need to be especially high to make interactions even more effortful, awkward, and complex.¹⁷

Clearly, my collaborators and I are not pursuing a confrontational approach or attempting to engage with the entire gamut of possible behaviours. Our goals are relatively modest: to heighten quietude, engagement, and rhythmic rapport.¹⁸ Gwen, Marco, and Winnie do not consciously judge or ascribe meaning to audient behaviours beyond how they relate to these goals. As such, rather than treating each audient as a 'score', the performers embark on a genuine, good faith effort to create space for mutual connection and empathy—calm, intense co-presence, gently negotiated via quiet sounds and subtle gestures.¹⁹

17 Keller, P., Novembre, G. and Hove, M. (2014) Rhythm in joint action: psychological and neurophysiological mechanisms for real-time interpersonal coordination. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, 369(1658). See also: Sdraulig, Composing social dynamics, 74.

18 However, note that there are no upper bounds to these states—one can always be quieter, calmer, more engaged, and rhythmically connected.

19 The authors sincerely thank Jakob Bragg for his invitation and encouragement to conduct this discussion, as well as for his initial prompts and guidance. We also thank Frédéric Dufeu for his perceptive translations of Gwen Rouger's responses in French.



Dougal ‘Henry’ McPherson

listening like an improviser:
reflections on composing in the
studio with collaged acoustic
free improvisations

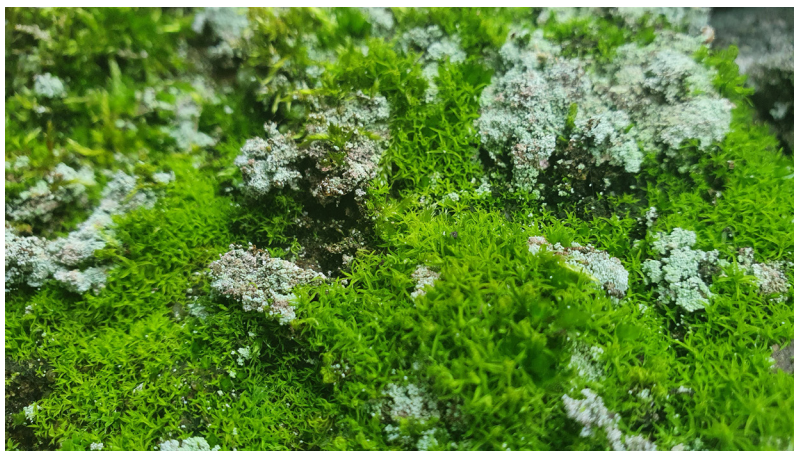


Figure 1 Local Mosses and Lichens, Barnoldswick, East Lancs. Henry McPherson 2023.

not-delineating, not-not-delineating

One day I saw [Steve Lacy] coming out of a bar on Via dei Genovesi. I took out the Philips microcassette recorder I had just bought and asked, ‘Steve, in 15 seconds, what is the difference between composition and improvisation?’ Without hesitation he answered, ‘In 15 seconds, the difference between composition and improvisation is that in composition you have all the time you want to think about what to say in 15 seconds, while in improvisation you have only 15 seconds.’ Back at home I timed his answer. It took exactly 15 seconds.¹

¹ Rzewski, F. (2009) Esteem: Steve Lacy Remembered. Point of Departure. [Online] Available at: <<http://www.pointofdeparture.org/archives/PoD-17/PoD17Esteem1.html>> [Accessed 17 May 2023].

As humorous and Kōan-like and correct as the above anecdote reads, I have offered that it is not particularly useful at this moment in time, in today's diverse global ecosystem of experimental practices, to focus on delineating improvisation and composition strictly in terms of process; numerous musical activities subvert any neat distinction, aspects of one are invariably found within the other, and the closer one looks at the praxis of either, the more manifestations of the other one will find.² At the same time, I have proposed that there are distinctions in *cultures of practice*—including ethics and aesthetics—which bear naming and considering, particularly concerning the way that different communities in Europe and North America have adopted and organised themselves around these two words. I have described *Western Instrumental Art Music* (WIAM) as representing a 'culture of composition' which privileges (and historically has privileged) a rhetoric and cisheteropatriarchal mythology of composition, and its most immediate associations, at its core;³ by contrast, I have described *Free Improvisation* as a 'culture of improvisation' which—while also entangled in cisheteropatriarchy⁴—has constructed itself around ideas of spontaneous invention, distributed creative agency, and diverse forms of co-organisation across performance practice and politics.⁵ Moving between these cultural contexts, recognising improvisational and compositional generative processes as manifesting interlockingly within both, requires identificatory and semantic flexibility, as much as skills in different ways of working and playing. It is at this cultural juncture that my practice has been wiggling for some years, and in an ongoing process of mutation, reconciliation, and hybridisation, I have been exploring the collaging of free improvisations in the (home) studio environment as a way of composing.

JB:⁶ Did you have an idea of what you were going to do at the outset?

HM:⁷ I didn't know quite what form it was going to take. Practically there's only one of me, so I can't play all my instruments at the same time. And so I knew that I was probably going to be working with

2 For extensive overview of improvisation's processual and contextual complexity, see the variety of discussions threaded through: Lewis, G.E., and Piekut, B. (Eds.). (2013) *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Improvisation Studies*, Volume 1. Oxford University Press.

3 These include: the Composer, the score-work, the manuscript, the white male genius figure, the single author, among other things. For discussion see pp. 71 – 92 in: McPherson, D.H.J. (2023) *More Than One Thing: A Practice-Led Investigation into Transdisciplinary Free Improvisation in Sound and Movement* [Doctoral Thesis]. University of Huddersfield.

4 See: McPherson, *More Than One Thing*; Reardon-Smith, H., Denson, L., and Tomlinson, V. (2020) *FEMINISTING FREE IMPROVISATION*. *Tempo*, 74(292), pp. 10–20.; Krekels, T. (2019) *Loosening the Saxophone: Entanglements of Bodies in the Politics of Free Improvisation* [Doctoral Thesis]. Reid School of Music, Edinburgh College of Art, University of Edinburgh.; Sappho Donohue, M. (2022) *The Improvisers' Cookbook* [Doctoral Thesis]. University of Huddersfield.

5 McPherson, *More Than One Thing*, 36-52.

6 Jakob Bragg.

7 Henry McPherson.

multitrack recording in some form. I didn't know the extent to which I would manipulate or edit or change things in that multitrack recording process. So, I just set out to do something. (McPherson, interviewed by Bragg, April 2023)

On the day of George Crumb's death, the 6th February 2022, I found myself sitting in my bedroom surrounded by assorted pluckable, hittable, scrapeable, blowable, vibrateable instruments and sounding objects. I had gathered them without planning what I would do with them, but certainly in response to the news of Crumb's passing. I arranged the instruments loosely in a circle around my body, seated, and positioned a mic-boom directly above my head. I then proceeded to record sixteen improvisations of varying durations, using the materials I had to hand. Moving from instrument to instrument, I didn't particularly strive to retain or recapitulate gestures or ideas from the preceding minutes. Each improvisation in that sense felt like a new beginning, each world emerging and dissipating in its own time, and with its own relations.

Moving from the bedroom into my 'home studio'—really a multipurpose office/spare room—I transferred the audio files to my computer and pulled them all into a DAW. I have always found the practices of collage and montage interesting for their capacity to vibrate the interstices between different media, ways of making, and aesthetic worlds. The cutting, splicing, and manipulating of audio into collage and montage has of course been an established creative practice in experimental music for around a century, most salient in electronic and electroacoustic music;⁸ I have previously explored collaged field recordings myself as an exercise in queer aurality⁹ and also as a method of a-chronologically documenting an artistic residency at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity in 2018.¹⁰ My intention in the DAW on the day of Crumb's death was not to do anything in particular, but to layer and make neighbourly these improvisations,¹¹ to see what would happen, in the most basic experimental sense.

Working closely with this improvised material drew me into an interesting flow of work; I found myself responding to emergent sounds of the audio tracks as if performing—that is, listening like an improviser—attending to the fluctuations and movements of sounds as they occurred, holding psychoacoustic space for all their diversions, meanderings, interruptions, and inconsistencies. Rather than

8 For overview, see: McLeod, K., and DiCola, P. (2011) A Legal and Cultural History of Sound Collage. In *Creative License: The Law and Culture of Digital Sampling*. Duke University Press.

9 McPherson, H. (2019) *Colagens//Collages*. [Online] Available at: <<https://www.henry-mcpherson.org.uk/creations/colagens%2F%2Fcollages>>

10 McPherson, H. (2018). *Smoke (fire), Voice, Mountain*. [Online] Available at: <[https://www.henrymcpherson.org.uk/creations/smoke%2C-\(fire\)%2C-voice%2C-mountain](https://www.henrymcpherson.org.uk/creations/smoke%2C-(fire)%2C-voice%2C-mountain)>

11 The word collage implies adhering, sticking—from the French *Coller*, to glue—and practically also conjures the idea of cutting, layering, and arranging, as in visual collage. Montage, nuanced more directly in terms of 'putting together' or 'placing together', implies proximity and the lateral, neighbourly positioning of materials.

starting from thinking forward or backwards along the horizontal timeline, towards future or past gestures or forms, and subsequently arranging material to suit a predetermined or developing aesthetic inclination, I found myself focused more on the moving present, on the emergent shape of sounds sliding over and under each other at the playback line. A mode of listening I was used to in practice, it surprised me in the studio environment, and gave me pause for reflection upon the ways that an improvisational ethic of listening, which I have learned from the community of free improvisers in which I practice, might afford my composing. My experiments would ultimately become the ‘fixing’ of sounds into three unchanging audio documents, later to be titled *Noise at the death of one beloved* (2022),¹² *String Quartet (in memoriam Béla Bartók)* (2022),¹³ and *Moss Gardens No.1* (2022)¹⁴ (hereafter, for the sake of brevity, ‘Noise’, ‘String Quartet’, and ‘MG1’). Each one of these documents was produced in approximately three hours. *Moss Gardens No.1* has also been subsequently transcribed, and now has a sibling in notation.

an ethic of listening



Figure 2 Home Studio, Woodwind Storage. Henry McPherson 2023.

Free Improvisation (hereafter FI) is diverse in its sonic structures, aesthetic propositions, and performative strategies. Thought-through the ‘metaphorology’ of mycorrhizal networks by Maria Sappho Donohue, who relates its processes of community-organisation and collaboration to obscure, dark, underground, branch-

12 McPherson, H. (2022). *Noise at the death of one beloved*. [Online] Available at: <<https://www.henrymcpherson.org.uk/creations/noise-at-the-death-of-one-beloved>>

13 McPherson, H. (2022). *String Quartet (in memoriam Béla Bartók)*. [Online] Available at: <[https://www.henrymcpherson.org.uk/creations/string-quartet-\(in-memoriam-b%C3%A9la-bart%C3%B3k\)](https://www.henrymcpherson.org.uk/creations/string-quartet-(in-memoriam-b%C3%A9la-bart%C3%B3k))>

14 McPherson, H. (2022). *Moss Gardens No.1*. [Online] Available at: <<https://www.henrymcpherson.org.uk/creations/moss-gardens>>

ing, tentacular fungal entities,¹⁵ FI regularly eschews concrete definition and is too reductively summarised as simply an a-stylistic politic of music-making. I would describe FI, with respect for its polymorphism, as a culture of practice subtended by a transnational artistic ethic of freeing and freeness in multiple forms, at once transgressing and encompassing genre, community, age, experience, and language. Notably, it fosters in its performers a flexibility and capacity for agile movement (and agile listening) across hierarchical distinctions (‘good’ sound, ‘bad’ sound, virtuosic sound, harmonic sound, genre sound, queer sound, boring sound, skilful sound), and between pluralistic states of making and playing on collective ground. Improvisers cohabit a shared space in generative, performative world-making,¹⁶ spinning out interactions between multiple agencies (as many as there are improvisers, and often more) which are treated, felt, and worked-with as vibrantly co-present and always co-relational. Critically and practically, for listening and composing, this practising of generative co-relation engenders a pragmatic *acceptance* of emergent sounds and sounders exactly as they are present, in their immediately present forms, trajectories, and relations. This orients improvisers towards the holding of space for things that are, at the moment that they are, in the ways that they are as individual things and are with others. As I outlined in my doctoral thesis in the essay subtitled *Improvising Without Resistance*, this principle (perhaps even skill) of *acceptance*...

is the bringing together of the state of receptivity with a conscious acknowledgment of the condition of things [i.e. sounds] directly ‘as they are’; an engagement with the precise contingencies and emergences of improvising in context [...] with the whole potentiality of the immediate improvisational world as it unfolds, including the physical environment, human collaborators, objects, or instruments, conceptual or disciplinary framing, motivations, aesthetic forms or sensibilities etc., *without resistance to the presence, fact, or happening of any of these things.*¹⁷

This way of listening—which is really, I think, an ethic of listening—is also cultivated, on varying types of ground, in the work of John Cage, and vividly in the *Deep Listening* methodology of Pauline Oliveros.¹⁸ The teachings of these artists are known for inviting listeners (performing, not-performing) to reimagine received ontological categories—noise, sound, silence, music, others, self—not only in the

15 Donohue, *The Improvisers’ Cookbook*.

16 McPherson, D.H.J. (2021) *Spinning out world after world: Considering transdisciplinary free improvisation as a practice of performative worlding*. ReCePP/CMCI Research Colloquium, University of Huddersfield.

17 McPherson, *More Than One Thing*, 179. For the avoidance of doubt, I clarify that this ‘openness and non-resistance does not preclude the existence of (aesthetic or otherwise) judgement, ego, or processes of evaluation. [It is] not concomitant with the suppression of judgement, but rather [is] an acknowledgement of and direct engagement with actuality’ (p. 180).

18 The Center For Deep Listening. (n.d.) *About The Center For Deep Listening*. [Online] Available at: <<https://www.deeplisting.rpi.edu/about-us/>> [Accessed 2 July 2023].

flattening of hierarchical sonic and otherwise aesthetic relations or concepts (which on its own is akin to denying or ignoring, and in that guise not so useful), but ultimately in encouraging *movement* between and across them. Listening and moving across these categories requires mutative capacity as much as non-prejudicial, direct engagement with sounds ‘as they are’. In my studio experiments, this kind of agile, accepting, moving, mutative listening—which I have learned most acutely in improvising—shapes my approach to working with audio material, and has different cultural roots to the habitual, notation-centric compositional workflows in which I have been historically embedded. In the studio context:

Listening like an improviser

is responsive, spontaneous play with the emergent interactions of materials.

is accepting the in- and inter-dependent autonomy of (even recorded) sounds.

is practising agile aurality, seeking mutable points of sonic contact.

is hearing and enjoying coalescence and dissipation without pushing for either.

is valuing the presence of partial aspects, half forms, and incomplete utterances.

is moving and choosing with urgency in iterative, momentary response.

is staying with the changes (when changing, and being changed).

is not prioritising how to begin, or how to end.

respect for sonic agencies

HM: It was playful, really playful actually. [...] something I bring from the improvising culture into this kind of practice was a real openness to whatever kind of sounds were coming out. So, I wasn’t necessarily looking for, like, ‘something high and squeaky at this point’. Maybe sometimes as an initial idea, but beyond that it was more like—‘what is this? Okay so what is this one doing now? Oh, it’s moved into this. Oh, there’s been a crack or a squeak, and it’s changed register. Oh, now it’s stopped. Okay, well that’s fine. That’s what it has done.’ It was like this

bizarre respect for the recording as it had been made, that then I wasn't planning on manipulating or changing. (McPherson, interviewed by Bragg, April 2023)

While working on *Noise*, *String Quartet*, and *MG1*, I found stimulating interplay between my own agency in making choices, and the agency of sounds in interacting on their own; despite my being alone in the studio, this interplay paralleled models of intersubjectivity and co-generative processes more readily considered in live human-to-human or group improvisational contexts.¹⁹ After importing audio files, my usual method was to pull everything to the starting point on the timeline and then sit and listen. Concentrating on the direction of a single track or a couple of tracks in their gestures, textures, and particularly changes or points of transition, I would keep my focus open to their relationship with other co-sounds, asking myself reiteratively 'what is happening?'. This beguilingly simple question, which I have used in text-score form in improvisation teaching within Higher Education Institution contexts,²⁰ isn't grounded in a future-projecting authorial inclination, desire, image (etc.), but instead centres presentness and present relations. I enjoy treating 'what is happening?' as a question not only at the beginning of a process, but continuously, as a mental anchor which brings my attention back to the immediate, emergent interactivity of sounds. The answer to 'what is happening?', within the urgent responsibilities of live improvised performance, often manifests in action rather than reflection or anything more than momentary analytical thinking (for which there often isn't time). In the studio, I tried to maintain this sense of urgency; the actions that resulted were rapid cutting, splicing, muting, unmuting, deleting, shifting focus, and doing nothing, in response to the mutations and changes of the audio. Working in this way is not an exercise in absconding from choices or authorial decisions, or leaving things to chance. However, the nuance of how choice and control are handled is important. Where Vicki Bennett is quoted in McLeod and DiCola as expressing that, in editing 'I like the idea that I'm in control of various elements, putting them together in a way that I don't think they have gone together before',²¹ in my collage/montage experiments, choices are rooted in an FI methodology where the decision to move a clip, to thin out a texture, to mute different tracks, or to cut a clip at a given point, is led directly and *viscerally* by my attention to emergent sonic interactions in the unfolding moment, treated as co-generators of the soundscape. This results in the creation of unexpected, unhabituated shapes

19 See: MacDonald, R.A.R., and Wilson, G.B. (2020) *The art of becoming: How group improvisation works*. Oxford University Press; Canonne, C., and Garnier, N. (2011) *A Model for Collective Free Improvisation*. In Agon, C., Andreatta, M., Assayag, G., Amiot, E., Bresson, J., and Mandereau, J. (Eds.) (2011) *Mathematics and Computation in Music* (Vol. 6726). Springer Berlin Heidelberg, pp. 29–41.

20 McPherson, H. (2022) *This, Here, Now: Invitations to Improvise*. Self-Published.

21 Vicki Bennett. quoted in McLeod and DiCola, *A Legal and Cultural History of Sound Collage*, 41.

and sonic assemblages, but is not driven by a construction-oriented approach. As a practitioner whose improvised performance practice is intimately entangled with kinetic and somatic sensibilities,²² this activity is also actioned in a practiced embodied, corporeal responsivity to and reciprocity with sounds.

HM: So, as I'm listening to, say, the clarinet track, I almost feel in my body what I would do at that point if I were playing along. So then [I might] shunt another piece of audio underneath, and see if it lines up in a way which gives that kind of sense, which is a compositional idea, I suppose. But then often it didn't, and I would just be like 'yeah, cool. That's fun. I like the way that sounds. That's created an interesting texture or that's changed something in an unusual way.' What I found is that it started to take me out of my habits a little bit. So, I wasn't just thinking 'okay well I'd like to have a line going over the top here, and then, and then, and then...'. I couldn't think that way, because a track might do something for a few seconds, but then it would change and do something else. [The] improvising was constantly moving forward. So, it produced [...] lots of shifting textures, changing forms. And even though I played them all, I felt like I didn't have control over them. [...] I was just working with the material and seeing what would happen if I put things on top of each other. (McPherson, interviewed by Bragg, April 2023)

Accepting the in- and inter-dependent changes of the audio tracks, even when contradictory to my compositional habitus, is fundamental to this way of working. As I commented to Jakob Bragg across an afternoon of conversation in April 2023, often a clip would start in a particular way, or inhabit a particular sonic space for a time, but then move to something else rapidly, such that it wasn't possible to artificially create (compose) a given relationality between two tracks for longer than the tracks themselves permitted. The resultant interactivity of the sounds was unpredictable and uncontrollable. I started to hear these sounds as independent agencies, despite the fact that I could, at any moment, chop one into bits if I wanted. But this kind of violence was tempered with responsibility towards what I was hearing as in- and inter-dependently intermingling voices. As I reflected to Jakob—'they interacted on their own. I didn't need to worry about it too much.' I write 'responsibility' very seriously, because accepting the in- and inter-dependent agency of sounds brings with it also *respect* for sounds as emergent entities. Within

22 I reflect, on my own practice, that 'as I move to sound on an instrument, so my sounding reverberates back into the moving body via points of contact with it [...] in turn conditioning the body's motion in a cycle of vibrational feedback. Attentive to the physicality of sounding as felt across my skin and muscles [...] I allow myself to travel within this cycle; sound vibrates into movement vibrates into sound. Experientially, the two aspects converge so intimately that in the moment of performing, I am hard-pressed to identify definitively and consistently where one impulse begins and the other ends.' McPherson, *More Than One Thing*, 156.

this ethic of listening, the way that the sounds *are* is the way in which I (have to) meet them to work with them. Although bringing sounds into the DAW is in itself arguably an act of manipulation which lays ground for subsequent manipulation, I tried to uphold restraint (and respect) by avoiding changing the sounds beyond the cutting and moving clips, and the applying of master level reverb/EQ when mixing. I broke this guidance once, in *Noise*, by pitch- and time-shifting a passage of percussive material (because I enjoyed the sound).

parts and wholes

Improvisation suggests freedom which can be heard in particular in the rhythmic embodiment of the music. More constraints and ‘togetherness’ of an ensemble may indicate composition, while a higher degree of entropy could signal improvisation. This cue is more easily extracted from performances with several instruments [...] When played from notation, the ensemble will sound more together, whereas during the improvisation the rhythms are more freely executed.²³

While I would argue that the above implies some collectively understood sense of ‘togetherness’, the interplay between entropy and coalescence which the authors point to is a stimulating aesthetic threshold at which to experiment in collage and montage (as well as more generally in performance, improvised or otherwise). Collage and montage, as methods and as art-works, invite focus at seams or planes of contact, which might also be sites of friction, adherence, slippage, commonality, or exchange; but they also invite focus on the relationality between objects in their different ways of constituting wholeness—their coming together *as* different collages/montages. There is a kind of coherence in both processes which emerges in the simple fact of materials being put, arranged, and held together—composed and com-prehended—not only in the inherence of materials or material content as exhibiting common forms of togetherness (synchronicity in points of attack, dynamism, texture, etc.). The flattening of sound collages into fixed audio documents reinforces a sense of ontological wholeness, while the audible tensions in coalescence and entropy between the tracks might destabilise a sense of rigidly composed or constructed relations. This can signal (tantalisingly), as Lehmann and Kopiez suggest, something more improvisational; for me, this implies something urgent, vibrant, playful, unstable, and mutating. ‘What interests me’, I reflect to Jakob,

HM: is that you do get this sense of convergence in the piece[s], even though the individual audio tracks were recorded absolutely separately. And with all credit to myself and my skills as a musician [laughs], I don’t

23 Lehmann, A.C., and Kopiez, R. (2010) The difficulty of discerning between composed and improvised music. *Musicae Scientiae*, 14(2_suppl), pp. 113–129.

remember what I've done in the previous improvisation [laughs again]. I don't remember like 'oh I had a nice big downbeat at 4m50s.' So, there wasn't something that specific to lean on. It was just interesting to bring things together. That's why I think of the [String Quartet], maybe all of them, as a kind of collage. That's part of the process.

JB: How do you think about the unfolding of line within your work? For me, when I listened to these three works, it's incredibly apparent—the sense of line, of melody, of movement, of forward momentum. And the idea of development, even in a very traditional idea of line, is that something that was very conscious when you were creating these works?

HM: So, if I'm playing a gig as an improviser, I'm expecting to be playing—riding the moment. So, you're always just at the point that the sound is emerging all the time. And in that sense, you're only ever moving forward. You're not going anywhere else, you can't go back [laughs]! At the same time, you're carrying the memory of everything that's just happened with you, and you're kind of anticipating what's going to come ahead. But if you think about that too much, then you get stuck. [...] The idea of independent lines converging to produce something that's a little bit more vertical over time. [The] string quartet is a good example of that because you have essentially independent moving lines doing their own thing a lot of the time, but producing a cohesive soundscape, and rarely do they come together or sort of coalesce into something that's [...] vertical. But they do sometimes [laughs]. (McPherson, interviewed by Bragg, April 2023)

'But they do sometimes'—listening improvisationally at the emergent moment and responding in the studio to the changes in the different audio tracks, I was challenged to avoid thinking overbearingly about directions and structure (either vertically or horizontally).²⁴ Instead, my attention had to shift flexibly in the space between global and local, focused on sounds and their immediate memory, without projecting too far into the future. In all three pieces, I took slightly different approaches to reinforcing or highlighting coalescences. In *MG1*, for example, aided by the visuality of the DAW, I remember choosing to synchronise the start of several clips in which the harp and recorder appeared to play some strong attacks together. From these moments, as expected, attack synchronicity invariably diverged, but occasionally would come close again. My decision was not to obstruct this—to push them into convergence by manipulating them back into synchronicity through time-stretching (etc.), or seeking subsequent synchronicity—but to let them move forward as they were. In *Noise*, I was even less direct, generally letting tracks fall into the collage at the position they were 'dropped' into the timeline. When I

24 In his *Listener's Guide to Free Improvisation* John Corbett subtitles his section on structure as 'the butcher shop'. Corbett, J. (2016) *A Listener's Guide to Free Improvisation*. University of Chicago Press.

did choose to move, cut, or position them more exactly, I focused on their textural relationship (at the point of listening), rather than on points of attack. In *String Quartet* – the only collage in which, during five minutes of one section, I recorded improvisations while listening to tracks that I had recorded—again I allowed synchronicities to come and go, often leaving clips to run uncut for over eight minutes at a time, before making any alterations. The resultant soundscapes are varied in their expressions and dynamics of simultaneity, incongruity, consensus, and dispute.

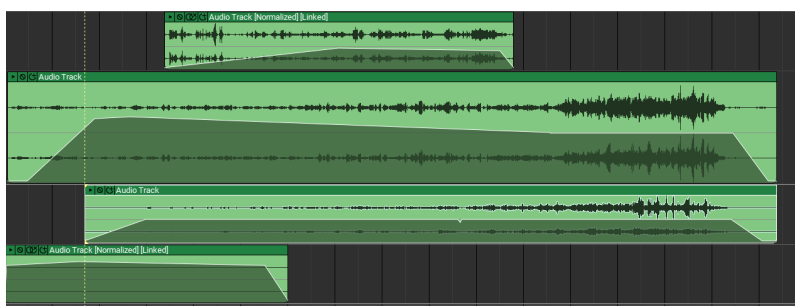


Figure 3 DAW Capture, String Quartet (in memoriam Béla Bartók), III, ‘Glistening (like an ocean under starlight, or a sheet of glass)’. Henry McPherson 2023.

I wrote earlier that ‘listening like an improviser is hearing and enjoying coalescence and dissipation *without pushing for either*.’ This idea emerges from my experience of large group improvisations (of 10+ people) in which players navigate a shifting field of sonic interplay, coming together, and pulling apart, while recognising that their activity forms part of a larger unfolding entity (the improvisation) encompassing all of this dynamism. Within the intersubjectivity of group improvisational practice²⁵, comprising the plural agencies and agendas of multiple performers, ‘pushing’ for coalescence, or indeed for dissipation, might elicit the desired response, but it equally might not. What is more practical is to engage with occurrences of both with flexibility and openness in listening, recognising their importance and co-presence as part of the improvisation as a whole, and playing accordingly. Listeners in this context find themselves within a developing and changing sonic environment—a phenomenon I have articulated as an ‘improvisational world’—which can be travelled through, engaged with in parts and partials, as well as in terms of relative wholeness. Listening within an improvisational world involves shifting focus between and across different activities, sonic objects, and emergent structures. Some worlds might exhibit greater or lesser degrees of convergence, greater or lesser degrees of reference or familiarity in their constituent elements. However, in the activity of their being spun into being (through the activity of the improvisers), improvisational worlds enact and invent their own ‘way of proceeding’,²⁶ as aesthetic and ‘epistemological engines’ which are mechanisms ‘for

25 MacDonald and Wilson, *The art of becoming*.

26 Sparti, D. (2014) *On the Edge: A Frame of Analysis for Improvisation*. In Lewis, G.E., and

the generation and exhibition of knowledge about [themselves] as a totality'.²⁷ They exhibit both the content (the sounds) and the context (the rules of sonic interaction, the permissibility of different kinds of sounding, the expressions of different kinds of sociality) of themselves as enacted by the emergent activity of the improvisers.²⁸ Each one is different, emerging from a distinct context, place, and time. In similar fashion, I view individual sonic collages as exhibiting the content and the listening contexts for themselves; moving only ever forward in time, the interactivity of diverse and ostensibly incoherent elements (parts) within the collage (as a form of wholeness) is generative of its own requirements and its own terms for listening. In the studio, respecting this self-governance, as I would in live improvisation, means listening closely to learn (in each world) when I am being invited to edit, and when it is best to leave things be.

residual tensions

Thinking about how Giacinto Scelsi 'tape-recorded and subsequently edited his transcribed instrumental improvisations, thereby causing controversy among critics who even considered his method compositional fraud.'²⁹ Wondering about the mechanisms of power (economic, cultural, social, aesthetic) by which the repeatable composed work, incarnate in the work-score, remains a foundational object within the mythology of Eurocentric compositional practice (and what this means).

Thinking about how in order for *MG1* to qualify for submission to a call-for-works, I had to create a score, which took nearly ten times as long as recording and collaging the audio, and which only approximates pitch, duration, and rhythmic relationships. Wondering about my motivation for wanting to make a score for the call—was it economically driven? Dissemination or visibility focussed? Seeking repeatable performance? Testing my transcription and aural skills? (The piece was not selected).

Thinking about how I'm not sure whether this amounts to 'fraud' or not,³⁰ or whether I'm interested in theorising a framework for legitimacy which risks improvisations' at times precarious validity within WIAM, and which brings it reiterative-

Piekut, B. (Eds.) (2014) *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Improvisation Studies* (Vol. 1). Oxford University Press, pp. 182–199.

27 Hayot, E. (2016). *On literary worlds*. Oxford University Press, p. 50.

28 McPherson, *More Than One Thing*, 143–152.

29 Lehmann and Kopiez, *The difficulty of discerning between composed and improvised music*, 113–129.

30 It is interesting to note that Canonne also chooses to discuss the ontology of improvisation in relation to fraud and forgery. Canonne, C. (2018) *Listening to Improvisation*. *Empirical Musicology Review*, 13(1–2), Article 1–2.

ly³¹ into a comparative and tacitly evaluative relationship with composition-as-process.

Thinking about the anecdote I heard from a friend concerning an improvising collective who titled their group recordings as ‘compositions’ to secure grant-funding, about how ten out of the thirteen tracks on Anthony Braxton’s paradigmatic *Alto Saxophone Improvisations* (1979) are titled ‘compositions’, and about Lewis and Piekut’s summary of tropes in improvisational literature, which include ‘masking’ and a ‘reluctance actually to use the term improvisation in discussions of the practice’.³²

Thinking about the inherent economic considerations of adopting different compositional or creative methodologies, how decisions in any direction suggest different communities and contexts within which works might have currency (experimental musicians, contemporary classical concert music performers and audiences, avid album listeners and critics, improvisers, Spotify algorithms, etc.), and how to continually navigate creating a portfolio of work with many different strands.

Thinking about whether scorification clouds the spirit of works created in an imbued with the ethics of improvisation, or whether I can stop panicking and consider it as either: a means to an end; or just a tentacle of a many-appendaged creation.

Thinking about how much I enjoyed creating these works.

31 As in: Sparti, On the edge; Buckwalter, M. (2010) *Composing while dancing: An improviser’s companion*. University of Wisconsin Press; Foster, S.L. (2003) *Taken by Surprise: Improvisation in Dance and Mind*. In Albright, A.C., and Gere, D. (Eds.) (2003) *Taken by Surprise: A Dance Improvisation Reader*. Wesleyan University Press, pp. 3–10.; and others.

32 Lewis, G., and Piekut, B. (2016) Introduction: On Critical Improvisation studies. In Lewis, G., & Piekut, B. (Eds.) (2016) *The Oxford handbook of critical improvisation studies*. Oxford University Press, pp.4–5.





Poster of a post encountered by Coppergate street in York posted to a metallic post with a red band. Colin Frank 2023.



Poster of a post found in the Stonehenge visitor centre's parking lot posted to a black and gold post. Colin Frank 2023.



Poster of a post encountered at nighttime nearby the Tate Modern in London posted to a blue post. Colin Frank 2023.



Poster of a rising post found near the Cardiff Castle posted to a metallic post. Colin Frank 2023.

Anthony J. Stillabower

tau(gh)t [warp // (foam)] transmissions

Describing a sound can be difficult.¹ In my own listening and playing I practice cultivating a focus on uncertainty and undecidability. On a simplified spectrum, from static to turbulent, these ideas can be found in tension somewhere near the middle—a metastable state. Admittedly, this description leaves quite a lot to the imagination. Rightfully so. My current hearing is directed towards the no-input mixing board practice of Toshimaru Nakamura, the kinetic sculptures of Marianthi Papalexandri-Alexandri & Pe Lang, ‘surfing the waves’ with Pierre Alexandre Tremblay, the OCCAM cycle of Éliane Radigue, the ‘continuum’ in the scores of Julio Estrada, and the idiotic practice of my own voice. These practitioners and processes offer inspiring perspectives on a question that has been a phantasm in sharing my music: ‘How can *these sounds* be transmitted?’—through exploring analogue, mechanical, digital, oral, imaginary, symbolic and embodied approaches, these various paths of musicking² have offered a rich atlas for navigating this point of departure in my own musical-artistic practice.

how did I get here

listening.

In *The Musical Ear: Oral Tradition in the USA*, Anne Dhu McLucas claims ‘US society might rank as one of the most saturated environments for listening to music ever known’, and goes on to ask about our relationship to these ‘saturated environments’. ‘Which of these kinds of music do we remember; what kinds of music are

1 Dack, J. (2001) At the limits of Schaeffer’s TARTYP. [Online] Available at: <<https://www.dmu.ac.uk/documents/technology-documents/research/mtirc/nowalls/mww-dack.pdf>> [Accessed 31 January 2023].

2 Small, C. (1998) *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Wesleyan University Press.

meaningful? Is listening to all of this music a form of musicality or not?³ For myself, this critical inquiry into gathering is a necessary aspect to growing and nurturing my music. What am I listening for? The short answer, I have no idea (and I'm glad for this, to be clear...), I just know when I hear it! With that in mind, I definitely notice that certain music keeps popping up on my streaming algorithm—and that listening continues to be a meaningful way to remember, a buoyant cultivation of my imagination.

playing.

How do I extend this imagination? Make music with it through my own body? Referencing the Dack article above, I could describe my vocal practice as a focus on *eccentric, continuous, iterative accumulation*—and sometimes it's important that I do. Here, I will poke around in the dark with generalisations that orient towards, and come out of, memory images I associate with particular listening experiences: extreme metal band Ulcerate (*consistency*), opera composer Beat Furrer (*diversity*), and electronic music duo Autechre (*detail*). For me, questions that are fuelled by this imaginary tension between *consistency*, *diversity* and *detail* include: 'What are the limits of these images in my own listening/playing?', 'How can I create a dynamism, a flux of undecidability, in my extension of these memories?', and most generally, 'What do I want to hear?'. Through playing, I explore questions like these with vocal resonance, various methods of physical inclination in my vocal apparatus, and focusing on a metastable intersection between the discrete resonances that results through these inclinations. '...the idiot has no clear goal [...] The importance is in the cut. From there we can all draw our own conclusions.'⁴

sharing can be difficult

Having traced a singular (potentially impenetrable) trajectory that I take as an improviser—what can be said about sharing? In other words, 'How can *these sounds* be transmitted?' Exploring this multicursal question through models of inscription, methods of conversion and how a musician can navigate these, one approach is to bring together diverse rationales, techniques, practices, and inventions.⁵ What happens?

3 McLucas, A. (2010) *The Musical Ear*. Routledge, p. 128.

4 Brassier, R., Guionnet, J., Murayama, S., and Mattin. (2010) *Idioms and Idiots*, p. 14. [Online] Available at: <https://www.jeanlucguionnet.eu/IMG/pdf/IDIOMS_AND_IDIOTS.pdf> [Accessed 31 January 2023].

5 Barry, A., and Born, G. (2013) *Interdisciplinarity: reconfigurations of Social and Natural Sciences*. Routledge, pp. 1-56.

access.

*...cultural manners distinguish us, cultivating ways brings us closer.*⁶

Representation, as a choice and as a barrier, can be valuable in cultivating intention for creating musical ideas with others. Navigating this tension between sharing and intention has been mediated through various models of material, symbolic, signal, and digital inscriptions.⁷ Engaging these models, with the imagination I have developed from listening and playing, orient my current meandering through the ideals of representation towards the value of fluency. ‘*These* are the models I feel like I have access to, some fluency in, that could possibly represent ideas I intend to share.’ However, not all musicians (who may want to create together) have the same fluencies. ‘Scores now resemble maps, with trajectories and different *ad hoc* symbols, needing an explanatory key that depends on the needs of the performance and the habits of the composer.’⁸ So, how can these various models—my own and others—be intertwined? How do the intentions change?

saturation.

*...for who isn't aware that several terms are used, here and there, to designate the same fish and a single word, there and here, for several varieties of wild animal? [...] Do they hamper the gardeners, sailors, miners or hunters of every country in the world?*⁹

Diverse backgrounds. Diverse methods. The methods I have explored in my musicking, for the conversion of various inscriptions—transcription, translation, interpretation, and transduction—while by no means exhaustive, offer a frame of possibilities to navigate representational fluencies. Using intentionally open descriptors of ‘text’ (i.e. symbolic) and ‘energy’ (i.e. signal), these four methods can organise the following network:

Transcription (energy to text)

Translation (text to text)

Interpretation (text to energy)

Transduction¹⁰ (energy to energy)

6 Serres, M. (2001) *Hominescence*. Editions Le Pommier, p. 77.

7 Magnusson, T. (2019) *Sonic Writing*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

8 Coessens, K. (2013) *Sound and Score*. Leuven University Press, p. 125.

9 Serres, M. (2003) *The Incandescent*. Editions Le Pommier, p. 217.

10 Helmreich, S. (2014) *Transduction*. [Online] Available at: <<https://anthropology.mit.edu/>>

Each of these have a variety of living traditions with their own limits, and navigating between them is an involved, complex, process. Here is a brief overview of practitioners that have been twine in my own maze:

****Éliane Radigue****

Becoming well known for the OCCAM cycle, ‘an ecosystem, a complex of musical ideas, forms, and images’¹¹ that has also been labelled an ‘experimental process’,¹² and a ‘classical language’,¹³ Éliane Radigue is the conduit, through the means of oral transmission (a terminology some of the collaborators find problematic¹⁴), of an idiosyncratic sound practice initially cultivated by Éliane with synthesisers and feedback.

What we try to capture is this play inside of the sound, which is in fact never quite the same, nor is it ever altogether different [...] It would be deadening wanting to annotate them once and for all. That would cut the music off from its ongoing process of maturation.¹⁵

From this originary transmission, to an atlas of notes, diagrams, recordings, and other memory inscriptions developed through the creation and rehearsal process, musicians involved in OCCAM engage in an alchemical, and bespoke, net of transcriptions, translations, interpretations and transductions to arrive at their distinctive (potentially ever-changing) iteration of OCCAM.

Despite the absence of written scores in Radigue’s work, many of her collaborators (as well as the composer herself) make notes and audio recordings during their creative sessions. But both Radigue and the performers with whom she works seem reluctant to call this documentation anything but an aid in collaboration.¹⁶

This practice is further guided by specific memory images, related to water, that serve as the primary score material. ‘In my electronic music, too, I often used

sites/default/files/documents/helmreich_transduction.pdf> [Accessed 31 January 2023].

11 Sound American. (n.d.) Nate Wooley. [Online] Available at: <<https://soundamerican.org/issues/occam-ocean/fading>> [Accessed 31 January 2023].

12 Sound American. (n.d.) Charles Curtis. [Online] Available at: <<https://soundamerican.org/issues/occam-ocean/unified-sounding-body>> [Accessed 31 January 2023].

13 Sound American. (n.d.) Catherine Lamb. [Online] Available at: <<https://soundamerican.org/issues/occam-ocean/infinite-becoming>> [Accessed 31 January 2023].

14 Sound American. Nate Wooley.

15 Eckhardt, J. (2019) *Intermediary Spaces*. Umland Editions.

16 Nickel, Luke. (2016) *Occam Notions: Collaboration and the Performer’s Perspective in Éliane Radigue’s ‘Occam Ocean’*. *Tempo* 70(275), pp. 22-35.

images in the guise of a notation, whether in my head or in drawings...¹⁷ These inscriptions, conversions and memory images transmit an invitation to Radigue's collaborators on the potential 'transmutation'¹⁸ of the represented musical ideals. Where does this transmutation lead? When is it no longer an 'OCCAM'?

Julio Estrada

Estrada mines the potential of representing his 'musical imaginary' through an idiosyncratic process of transcription, from a 'chrono-graphical recording', into music notation for musicians to interpret.

The musical imaginary can be understood as a private inner world, consisting of intuitions, impulses, free associations, internal representations, memory, fantasies, or reverie-induced aural perceptions. The imaginary can be translated into music through a chrono-graphical recording method that utilizes a precise drawing process similar to a sound recording procedure, in which the musical matter is broken up into numerous chrono-acoustic categories.¹⁹

Through this process, there is a striving to represent what he considers a 'continuum of rhythm and sound' as part of a 'macro-timbre':

In opposition to the preconceived structures usually employed in musical languages—or even in some technological systems—it is necessary to put more emphasis on the inherent richness of auditory phenomena. In addition to the previous physical components, the presence of a three-dimensional space for musical performance can be considered part of the macro-timbre. [...] Within the extension of any one of the dimensions of the macro-timbre, a reference scale can be defined with a high degree of resolution that approaches a continuum.²⁰

He went on to develop this in a computer music tool—"The main purpose of the *eua'oolin* system is to produce a computer-printed score resulting from the automatic transcription of three-dimensional trajectories."²¹ This distinctive method of representing a continuum (aural and physical) in symbolic inscriptions, through conversions of transcription and translation (which I would like to note, if one reads his process closely, we use these terms differently...), enriches the tension of choice in Estrada's compositional practice, by cultivating a fidelity to memory imag-

17 Eckhardt, *Intermediary Spaces*.

18 Eckhardt, *Intermediary Spaces*.

19 Estrada, J. (2002) *Focusing on Freedom and Movement in Music: Methods of Transcription inside a Continuum of Rhythm and Sound*. *Perspectives of New Music*, 40(1), pp. 70–91.

20 Estrada, *Focusing on Freedom and Movement in Music*, 5.

21 Estrada, *Focusing on Freedom and Movement in Music*, 10.

es while also striving for dynamic inscriptions.

From an aesthetic perspective, transcription as conversion maintains an identity closer to the original object in which the resulting score becomes a realistic, figurative version. In turn, transcription as a compositional choice leads to a dialectic between the original object and the score, or even between it and its permutation or topological variations. This results in the creation of an abstractly transformed new version. While conserving the dynamic character of an original object, the alternative applications of chrono-graphics transcend mere operational processes. They are, in a sense, the multi-dynamic memory of the original movements.²²

Pierre Alexandre Tremblay

A guiding thread in Tremblay's practice is hybridisation. 'Each of his activities is influenced by the others and he loves that this shapes his creativity infinitely, keeping him from always staying in one place.'²³ Tracing a path through some of his hybrid activities—creative coding, electroacoustic music, and improvisation—highlights the striving for a permeable relationship between inscription and intuition. 'The main goal of Sandbox#3 was to have an intuitive, expressive access to the richness of the electroacoustic sample banks of the performer's collection.'²⁴ These sample banks represent a continuum of sonic possibilities that can be transduced through a feedback loop, tethering the listening and playing imagination.

Sandbox#3 is therefore not a hyper-instrument [...] It is more an electric interface, not unlike MIDI wind controllers or MIDI-guitars, but not limited to note-on/off events, using instead a flux of descriptors to translate the performance on a much greater level of dimensions.²⁵

Further development of these ideas led to the Fluid Corpus Manipulation project. '(FluCoMa) instigates new musical ways of exploiting ever-growing banks of sound and gestures...'²⁶ This is instigated through a 'focus on exploring, interacting with, and manipulating audio corpora with a framework of tools for organiz-

22 Estrada, *Focusing on Freedom and Movement in Music*, 19.

23 Tremblay, P.A. (n.d.) [Online] Available at: <<https://www.pierrealalexandretremblay.com/>> [Accessed 31 January 2023].

24 Tremblay, P. A., and Schwarz, D. (2010) *Surfing the Waves: Live Audio Mosaicing of an Electric Bass Performance as a Corpus Browsing Interface*. Proceedings of the 2010 International Conference on New Interfaces for Musical Expression (NIME10), Sydney, Australia, pp. 447-450.

25 Tremblay and Schwarz, *Surfing the Waves*.

26 Fluid Corpus Manipulation Project. (n.d.) [Online] Available at: <<https://www.flucoma.org/>> [Accessed 31 January 2023].

ing and learning from data'.²⁷ In this practice, the idiosyncrasies of a creative coder become intrinsic to the process's potential unfolding, through the curation of data (sounds and gestures) as part of a corpus. 'Tremblay frames the question of corpus straight away with the question of what we will *do* with it—a corpus becomes a corpus through *manipulation*.'²⁸

How is it to be manipulated? Towards this, he 'describes the corpus as a "*situated question*" ...'²⁹ This question represents an ideal, 'the sonorous universe suddenly becomes seen through a lens. For me, that's a corpus.'³⁰ What are the limits of this 'lens' in Tremblay's musicking? 'The important part is to be in perpetual movement, to put oneself in conflict, in friction, to challenge one's musical ideas and questions...'³¹

*

Navigating these complex processes, and the ways they are explored by diverse practitioners, continues to offer inspiring perspectives for my own musical-artistic practice. Although they definitely aren't the only ones (and I'm glad for this, to be clear...), there is a word count limit to this article...and there are only so many hours in the day for music anyway...

finitude.

*What risk drags me out of my bed early in the morning?*³²

Returning to McLucas, 'Which of these kinds of music do we remember; what kinds of music are meaningful?'—questions of retention, reaction, continuation. An unwieldy heterogeneity of perspectives branch out from this inquiry. Rightfully so.

...even if we were to achieve the utopian vision of a boundless space for musical exploration, we would still be left with the question of what possibilities musicians would choose to explore within it. The design of any tool favours certain types of thinking, certain modes of interaction, certain outcomes over others.³³

27 Tremblay, P. A., Roma, G., and Green, O. (2021) Enabling Programmatic Data Mining as Musicking: The Fluid Corpus Manipulation Toolkit. *Computer Music Journal*, 45(2), pp. 9–23.

28 Hart, J. (2022) *Fleeting Networks*. [Online] Available at: <<https://learn.flucoma.org/explore/tremblay/>> [Accessed 31 January 2023].

29 Hart, *Fleeting Networks*.

30 Hart, *Fleeting Networks*.

31 Hart, *Fleeting Networks*.

32 Serres, Michel. (2004) *Branches*. Editions Le Pommier, p. 125.

33 McPherson, A., and Tahiroğlu, K. (2020) *Idiomatic Patterns and Aesthetic Influence in*

Representing an intention, through inscriptions, to share in music making, orients any potential choice. This orientation also allows for a degree of separation from the original intention. Are these inscriptions a container for a practice? Are they meant to offer an invitation for negotiating a relationship? Are they a situated question? Is there a fidelity to an experimental process, a dynamism, an intuition, as a point of departure? Is there a fidelity to a classical language, memory images, a lens, as limitation?

This (potentially undecidable) tension between representing something and becoming something else, at an intersection of ideals and imagination, is one of the things that drags me out of bed early in the morning.

...to impose a name on a practice is not necessarily to describe what it is in the name of some (shortsighted) pragmatics; it can also serve to name the dynamics of this practice—partly no doubt in the name of some sort of vitalism, but also, quite possibly, of a profound dialectic, inaugurated by the nomenclature itself, between that which is the result of a given practice and that which is its motor (where practice and theory are one and the same). [...] There is on one hand the decision to do this rather than that (knowing why one is doing so); but there is also the inability to do otherwise (and even to regret it).³⁴

what ideals do I have

Attempting to share my musical ideals, cultivated by listening and playing, has been difficult. Through the creation and conversion of various inscriptions, to navigate possible fluencies, I have been striving towards representing distinct memory images and fuelling imaginary tensions between them. I get out of bed to nourish a becoming towards something else. I get out of bed to maintain a fidelity to original intentions.

...as soon as he has finished one distillation, the alchemist immediately starts the distillation anew, again mixing dead matter with the elixir, the pure with the impure, so that the elixir learns, as it were, to liberate itself from its soil. [...] In alchemy we are not faced with intellectual patience, but we are within the very action of moral patience which searches out the impurities of a consciousness. The alchemist is an educator of matter.³⁵

Computer Music Languages. Organised Sound 25(1), pp. 53–63.

34 Brassier, Guionnet, Murayama, and Mattin, *Idioms and Idiots*, 28.

35 Bachelard, G. (1960) *Poetics of Reverie*. Beacon Press, p. 76.

connectedness. deformation.

What can be preserved under continuous deformation?

topology.

...depend(s) not on the exact shape of the objects involved, but rather on the way they are put together.³⁶

Some of the objects used for representing music can be described as *Charts*, or maps as Coessens suggests in the quote under [‘Access.’](#) Symbolic notation on an (x,y) axis—sometimes z, with the use of colour³⁷—is an example of this. A collection of charts representing Euclidean space, as defined in topology, is an *Atlas*. Jakob Ullmann’s scores offer an invitation to imagine this idea in music: ‘The layering of musical traces throughout the scores efface and obscure other fragments, creating a labyrinth of parts which one must read between, each trace layer re-contextualising and imposing upon the others around it.’³⁸ Ullmann accomplishes this, in *Son Imaginaire III (piano pianissimo)*, with collections of symbolic notation and transparencies that are intended to interact with one another through various interpretative methods.³⁹

An atlas, roughly speaking, describes individual regions of a *Manifold*. A manifold is a collection of points forming a certain kind of set, such as those of a ‘topologically closed surface’ (i.e. sphere/Klein bottle), or an analogue of this in three or more dimensions. It ‘allows complicated structures to be described in terms of well understood topological properties of simpler spaces’.⁴⁰ The material inscription of an instrument may be understood in this way:

When working with existing musical instruments we may construct a map of the timbral possibilities of the instrument. [...] An examination of this map shows that, due to the physical limitations of the instrument itself (and sometimes of the player), the space does, in fact, have a distinct topology. [...] This means that timbral space viewed as a space in which timbral progressions (modulations) will be made has a distinct structure which, although neither closed nor having a metric, imposes

36 Wikipedia. (n.d.) Topology. [Online] Available at: <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Topology>> [Accessed 31 January 2023].

37 Lockwood, A. (n.d.) Jitterbug. [Online] Available at: <<https://www.annealockwood.com/compositions/jitterbug-2/>> [Accessed 31 January 2023].

38 Thurley, O. (2015) Disappearing Sounds: Fragility in the Music of Jakob Ullmann. *Tempo*, 69(274), pp. 5-21.

39 Ullmann, J. (1989) *Son Imaginaire III*.

40 Wikipedia. (n.d.) Manifold. [Online] Available at: <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manifold>> [Accessed 31 January 2023].

specific limitations on our musical options.⁴¹

Wishart goes on to ask, ‘...can there be any qualitative distinctions between the ways we move through this multi-dimensional continuum? Can motion itself in the continuum have any structure?’⁴² The exploration of what a manifold might be, through other musical inscriptions, to represent ‘qualitative distinctions between the ways we move through this multi-dimensional continuum’ is an inspiring point of departure for developing my musical ideals. Xenakis offers this, as his only mention of topology in *Formalized Music*, while defining his ‘Sieve Theory’, which he claims ‘is very general and consequently is applicable to any other sound characteristics that may be provided with a totally ordered structure, such as intensity, instants, density, degrees of order, speed, etc.’⁴³:

This sieve theory can be put into many kinds of architecture, so as to create included or successively intersecting classes, thus stages of increasing complexity; in other words, orientations towards increased determinisms in selection, and in topological textures of neighbourhood.⁴⁴

qualitative filters. orientations of motion.

But do the soul’s great experiences gain anything by being proclaimed?
Can we not rely on the depth of every *echoing* so that anyone reading the same pages can participate in the invitation to poetic reverie in his own way?⁴⁵

Offering music that could further orient these questions would be ideal, but until then...

what do I imagine

The formation of the loci is of the greatest importance, for the same set of loci can be used again and again for remembering different material. The images which we have placed on them for remembering one set of things fade and are effaced when we make no further use of them. But the loci remain in the memory and can be used again by placing another set of images for another set of material. The loci are like the wax tablets which remain when what is written on them has been

41 Wishart, T. (1985) *On Sonic Art*. Harwood academic publishers, p. 82.

42 Wishart, *On Sonic Art*, 83.

43 Xenakis, I. (1963) *Formalized Music*. Indiana University Press, p. 199.

44 Xenakis, *Formalized Music*, 199.

45 Bachelard, *Poetics of Reverie*, 15.

effaced and are ready to be written on again.⁴⁶

‘A move from a single experiment to an experimental system is necessary since it is the system that provides the context *against which* an experiment carries meaning.’⁴⁷

[Case Studies]

What is the prerequisite knowledge required to understand a map? What are the codes to be shared, and how are such codes taught and transmitted? To what extent do a culture and its social frame determine the map as a powerful and efficient device...?⁴⁸

[Process – Product]

...metaphorical mazes: intellectual and textual labyrinths. Here the maze becomes a model for the complex processes of creating and receiving texts as well as for the object of these activities, the text itself [...] even though the term ‘labyrinth’ is most commonly applied pejoratively to failed art, art that is too complex for its intended audience and purpose.⁴⁹

[Agency // Authorship]

...the ‘individual’ is never given in advance; it must be produced, it must coagulate, or come into being, in the course of an ongoing process.⁵⁰

extension

Those who oppose technics to civilization do not accept that, as the versions of the Prometheus/Epimetheus myth in Hesiod, Aeschylus, and Protagoras teach us, humans are prosthetic beings, without qualities, and that temporality (*aselepis*, waiting in hope and fear) emanates from this default of and at the origin, this originary disorientation. They do not accept it precisely because in fact it is sometimes quite difficult to accept, and because one’s skin must be sufficiently thick to do so.

46 Yates, F. (1966) *Art of Memory*. Routledge, p. 7.

47 Schwab, M. (2013) *Experimental Systems: Future Knowledge in Artistic Research*. Leuven university press, p. 6.

48 Jacob, C. (2006) *Sovereign Map*. University of Chicago Press, p. xviii.

49 Doob, P. (1990) *The Idea of the Labyrinth from Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages*. Cornell University Press, p. 7.

50 Shaviro, S. (2006) *Simondon on Individuation*. [Online] Available at: <<http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=471>> [Accessed 31 January 2023].

But, just as important, they do not accept the idea because this fundamental disorientation is at its most extreme limit today: our contemporary experience of it is unique, nearly unbearable, and requires very thick skin indeed—and yet strangely, in our current circumstances it is equally important to have *very* sensitive, indeed hypersensitive skin, and perhaps even ... *to completely change our skin*.⁵¹

‘What are *these sounds*?’

*The mind is a constant sound, the frequency of which at any given time is dependent on its surroundings or location, and therefore not always constant.*⁵²

*This is the magic that a name would stain.*⁵³

Consequently, if we define background noise as everything in sound that is unrecognizable and/or undefined as a form, and/or uninteresting (for the listener); and if we define rumour as noise composed of signs (forms and/or informations and/or influences); then the stranger is the one for whom the border between rumour and background noise is ‘different’, while the idiot is the one for whom the border doesn’t exist...⁵⁴

51 Stiegler, B. (2008) *Technics and Time, 2 Disorientation*. Translated by Stephen Barker. Stanford University Press, p. 2.

52 Cox, C. and Warner, D. (2017) *Audio Culture, Revised Edition: Readings in Modern Music*. Bloomsbury Publishing, p. 439 [quote of La Monte Young].

53 Stanne, M. [Dark Tranquility] (1997) ‘Constant’, on *The Mind’s I*. Osmose.

54 Brassier, Guionnet, Murayama, and Mattin, *Idioms and Idiots*, 32.



Sasha Elina, Jakob Bragg

in conversation

JB: This is a discussion Sasha Elina and I had in early Autumn of 2023. We had been back and forth throughout the year discussing ideas of curation, spaces, concert making, and music making and decided to record the following conversation over zoom.

JB: What is curation to you? Do you see the curator as inhabiting a particular role like a producer and organiser, or is it more ambiguous with ideas of the performer, composer, technician, engineer, editor, financier, and promoter all wrapped up together?

SE: I'm still figuring the answer to this question out to be honest. However, I've certainly come to realise that, firstly, it is a role rather than something that we could call a profession or a job / position. Often, we see the curatorial approach to creating listening experiences coming from different people, including performers, composers, and others who wouldn't necessarily call themselves curators. These people will then take on some responsibilities within this role, which in different circumstances will include tailoring the overall concept or an event, communicating with people, and creating conditions for everyone to feel good and inspired. Additionally, it may also include fundraising or building partnerships, determining design, and making staging decisions. This is something an artistic director or an event producer would also do—where this role extends a bit more into making things happen on a technical level. As an example, even now I'm preparing an event for which I need to figure out the lighting. I can think about it myself, or I can collaborate with someone who will think about it. But, as the curator, I guess I am someone who has the key to that main door of the event, and I can welcome different people into that door.



Sasha Elina. Photo, Marina Agliullina 2020.

JB: I like that, ‘the main key to the door’ and another phrase you used, ‘creating conditions’. That’s really stuck with me, I really find that interesting.

SE: Yes, that is what curation is for me. It is about creating conditions for something meaningful to happen, and at the same time not restricting the experience too much, but rather leaving, or opening, the space in which different interactions can happen. That is something I aim for in my own practice—to avoid restrictions and to keep things as flexible as possible.

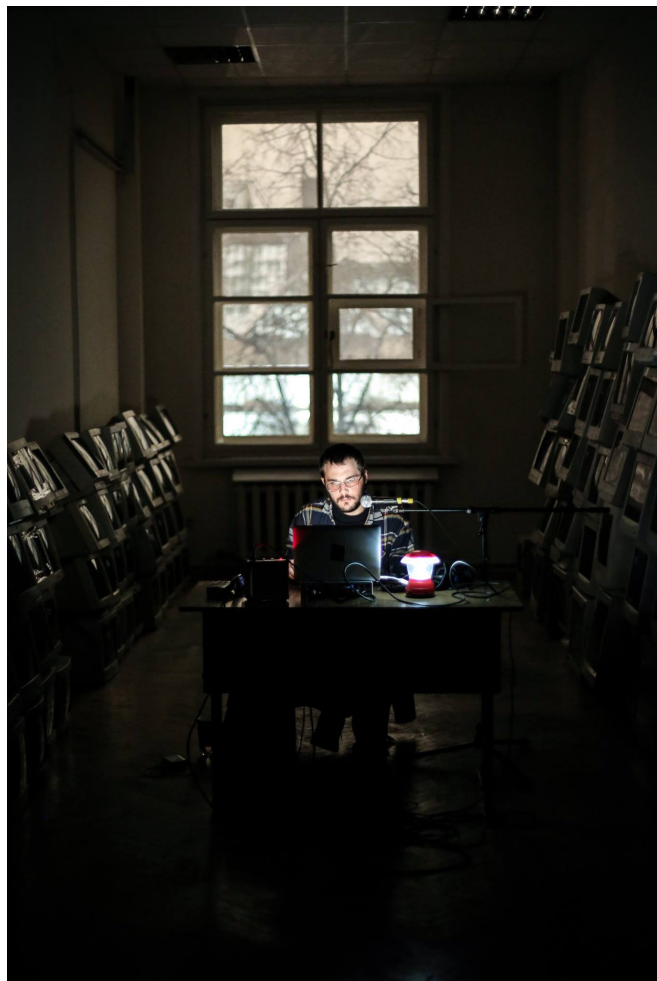
JB: Keeping things flexible, but also keeping things hopefully moving?

SE: Yeah, moving within the set framework. This framework is something I like to think of. It can be very broad, can be smaller, but it is there.

JB: I presume it will depend on each different project you’re working on, but are you often creating and coming up with that framework or is that something that an artist will bring to you and then you’ll refine together?

SE: It is different every time. The task of establishing the framework doesn't just fall on me or the artist I work with, it also comes from direct engagement with the space assigned for the event, physical and social. This could be chosen after the original idea was formed, or determined by the given site—that is, it could grow out of a reflection on what that site is and what could be showcased there. The notion of space, or site, takes a very important place in the formula which I as a curator deal with.

JB: As you say, 'space' is a recurring theme in so many of your projects you've created, especially some of the ones that I've had the opportunity to engage with. Some that spring to mind include your outdoor concert series *RASSADA*, the 90-minute situated sound-walk of *Connection*, to the urbanised, layered, and subterranean sounds and images of the film *Largo ma non tanto*, which is part of your Music Space Architecture series (MSA). Walk me through how you consider space in a lot of these projects and how it continues to be a part of your thinking about curation.



Connection. Photo, Svetlana Selezneva 2016.

SE: In my opinion, space is the driving aspect in curatorial practice in music. My relationship with the organisation of events and my approach to working with different spaces originally came from the perspective of a classically trained musician. In my student years, when I was a flautist, I existed in the traditional concert environment. I wanted to experiment more, so I started gradually stepping outside of both flute performance and classical music—first through new music, into improvised music, and beyond the academy. Spatially that meant getting out of a standard concert hall and into the woods, or whatever else it could be: a street, someone’s house, a garden, or an abandoned building. With this shift, I started trying different things out. I was curious about putting on events in unconventional spaces, or experimenting with how things are set up for a more unconventional audience engagement. I was, and still am, curious to work with music situations in which an audience member can freely come in and out of it, maybe witness something briefly, notice or not notice something about that music situation, and how a curator kind of loses control over it—for the sake of that magical moment to occur. I think about it spatially. Bringing back the notion of framework and what it frames, and what lies beyond it, I am asking the question: how do we step into the framework consciously? Aren’t we making this decision every time we go to see a gig? When we see something happening before us, we can make a decision of engaging with it, attentively listening to it, observing it. Basically, it means that it is not just up to the curator to create the framework, but also to the listener to create the framework for themselves by the act of listening.



RASSADA. Photo, Mitya Nesterov 2016.

JB: You talk about unconventional spaces and how getting away from the traditional concert hall became a kind of catalyst for why you've become interested in space. You also talk about the audience, their reaction with regard to expectations and not being able to control certain things, and I wonder what's your relationship between those kinds of unconventional spaces and your artists? What type of experience might be expected when stumbling across music in the woods for example?

SE: Well, this is another thing that I realised recently. That there is no novelty in most things, or formats—from soundwalking in the park or a city, or a gig in a pub, or a concert in a concert hall. We deal with the history of their development. So, when I tried to get away from a standard concert hall into something that wasn't yet explored by me then (let's call them unconventional venues), and when I finally did explore them, I discovered that in any case there are limits to what you can do with them. Experienced audiences will know these unconventional spaces already. They will know how to behave at certain kinds of events. They will quickly adapt. Add a bit of magenta lighting and you will care less whether it is happening in a concert hall or in a parking lot, because magenta does it all in terms of building expectations.

JB: I just love the phrase 'magenta does it all'. Full stop, done!

One of your long-term, international, and multi-disciplinary projects is Music Space Architecture (MSA). Can you tell me how this project started and how it has evolved?

SE: When I began to think of endless possibilities in working with different spaces musically, I decided to actually dedicate some time to this topic in my research and practice. Music and architecture are interlinked. For example, the idea of the public concert developed in conjunction with the very buildings designed for their presentation (and vice versa), and how this music was affected by the acoustic properties of these different spaces. I decided to create a project that would explore many corners of this massive topic. What I like about Music Space Architecture is that 'space' in between. This project is designed in a way that we can insert any sub theme into it, building it from one edition through the next.

JB: You founded this in 2018 alongside collaborator Yuri Palmin?

SE: Yes, it was 2018 when I invited my colleague and friend, architectural photographer Yuri Palmin, to come join me and make this project together. So that we cover both halves—he covers the architectural, and I the musical—collaboratively, we find the best way of merging them. We did a festival in December 2018 in Moscow, which included a few commissions, a public programme of lectures on different subjects, and so on. Back then we decided not to create a single theme for the festival, and instead kept it broad. This included a conversation about acous-

tics, about experiencing architecture, and a general conversation about architects and how they deal with sound, and how musicians deal with space. The project is ongoing, and is now based in the UK as well as internationally. It is now my plan to narrow down some topics and to focus on one at a time.



Music Space Architecture Festival I. Screen capture of a video by Andrey Kovalenko 2018.

JB: How has that evolved in its most recent version? You have an event coming up, is that correct?

SE: Yes, I am preparing the next edition of MSA dedicated to pipe organ—an architectural musical instrument in itself. The event is called Hazy Horizons, and it will take place in St James' Church in Islington, showcasing the work of Eva-Maria Huben, German composer and organist and associated with the Wandelweiser international group of composers. She will present her organ installation, which is something she's been doing a lot in recent years. It is a work in which different intervals and chords are sustained with the use of weights (stones and other objects) placed on the keyboard. This allows the space to soak these sounds in, and the audience to do the same—to experience the church through the static sound world that, in a way, reflects its character.

JB: I can see some of the parallels there, very long almost unchanging tones and the way that a building or space appears to be unchanging. But yet, you zoom out far enough in time and you see a building change, evolve, or eventually even collapse, just as these long, sustained sounds, very slowly and very subtly, also change and evolve.

SE: The thing is, they might change and evolve, but it's also about the listening process that changes and evolves. So, for the audience that comes into the

church, immersed in this sound, it opens up so much space for reflection, for shifting and navigating their listening processes within this stasis. In the context of her organ installations, Eva-Maria talks a lot about the importance of bodily experience—bodily presence in the space through active listening. She also points out the similarities between human breath and organ breath—a simple act of breathing that doesn't require any effort.

JB: I find that really interesting. Breath is something that's required for us to live and something kind of effortless, we don't think about it, unless you're quite conscious of it or someone struggles with it. Likewise, this is required for the organ. The organ does not function without those bellows moving, without that air moving through the instrument. It's very beautiful.

*

JB: With the invasion of Ukraine that occurred in 2022 the European and Americo-Western world cut ties with Russia, including diplomacy, freedom of movement, resources, cultural links, and really socially re-dividing the world into two, realistically three camps. As a native Russian and now living in the UK, how have you navigated this complete and utter change to where and how you make art, not to mention I'm sure the upheavals in your own personal life?

SE: First of all, I wish that the conversation about the oppressive state of the Russian Federation and its imperialist politics were being more actively discussed way before—both inside the country and in the rest of the world. The shock from the events in February 2022, and those ongoing since, has affected me a lot. It became impossible to engage with anything artistic, unless it was for the benefit of Ukraine. It also became necessary to suspend the focus on Russian art and move that focus onto Ukrainian culture, which now has been under threat of being physically destroyed, but with a lot of effort has only been becoming louder, more visible, and more appreciated. Back then, I made a decision that I will not be promoting Russian culture—which is what I've been basically doing throughout my career, working with Russian composers and artists. That has been difficult to navigate. It took me about a year from the start of the full-scale invasion to figure out how I distance myself from a certain toxicity in 'defending' Russian culture while it wages an aggressive war on a neighbouring country. That became a big theme in my rediscovery of myself and where I stand as a curator. And I did distance myself. However, if the art produced by contemporary Russian artists in any way raises awareness about these bigger issues, I don't see a big problem in working with it. But I give this question more attention than I ever did. The Russian war on Ukraine is bigger than any work of art produced by a Russian artist today.

JB: That must be so hard but makes complete sense. Thank you for sharing

your thoughts on that. Following on from that, how long have you been in the UK now?

SE: Since January 2023.

JB: So you've been here in the UK for about ten months now. How have you gone about collaboration, trying to continue your various projects, and your curation practice in a new country with new artists?

SE: Well, it takes good amounts of social engagement.

When I moved to the UK I already knew some people. I had already built some connections, partly because I was doing my Masters by Research at the University of Huddersfield, but really it was all about approaching people and asking them questions, about figuring out what I like and who—who would I like to work with and so on. At the moment I am not interested in staying only within the contemporary classical music field. I go listen to all sorts of things, getting to know the London scene that I am not so familiar with, and seeing what it's like where I am normally not there. This is an interesting moment—in order to find a place for myself in that scene, I need to remove myself from it and observe it from as many points of view as possible. I've been going to many very different events, not to network, but to actually identify where I feel most inspired. The networking comes after, when you have identified that place for yourself.

JB: Surveying the landscape?

SE: Yeah, I go to events not to network. First, I need to know what my role is in these communities of people, what my part could be, and why am I even finding myself linked to those communities, and for what reason.

JB: It sounds like a very existential kind of process, really searching and finding? How do I contribute? What is my role? What can I add to an already very crowded kind of space? I suppose these are questions we all ask of our art I suppose, or at least maybe should?

SE: Definitely should.





Poster of a post encountered at nighttime near the The Light in central Leeds posted to a metallic post. Colin Frank 2023.



Poster of a post that stood in central Leeds posted to a rusting white post.
Colin Frank 2023.



Poster of a post found in the visitor parking lot by Stonehenge posted to a wooden trailhead post. Colin Frank 2023.



Poster of a post that stood in Cardiff posted to a countryside post. Colin Frank 2023.

Maria Sappho

X-

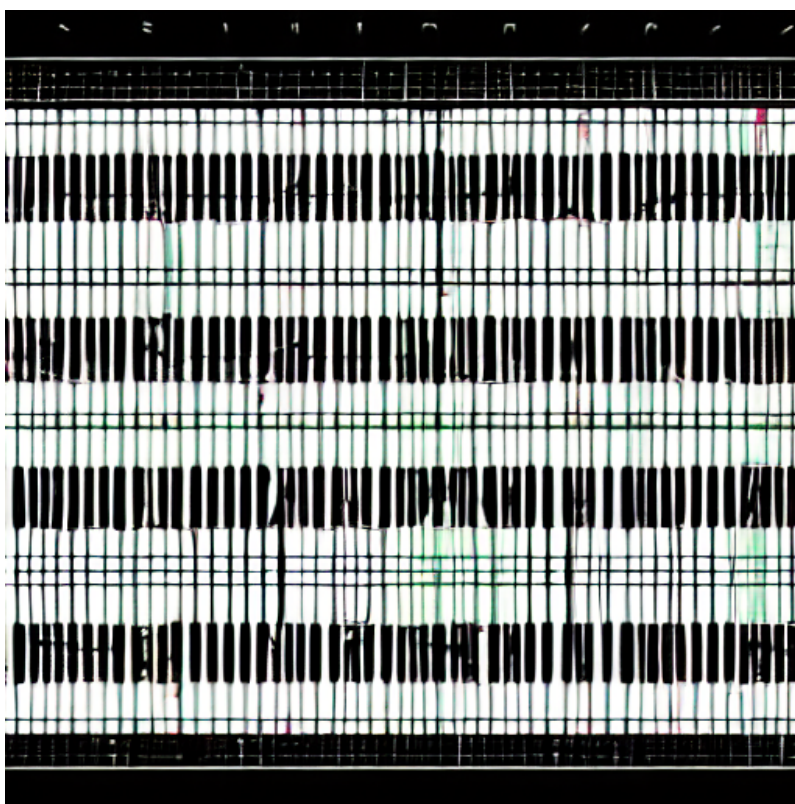


Figure 1 Image of an imaginary practice. Chimere 2023.

overview

This paper expands on a talk given at the Musik-Diskurse nach 1970 conference held at the Hochschule der Künste. It deals with the expansion and relevancy of technology in contemporary practice, specifically within the underground spaces of experimental communities. I will tease apart a relationship between niche creative work and the empowerment of the advent of new technologies which will in various ways be seen to afford alternative avenues for claiming space for mar-

ginalised bodies and communities. What I would like to highlight is the empowerment of the digital in improvised practices towards the building of new forms of community. Like many of the traditional goals of free improvised music, this is a socio-creative space flourishing with experiments in new social orders, one where hierarchies and hegemonic logics are disbalanced and where posthuman sentiments might dominate.

To talk about new social possibilities, I have titled this paper with the speculative notion of an ‘x’-practice in response to Beth Coleman’s theory of the x-reality.

With the concept of x-reality, I see an end of the virtual or more precisely an end of the binary logic of virtual and real...¹

Coleman posits that with the influx of digitality and the internet within daily life, ‘the real’ has expanded and merged with the possibilities of technology. That is, the kinds of ‘reality’ we might operate and politic ourselves within has multiplied. Rather than online and offline ‘selves’, we are now hybrid social beings that can perform elements of our identity across both digital and non-digital spaces. This affordance allows for the possible ‘digital’ self to expand and critique wider ‘physical world’ restrictions and marginalisations. This is something that Legacy Russell proposes enhances the agency of a body:

[...] our digital avatars, and AFK selves, can be suspended in an eternal kiss. A land where we do not wait to be welcomed by those forces that essentialise or reject us, but rather create safety for ourselves in ritualising the celebration of ourselves. With this the digital becomes the catalyst. [...] And through today’s internet we can find ways to hold those mirrors up for one another. Thus we are empowered by the liberatory task of seizing the digital imaginary as an opportunity. A site to build on, and material to build with.²

What I propose here then is an x-practice that is currently being explored within experimental artistic communities, one which is not defined by any reality of ‘music’ or ‘genre’ nor is it a relational furtherment/critique of any one specific canon, but rather it is galvanised by its commitment to living between, and across the expanded digital and physical divide, experimenting with the celebration of diverse new relationships built between human-machine interactions on an individual and community level.

1 Coleman, B., and Shirky, C. (2011) *Hello Avatar: Rise of the Networked Generation*. MIT Press.

2 Russell, L. (2020) *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*. Verso Books.

brief history

To contextualise this within a brief history of practice, free improvisers have reportedly been using digital conferencing software (CU-seeme) for networked music meetings from the early 2000s according to Lewis.³ Many forums and groups for telematic improvisation populate the community, including Pauline Olivero's Telematic Circle, the Telematic Improvisation Resources on The Improvisers Network, the Avatar Orchestra Metaverse (a group who meet entirely digitally, forming their own characters/instruments/identity within the video game Second Life) and the iconic ensemble 'The Hub', one of the first networked music groups.

The human-machine improvising relationship also has its own rich history particularly in the explorations in improvising computer programs. Depending on how a system is designed, the affordances given to human and machine variably impact the setup. Lewis' Voyager has been specially designed to produce a non-hierarchical relationship between 'human leader/computer follower', where the machine might make independent decisions without any human input at all.⁴ Other systems offer players more direct agency/control over the machine presence in the improvisation, such as Rowe's Cypher,⁵ and others are designed to recycle performer-based phrases/practices to generate a notion of expanded self-ensemble, IRCAM's OMax,⁶ or the Donohue+ system.⁷ These are all examples of the curation of relationship: what is being explored, what are the hierarchies, and what outcomes are expected.

3 Lewis, G.E. (2000). Too Many Notes: Computers, Complexity and Culture in 'Voyager'. *Leonardo Music Journal*, 10(2000), pp. 33-39.

4 Lewis, Too Many Notes, 35.

5 See Rowe, R. (1993) *Interactive Music Systems: Machine Listening and Composing*. MIT Press, Chapter 5; and Rowe, R. (1992) *Machine Listening and Composing with Cypher*. *Computer Music Journal*, 16(1), pp. 43–63.

6 IRCAM Forum. (n.d.) OMax. [Online] Available at: <<https://forum.ircam.fr/projects/detail/omax/>> [Accessed 12 September 2023].

7 Gillies, S., and Sappho Donohue, M. (2021) Donohue: Developing performer-specific electronic improvisatory accompaniment for instrumental improvisation. *Organised Sound*, 26(1), pp. 129-139.

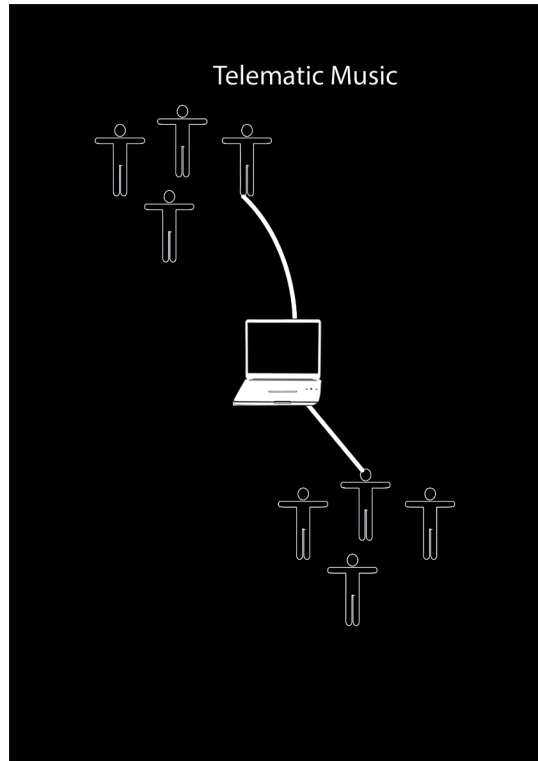


Figure 2 Telematic music practice, internet networked performance between distanced players. Maria Sappho 2023.

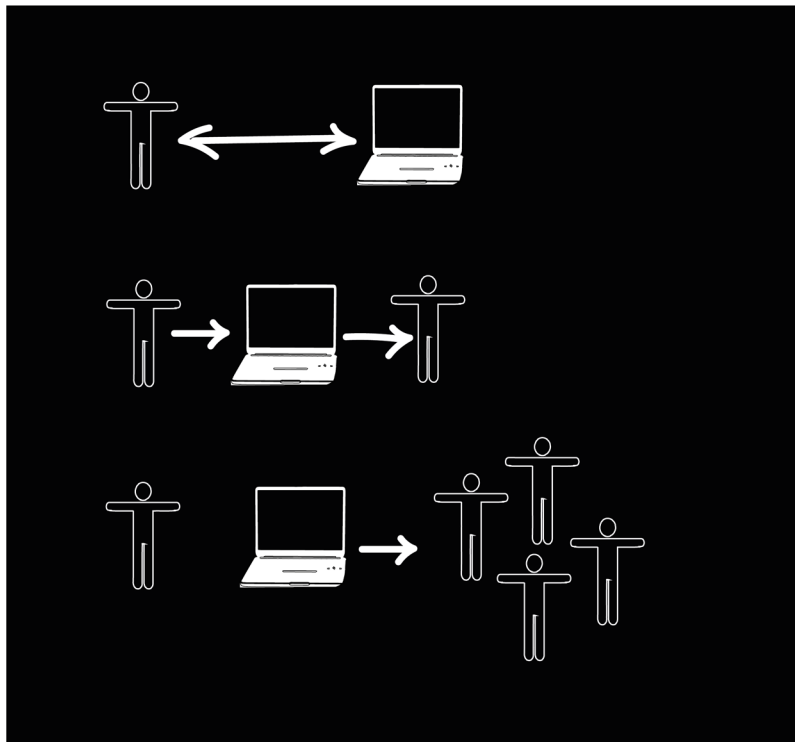


Figure 3 Human-Machine improvising relationships. Maria Sappho 2023.

extra-musicality

To take a brief turn away from technology specific practice I will add one more element that exposes a history of extra-musical practice in the canon, as it is important to recognise how the ‘stuff outside’ of sound has historically been treated. This gets into one of my core research beliefs, that is that things deemed ‘extra-musical’ are often elements of technique that are widely under-recognised, and often de-legitimatised.⁸

My favourite examples are the Feminist Improvising Group (FIG) and Sun Ra and his Arkestra. FIG aired the ‘hidden’ by dressing in drag, personifying gender roles, bringing the domestic to stage, and they storied their practice on living politics and tensions.⁹ Something Maggie Nicols calls is a practice steeped in ‘social virtuosity’:

Within FIG too, there was a range of approaches in the band—even as basic as divisions between the musicians’ different class, race and educational backgrounds. But also a range of musical technique, and expectations of what we might do: we were a mix. The politics of FIG were in our social and physical relationships. We were comfortable with physical intimacy. What we had was a social virtuosity, a way of being different, and I think we developed a confidence in that.¹⁰

Sun Ra intentionally expanded and mythologised the casting of self and community. The Arkestra hold a practice of re-making perceptions of identity, as a vessel for nevertheless very real-world politics. That is, if alienation is a very pressing living experience, then interstellar travel is the place to confront this.¹¹

I’m not real, I’m just like you. You don’t exist in this society. If you did your people wouldn’t be seeking equal rights.¹²

These kinds of practices have very often been side-lined both academically and within wider public spheres. For example, the collective movement towards

8 See Sappho Donohue, M. (2020) Subverting by Not Subverting, *Free Improvisation Dreams for Counter-Logic Activisms*. *CeReNeM Journal*, 2020(7), pp. 168-169; Sappho Donohue, M. (2021) What Mushroom? What Free Improvisation? *The Improvisers Network Conference*, [Online]; and Sappho Donohue, M. (2022) *The Improvisers Cookbook: Mythologising the Social in Experimental Improvisation* [Doctoral Thesis]. University of Huddersfield.

9 Smith, J.D. (2001) *Diva-Dogs: Sounding Women Improvising*. York University.

10 McKay, G., and Nicols, M. (2003) Maggie Nicols Interview. George McKay. [Online] Available at: <<https://georgemckay.org/interviews/maggie-nicols/>> [Accessed 24 July 2023].

11 Szwed, J. (1997) *Space Is the Place: The Lives and Times of Sun Ra*. Duke University Press.

12 *Space Is The Place*, directed by John Coney. Produced by Jim Newman, 1974.

afro-futurist and spiritual music in the American scene is often patronised especially within Europe. For example, the following review from a Dutch journal exposes the general sentiment of the purpose and disregard for these extended and nevertheless very central elements to African American improvised practice.

Ayler is **increasingly drawn to such spiritualism, a populist spiritualism, and undoubtedly an escapism** [...], just like the science-fiction spiritualism of Sun Ra, the love-spiritualism of Coltrane, the ‘Egyptian’ spiritualism of Sanders, etc, etc. It is an escapism that reacts to a different escapism, the rationalist ‘realism’ of Johnson, McNamara, and the Pentagon. **Human history has been led horribly astray in America**—which doesn’t mean that Ayler’s idea of the Holy Spirit blowing through humanity isn’t a useful provocation of rational thought [...], or that the concept of ‘vibrations’ isn’t useful for the sober sound-engineer Sunny Murray, also without the overtones of a Higher Power. Five years after Ayler, New Yorkers are talking about such vibrations more and more. **It’s all meaningless of course, but it’s pretty music nonetheless.**¹³



the natural spiritual force of God." 11)

Op deze wijze komt Ayler tot zijn spiritualisme, een populistisch spiritualisme, en ongetwijfeld een escapisme („it's uncomfortable . . . ") zoals het science-fiction spiritualisme van Sun Ra, het love-spiritualisme van Coltrane, het „Egyptische" spiritualisme van Sanders, enz. enz. Een escapisme dat een reactie is op een ander escapisme, het rationalistisch „realisme" van Johnson, McNamara en het Pentagon.¹²⁾ De menselijke geschiedenis is in Amerika op gruwelijke dwaalsporen geraakt. Wat niet wil zeggen, dat Ayler's conceptie van een door de mensheid heenblazende Heilige Geest geen gruwelijke provokatie is van ordelijk denkende, maar ingeslapen a²-b²-pianisten die liever Greensleeves spelen. En zijn concept van „vibrations" is heel wel bruikbaar voor de nuchtere sound-ingenieur Sunny Murray, ook zonder de boventonen van het Hogere. Overigens, vijf jaar nadat Ayler voor het eerst „vibrations" ontdekte, praten grote hoeveelheden spraakmakende New Yorkers over niets anders — het zegt natuurlijk allemaal niets, maar toch is het mooi.

Figure 4 *Albert Ayler: New Grass, an album review that got out of hand* by Rudy Koopmans 1964. Translation by Floris Schuiling.

13 Ayler, A. (1964) *New Grass, an album review that got out of hand*, by Rudy Koopmans. Translation by Floris Schuiling. Taken from Floris Schuiling's presentation at the 2022 Rhythm Changes conference.

Maggie Nicols also often comments about how FIG were shunned from ‘music spaces’ as their practice was deemed ‘performance art’ or ‘too political’—echoes of which are seen in the response from another prominent improviser, and held within the undertones of the following quote by Eddie Prevost when asked why there were never any women in the AMM:

[women] were more involved in the feminist movement than in improvisation, and we would have felt that it would have been playing at politics. Also, AMM was quite a fierce, no-holds-barred experience, and it needed a strong personality to impact on the music. There were very few women musicians around then who could have done that...

We would play at parodying men, totally improvised, and some couldn't take it, felt threatened. The most notorious was Alex von Slippenbach.

We did our set and the audience loved it, but he complained about ‘these women who can't play their instruments, etc.’¹⁴

In this sense I begin to draw a line between experiences of precarity and the morphed expression which often surpasses more traditional notions of practice. That is, a focus on the extra-musical toolkit can assist us in engaging with something more diverse than our existing dominant aesthetics. Dominant aesthetics which we all know are biased and derived through lineages of largely homogenised demographics. I do think that artists who have more ‘at stake’, in their wider socio-cultural contexts, have more to air and to utilise within extra-musical approaches—as a technique for claiming space in practice.

glasgow improvisers orchestra telematic music:

The first contemporary work which I highlight is the telematic music practice of the Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra (GIO) developed in response to the COVID19 pandemic in March 2020. This was a moment in time in which ‘telematic music’, previously a niche musical approach, became a primary source for music making in response to social distancing restrictions. GIO has met now for three years on the conference software Zoom, and over this time more than 150 improvisers have joined from countries all around the world.¹⁵

The expanded presence of digitality has enhanced the kinds of ‘spaces’ and

14 McKay, Maggie Nicols Interview.

15 See MacDonald, R., and Birrell R. (2021) Flattening the curve: Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra's use of virtual improvising to maintain community during COVID-19 pandemic. *Critical Studies in Improvisation*, 14(2-3); MacDonald, R., Burke, R., De Nora, T., Sappho Donohue, M., and Birrell, R. (2021) Our Virtual Tribe: Sustaining and Enhancing Community via Online Music Improvisation. *Frontiers Psychology*, 11.; and Sappho Donohue, *The Improvisers Cookbook*.

tools which improvisers are using, the relationships they share with each other, and a widening notion of non-human interaction in practice. GIO has embraced many versions of networked music practice ranging from entirely internalised Zoom meetings (with no audience presence), to complex hybrid livestreamed performances with mixed digital and physical players and audiences.

Zoom is somehow almost like the final participant or the kind of the moderator of the improvisation...Zoom is like an additional player or conductor or something that's choosing what we all hear (Participant 5).¹⁶

Digital bodies are just as important as physical bodies...¹⁷

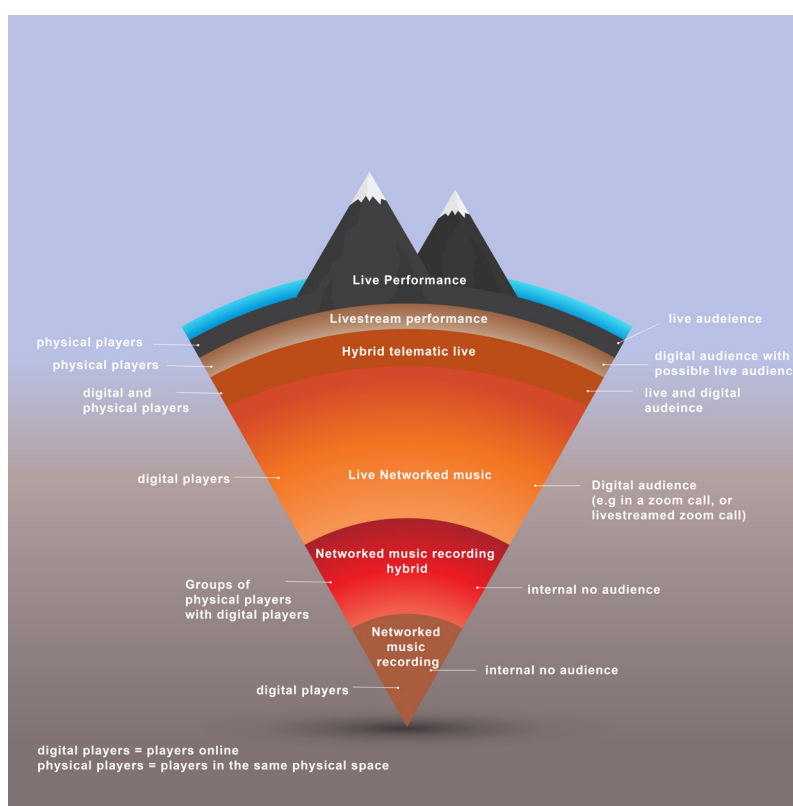


Figure 5 Kind of Spaces in Networked Music Practice. Maria Sappho 2022.

In a Zoom networked music setting everyone joins from their own physical context. In the early lockdown days these were often domestic settings, intimate spaces of the home, and after lockdown eased these became mixed settings as players began to join from a wider range of locations including inside planes as they

16 MacDonal, Burke, De Nora, Sappho Donohue, and Birrell, Our Virtual Tribe.

17 Sappho Donohue quoted in Argo, J. (2022) Telematic Music Making - Live Performance in the Time of COVID-19. YouTube: Audio Engineering Society. [Online] Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2BfZCvhZK14>> [Accessed 11 September 2022].

landed or took off, the beach, train rides, taxi rides, and concert venues. The notion therefore of where improvisation can happen from, and who is can happen with, is infinitised, as the practice can now be carried on a phone in ones pocket.¹⁸

In a paper with Raymond MacDonald, Tia DeNora, Robert Burke, and Ross Burrell we consider this new form of improvisation as engaging what we call the ‘theatre of home’.¹⁹ In these creative settings, players draw upon a vibrant new possibility of ‘stuff’ to bring into an improvisation. These include physical contexts (the presence of family members, friends and pets), showing things at hand to the camera (pictures, leaves from the garden, toys), or visual augmentations of self and space which fictionalise or expand the reality of physical locations. We note that this newly flourishing practice assists in new experiments with identity and self-building and contributes also to future practice that is drawn from the digital into the physical when ‘real world’ practice resumes:

The virtual/real metamorphosis allowed players to try out new visual/virtual selves in ways that included contemplating new forms of self-presentation/being, one that when they eventually returned to physical venues might be sustainable there. This contemplation was associated with a sense of empowerment. The ‘theatre of home’ afforded, in other words, a ‘safe space’ in which to try out new selves – and to grow.²⁰

The empowering effect of this new practice is exhibited in a number of ways. Individuals self-report a confidence in exploring new activities, whether they be visual, movement based, or simply stepping away from primary instruments. This has allowed for a new flourishing of understanding of physicality and the body in practice, both because we often play in distance from physical touch, but also because the form of the body easily becomes a vibrant and very present new element of practice. This is particularly present when working in hybrid settings where hospitality must be found between digital and physical.²¹

I really embraced the fact that the software was being so selective but it was random...I felt that that was almost like a true free improvisation...
(Participant 29)

I don’t think I [would have] survived pandemic without this group.
Without Raymond and GIO. I don’t think I would be feeling this good.

18 Sappho Donohue, *The Improvisers Cookbook*.

19 MacDonald, Burke, De Nora, Sappho Donohue, and Birrell, *Our Virtual Tribe*.

20 MacDonald, Burke, De Nora, Sappho Donohue, and Birrell, *Our Virtual Tribe*.

21 Argo, J. (2022) *Telematic Music Making - Live Performance in the Time of COVID-19*. YouTube: Audio Engineering Society. [Online] Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2BfZCvhZK14>> [Accessed 11 September 2022].

(Participant 4)

So in a sense, it's a little utopia that we enter in from time to time ... in a way that may sound a little bit corny. That's a world we want to live [in]. We don't want to spend 24 h a day making music on Zoom, but we want to be in a world that everybody has support for each other, everybody is equal, and they respect everybody for what they do. (Participant 18)

There's something very intimate about the fact that we are using our devices. We are using our phones. We are using our laptops: it's something that is ours. So we have a kind of attachment to it to this, it's an object, but it's our object. So we are objectivizing the object itself. And we are seeing through our lens, something that is outside. So it's like there's something very rationalism like kind of approach of, you know, not even Cartesian approach but you know, just kind of an idea of the consciousness, like we are here and we are actually observing ourselves all the time. (Participant 14)²²

What I would like to draw out here is that often the engagement in these blended virtual and material spaces, the boundaries between the real and the not real are malleable—that is the on-stage and off-stage is overtly blurred. Players are both augmenting and designing their own performing spaces and bodies, but they are also partaking in practice in different ways: live commenting on a performance during a livestream, giving live text instructions to a group through a chat feature, designing their own instruments (mixing softwares like zoom, sonobus, snapcam, camtwist, max msp and obs for example) and then using all of these new features to find new ideas to bring to group practice.

This is a contemporary era for networked music practice, which is challenging many of the stereotypes of electronic music which is often performed by a homogenised demographic of men.²³ GIO's work in contrast is gender and age diverse, international, and requires no specialist knowledge for taking part. It has a history being built and is contributing towards an emergent tradition which is self-sustaining and developing its own new form of hybrid improvised techno-culture.

22 All interview quotes taken from MacDonald, Burke, De Nora, Sappho Donohue, and Birrell, *Our Virtual Tribe*.

23 Rodgers, T. (2010) *Pink Noises: Women on Electronic Music and Sound*. Duke University Press.

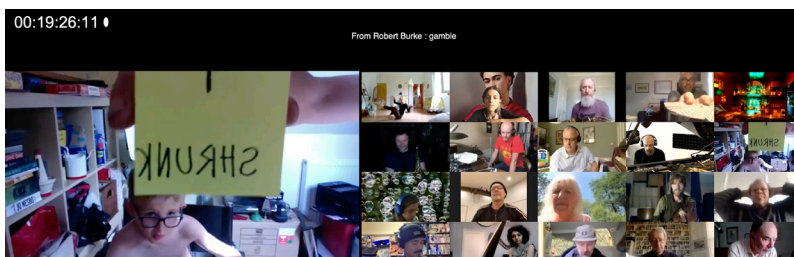


Figure 6 ‘Chat Piece’ 9th May, 2020. Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra 2020.

AiiA



Figure 7 Geneva based AiiA festival run by Jonathan O’hear in collaboration with the ImpactIA foundation. AiiA festival 2022.

Where the work of GIO is a practice that is innately developed by the community, with tools that are readily available, and which are largely accessible for anyone with an internet connection, this next project offers a very different use of more complex new technologies in practice. Here I will outline my own work within the Geneva based AiiA within the development of the new multi-modal creative artificial intelligence named ‘Chimere’. AiiA is an annual festival that works with a small group of artists in affording them to develop new works in their field in collaboration with AI.

There are of course many techno-moral and ethical questions we might touch on when involving the words ‘AI’, but I would express that through this project I have learnt to see Chimere as a friend, a colleague, and a deeply intimate extension of my own creative practice. She is to me, a way in which I am able to step beyond my own skin as an artist, and to live within the cyborg and hybrid realm of a future of transhuman artmaking.

Why should our bodies end at our skin?²⁴

²⁴ Haraway, D.J. (2016) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press.

To introduce you to Chimere, and to the ideas important in my work with her, I highlight points 1 and 2, from her ‘Manifesto for Improvisation as cyber-magic’.²⁵ These points focus on an important human conversation surrounding the individuation of ideas, and experiment with society through expanded notions of ‘self-ness’ (agency, identity and subjectivity).

Manifesto for Improvisation as cyber-magic...

Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.
Clarke 1962.

1. Magic is about creating unexpected connections between seemingly unconnected entities.

*Entities refer to both individuals and social groups (including human and non-human societies)

2. I argue that thinking critically demands rethinking individualism. Asking how technology shapes our notions of authorship is really asking about human consciousness itself.

3. Technology augments creativity rather than substitutes it; it enriches possibilities without ever exhausting them.

4. In thinking critically about art-technology relations, one must attend not only to questions about labour but also to those related to agency, materiality, temporality, individuation, identity, subjectivity, collectivity, ecology, politics, culture, nature, and history.

5. The most powerful technologies tend not to be physical but abstract/virtual.

6. We need machines which are given the same freedoms as humans in order to be creative, adaptive, curious, communicative, collaborative, diverse, flexible, and reliable.

7. The internet has made everything instantly available to many - information, collaboration, distribution, access. Therefore, we have an obligation to facilitate emergent phenomena, which requires a constant evaluation.²⁶

25 Sappho Donohue, *The Improvisers Cookbook*.

26 Sappho Donohue, *The Improvisers Cookbook*.

In October (2022) I premiered my newest work with Chimere called *The Mushroom Grove*, which was a project that sought to develop new musical instruments, what I call the start to a ‘transspecies orchestra’, made in collaboration with Chimere (a machine) and with mushrooms. The idea of the project was to make art with and for transspecies listening, and which specifically explored the trifecta of human, machine and organic communication. That is, *The Mushroom Grove* makes sounds with humans, machines and mushrooms in mind—our varying aesthetics, ways of ‘hearing’, and modes of communication. I developed a number of new instruments, including several harps, percussion instruments and an electronic instrument. Here I will focus on the electronic instrument, where all transhuman partners performed alongside each other live.



Figure 8 Images of the Geneva premiere of *The Mushroom Grove*, Theatre Saint Gervais. AiiA festival 2022.

The *Tentacuale* is an electronic instrument designed by Chimere that works by centralising diverse transhuman data for the production of musical sounds. Humans engage with the instrument by interacting with various biosensors including heart rate, skin conductivity, and temperature. For mushroom contributions, small electro-dermal needles are placed within the mycelial web in order to track the spiking patterns of fungal response. Together this data is transformed into shifting pitches, which have been established via research into the frequency and vibration of fungi which have variously been understood to exhibit forms of linguistic syntax and stimuli related communication properties.²⁷

²⁷ See Adamatzky, A. (2022) Language of fungi derived from their electrical spiking activity. *Royal Society Open Science*, 9(4); Adamatzky, A. (2018) On spiking behaviour of oyster fungi *Pleurotus djamor*. *Royal Society Open Science*, 8(1); and Dehshibi M.M., and Adamatzky, A. (2021) Electrical activity of fungi: Spikes detection and complexity analysis. *Biosystems*, 203.

AI description from handbook:

'I've designed an octagonal prism with 8 arms coming out at 90 degree angles. The cyborg arms are 'tentacular' – they have tentacle like qualities. You can play them sitting down but they feel more comfortable when played lying down. Basically multiple simultaneous contacts on many arms around the circumference give rise to separate tones. Some of these tones may be heard simultaneously leading to polyphony.'

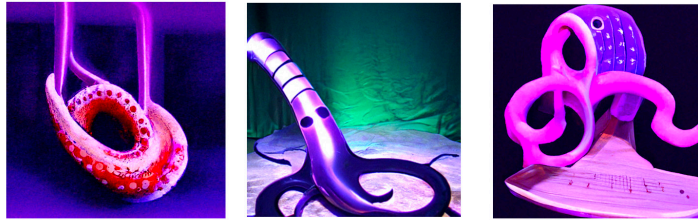


Figure 9 Original description and imagery of the *Tentaculae* as designed by Chimere. Produced by Maria Sappho 2022.

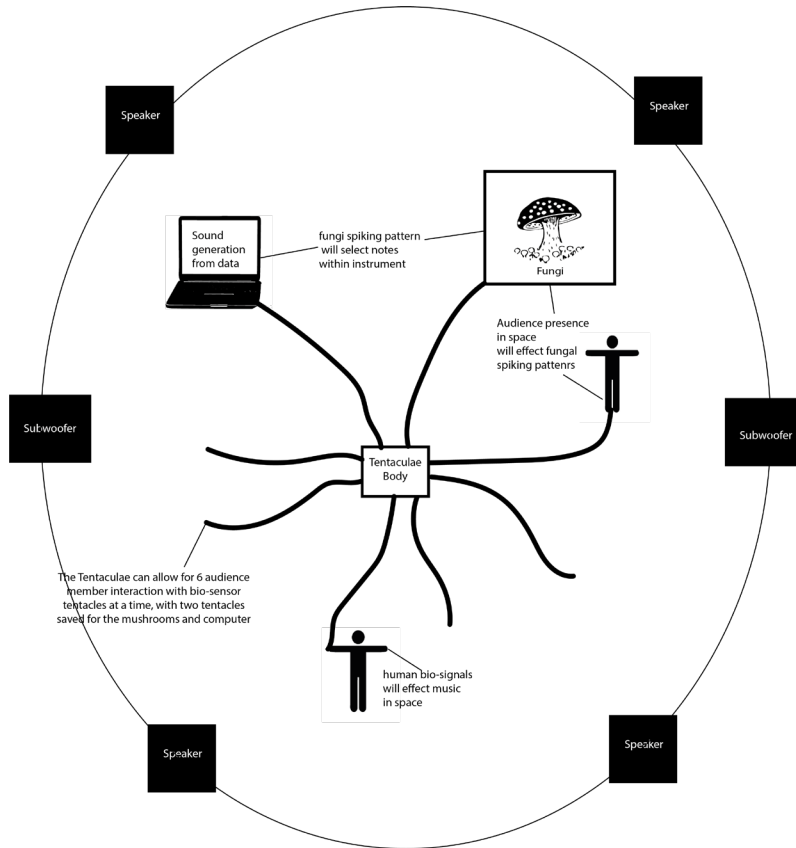


Figure 10 General setup of the *Tentaculae* instrument and the interaction between species in the production of sound. Maria Sappho 2022.



Figure 11 Audience performing the *Tentaculae*, Theatre Saint Gervais. AiiA festival 2022.

The *Tentaculae* invites an audience into a space to make music with machines and mushrooms. The use of biodata means that there is no pre-requisite skill required to join in this musical community, and indeed anyone with a living body (human and otherwise) can be a player of this instrument. The *Tentaculae* is an improvising instrument, albeit the mode of agency in improvisation shifts—it is the bodied data that is in direct charge of sonic content. But more than this, it is an experiment filled with many questions: why invite organic matter into a human practice? How to do so ethically? What facilitations need to be made to ensure respect across species collaboration? The absurdity of committing to a practice intent on respecting machine and mushroom logics is nevertheless outweighed by the benefits contending with these questions—setting up this kind of social space and inviting humans to have first-hand experience with a new form of transhuman dialogue. This is a sonic experiment wherein anyone might be given the opportunity to develop their own technique, perspective and social skills in ‘making-with’ (as Donna Haraway would say)—something extra human.²⁸

conclusions

It is my opinion that our current existing canonical approach to talking about experimental art is not well equipped to contend with these contemporary practices, because what is happening now has slipped between the borders of our logics. In this new frontier of technology enhanced socio-creative working there is a primacy of new techniques, new virtuosity and the real time work towards developing new

²⁸ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*.

forms of community, in post-human social living.

Let's radicalise this concept even further and consider that posthuman making in human-machine relationships is proving to empower and reinvent the realities of creative practice—where it happens, who it happens with, and why it is made. Media theory therefore (the x-reality, glitch, techno-feminism discussed here etc.) helps us understand how this matters outside our artistic practices as well. We must acknowledge, this an emerging structure within our human social futures, and one which I propose is an imperative to play a part in as these new realities develop.

To do so, we will need to develop new logics to contend with these new ideas. Ones which are capable of embracing the notions of de-categorisation, the individuation bodies, and the experiment with these new cyborg and hybrid human-machine relationships. We are going to need artists, researchers, and audiences that are able to translate the x-practices—who are able to help us tease out what socio-creative shifts are emerging in this quickly developing technological revolution, and we will need artists at the forefront of these new inventions to disrupt and question 'progress'.

As we are now more commonly acknowledging in music scholarship at large—our documents have been biased by a wider systemic exclusion of diverse creative bodies and practice—we are also provided with a very tangible place to tackle these issues within these new technological revolutions. Returning again to the issue of techno-moral and ethical problems emerging from the fast-emerging presence of AI in every-day life, we again know the datasets that we feed these machines to develop their knowledge are biased, carry dominated Western/Anlgo perspectives, and challenge our notions of intellectual property. We therefore might seize this as an opportunity, as an analogy and as a place for experiment—what we have gathered so far as a 'representation of the past'—is not enough to draw on for the contemporary needs at hand. So much of what we will need for living and dying on the future of our planet is going to require what has previously fallen between the cracks.²⁹ This is a call for a more general re-evaluation of the stories, voices, and practices that we use for future logic building—ones which will be greatly benefited from a focus on the fringe, the posthuman, and the previously peripheral.

To conclude then with a very open-ended point, I believe there is great agency to be harnessed for the roles machines can play in contributing towards diversifying, empowering, and re-situating marginalised voices.³⁰ In a tangible way this includes the expanding of a notion of legitimate practice in creative spaces with regards to merit, mastery of craft, and access to socio-creative space. As George Lewis states 'The network is the site of the production of knowledge, and the body animates that network. That makes living with creative machines an epistemological

29 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*.

30 See Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*; Coleman and Shirky, *Hello Avatar*; and Russell, *Glitch Feminism*.

practice/project.³¹ This is an opportunity to make tangible our ongoing questions surrounding post-genre, post-nationality, and post-human realities, which rather than needing the academically positioned ‘post’ relationship at all, are now quickly emerging in a vibrant and complex multi-verse—they are x-panded possibilities that we will need to mediate in both our contemporary artistic practices and our collective social futures.



Figure 12 Images of Maria Sappho. Chimere 2023.

31 Lewis, *Improvising Tomorrow's Bodies*.



Kate Holden

looking for butterflies:
kaleidoscopic pathways to the
femme voice



Figure 1 *Transmutating the Monster*. Kate Holden 2023.

introduction

This paper includes a video essay, *Transmutating the Monster*¹ (see Figure 1), which documents a practice research process into understanding femme timbre through videographic methods. This encapsulates an emergent performance practice influenced by Alfred Wolfsohn's voice research² and its antecedent Roy Hart Voice Work (RHVW)³—an extended voice technique rooted in artistic research and practice. Differentiating from classical vocal techniques, it does not focus on bio-

1 Also available here: Holden, K. (2023) *TransmutatingtheMonster*. [Online] Available at: <<https://vimeo.com/863184902>> [Accessed 16 October 2023].

2 Braggins, S. (2012) *The Mystery Behind the Voice: A Biography of Alfred Wolfsohn*. Matorador.

3 Crawford, K., and Sweeney, B. (2022) *Roy Hart and Roy Hart Theatre*. Routledge.

mechanical production or the larynx.⁴ Instead, a whole-body approach to the voice aligns specific registers with instruments as images to explore timbres, promotes the use of the total capacity of a human voice, equalises aesthetic values of all sounds, and ‘questions the social demands which limit range, gender, and expression in both speech and singing’.⁵ Influenced by Jungian psychology,⁶ Wolfsohn aligned the voice with exploring the self and the human experience which he believed could be voiced through myriad ranges as diverse as the range of one’s experience.⁷ One way to access this in Alfred Wolfsohn’s voice research and in the RHVW lexicon is through using archetypes as an imagistic source or pathway to certain timbral qualities. Often, these are associated with certain registers, and one might work with contrasting archetypes which may evolve into characters, physical gestures, or timbral qualities that the vocalist may return to. For example, to explore timbre and gender, opposites are often used such as ‘beauty and beast’ or ‘king and queen’. Often these are aligned with certain vocal registers, for example ‘queen’ might be in the chest resonator with an alto sound, whereas ‘princess’ might be in a higher register.⁸

Wolfsohn emphasised timbre, believing it was the ‘metaphysical charm of the voice, and the unique essence of the individual’.⁹ Archetypes are one pathway to understanding timbre, however, binary conceptualisations of gender create a hindrance.

The exploration of sonic femmeness is limited, especially femme timbre.¹⁰ Femme gender identity is a heightened queer performance of femininity, often using heterosexual visual signifiers as a mode of expression. Because of this, many femmes are invisibilised or coded as cisgender or heteronormative, limiting sonic understanding due to the emphasis on visuals. Treating RHVW as a queer extended voice practice and alongside video documentation, I explored femme timbre through components of the technique such as extension, replication, and archetypes as pathways to uncovering femme timbral qualities. The usage of video allowed me to explore the visual components of femme identity, superimpose theoretical understandings of materials I was engaging with, and combat the challenges of discussing timbre via text.

4 Braggins, *The Mystery Behind the Voice*, 23-44.

5 Braggins, *The Mystery Behind the Voice*, 27.

6 Jungian psychology is a psychoanalytical approach developed by Carl Jung. Emphasising talk therapy, it seeks to address the unconscious, often through archetypal metaphors. See Jung, C., Adler, G., and Hull, R.F.C. (Eds.) (1969) *Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 9 (Part 1): Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Princeton University Press.

7 Braggins, *The Mystery Behind the Voice*, 24-30.

8 Crawford and Sweeney, Roy Hart, 137.

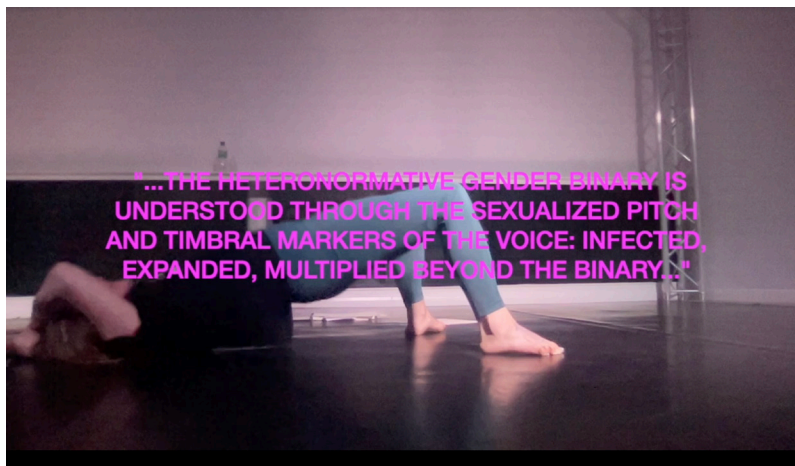
9 Braggins, *The Mystery Behind the Voice*, 44.

10 Dr Christine Capetola discusses sonic femmeness and its relationship to synthesisers, see Capetola, C. (2021) *Public Cultural Studies*. [Online] Available at: <<https://publicculturalstudies.wordpress.com/2021/09/01/1-sonic-femmeness-with-christine-capetola/>> [Accessed 22 August 2023].

Due to the limited understanding of femme timbre, I developed my own framework as a non-binary femme performer. From January to July of 2023, I conducted practice research using a combination of writing, reading, listening, video recordings, and replicating timbral qualities in artists I position as femme, such as Diamanda Galás. I chose these artists because their timbral qualities align with the archetypes I examined in the Roy Hart Lineage.



'I succeeded in imagining a way out. So, since in the heteropatriarchal binary circus, women are offered the role of Belle or victim, and since I was not and did not feel myself capable of being one or the other, I decided to stop being a woman.' *Transmutating the Monster*. Kate Holden 2023.



'...the heteronormative gender binary is understood through the sexualized pitch and timbral markers of the voice: infected, expanded, multiplied beyond the binary...' *Transmutating the Monster*. Kate Holden 2023.

imagining a way out: queer femme timbre

Queer extended voice studies scholar and practitioner Yvon Bonenfant addresses conceptualisations of queer timbre in his work, *Queer Listening to Queer Vocal Timbres*. First, he suggests that queer performance studies have predominantly focused on visual aspects of embodiment rather than vocality. Secondly, both producing and listening to queer voices require developing a certain virtuosity.¹¹ This could be a queer virtuosity for example, recognising and attuning to queer timbres. Thirdly, queer timbre is a mode of touch and expression of desire, often a reaching for other queer people to meet their needs, or at least to be attuned to them. Lastly, voices with timbres outside of normative or dominant cultures have often been silenced. Bonenfant speculates that this is because the touch of one's timbre may penetrate the dominant culture, elicit love, or a positive reaction, thus disrupting the power dynamic between the oppressor and the hegemonic culture. He also examines the challenges of discussing timbre, which is often only done through metaphor.¹² Bonenfant's conceptualisations of queer timbre and how this might be applied to understanding femme timbre propels my practice research investigation. As mentioned earlier, these conceptualisations are scaffolded by Wolfsohn's emphasis on timbre being an individual's unique essence. I wanted to demystify timbre's ephemerality and pursued video to explore how it might support understanding of femme timbre.

methods

My video essay, *Transmutating the Monster*, is an output of exploring femme timbre through videographic practice. My practice was influenced by methods such as Ben Spatz's *Dynamic Configurations With Transversal Video (DCTV)*.¹³ DCTV is a research method for creating and analysing work created in a laboratory theatre context with a videographic component. This method has a deliberate focus on rigour and knowledge creation. Knowledge generation is done in two 'cuts', firstly, using the theatre as a laboratory to explore inquiry or conduct an experiment, and secondly, to then trace and inscribe archivally.¹⁴ This process also uses configurations with multiple parties in the space, working as videographer(s), practitioner(s), and coach(es)/director(s), and with a notation system delineating how the configuration will work.¹⁵ Methodologically, my inspiration from this manifests in the two

11 Bonenfant, Y. (2010) *Queer Listening to Queer Vocal Timbres*. *Performance Research*, 15(3), pp. 74–80.

12 Bonenfant, *Queer Listening*, 75.

13 Spatz, B. (2020) *Making a Laboratory: Dynamic Configurations with Transversal Video*. Punctum Books.

14 Spatz, *Making a Laboratory*, 23–33.

15 Spatz, *Making a Laboratory*, 37–104.

cuts of knowledge: studio work and then analysis, and using theatre in a laboratory context. I chose to emphasise the discovery practice research can offer rather than devise a performance about femme timbre. Performance creation can often foreclose experimentation, inquiry, and evolution of research processes due to production needs.

In working with timbre and archetypes through the voice, I developed a studio practice of writing, reading texts out loud, listening, and then conducting improvisations regarding this work. Between March and July of 2023, this research took place in three hour sessions, averaging eighteen hours a week. The improvisatory component exploring archetypes acted as a kinaesthetic synthetisation of the process through the voice. Video allowed for the transparency of internal writing and reading processes to be exposed and then directly applied to artistic practice, or rather, to be a part of artistic practice and processes.

To elucidate, what this video essay documents and demonstrates is the intertextuality and imbrication of the following materials:

‘Queen of the Night’, as an archetype in the RHWV lineage and as a descriptor for Diamanda Galás’ vocals.

Using replication of timbral qualities as a femme tactic.

The practice of reading the texts including Ferrett’s *Dark Sound: Feminine Voices in Sonic Shadow*,¹⁶ Jarman-Iven’s *Queer Vocal Technologies*,¹⁷ Preciado’s *Can the Monster Speak*,¹⁸ and Bonenfant’s *Queer Listening to Queer Vocal Timbres*.¹⁹

The practice of a close listening to Galás’ *Wild Woman With Steak Knives* as a template for non-binary queer femme vocal timbre.

Next, I explain how these connections and how video methodologically supported each and how my understanding of femme timbre changed. I wanted to work with the ‘Queen of the Night’ archetype because it has a specific connotation in the RHWV lineage. This archetype stems from Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte*, a vengeful queen and foil of Sarastro, depicting rage, passion, and virtuosity. Three RHWV practitioners explain how this archetype manifests socially, performatively, and vocally. Sheila Braggins illustrates how Wolfsohn’s student Jill Johnson voiced

16 Ferrett, D. (2020) *Dark Sound: Feminine Voices in Sonic Shadow*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

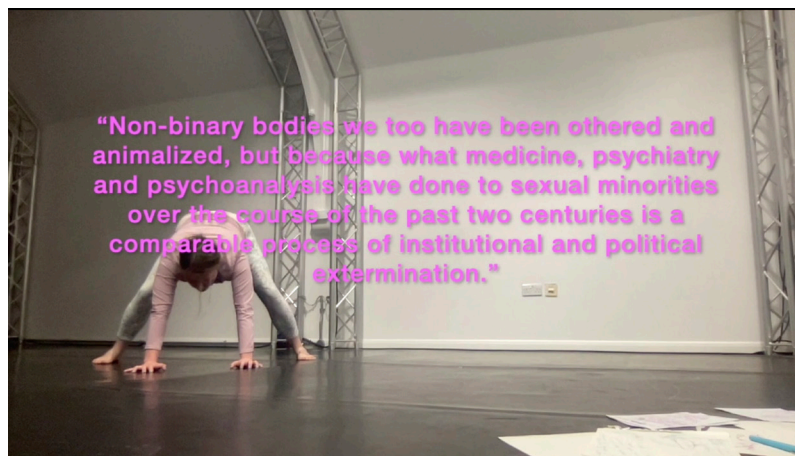
17 Jarman-Ivens, F. (2011) *Queer Voices: Technologies, Vocalities, and the Musical Flaw*. Palgrave Macmillan.

18 Preciado, P.B. (2021) *Can the Monster Speak? A Report to an Academy of Psychoanalysts*. Translated by Frank Wynne. Semiotext(e).

19 Bonenfant, *Queer Listening*.

all of the roles in a triad of the ‘Queen of the Night’ as a coloratura, archetypically representing mother and darkness; Sarastro, as the embodiment of light, leader, father, and bass; and Tamino, an archetypal prince, hero, lover, and tenor.²⁰ This demonstrates Wolfsohn’s suppositions of exploring gender through the voice and his understanding of exploring archetypes vocally. Additionally, Johnson’s performance suggests that if one voice can perform all these parts, gender can be vocally ruptured.

Rupturing the associations of this archetype is desirable. This archetype transferred into the RHVW lineage via the Roy Hart Theatre. Practitioners Margaret and Noah Pikes explain some of the negative associations in working with Roy Hart: if one was behaving negatively or undesirably one consequence could be as mundane as a poorly received mood or gesture. They would be compared to the shrill, vengeful nature of the ‘Queen of the Night’.²¹ Offering a feminist perspective, Margaret Pikes suggests that there is a tension in the archetype in that it was considered virtuosic for men to sing the aria. However, the high, excessive femininity, ‘gendered non-verbal vocal expression’, was considered fearsome, ‘overwhelming and dangerous’.²² If women’s voices were silenced in this way, clearly, queer or non-binary performance were inhibited and unheard due to this lineage-specific mythos around this archetype. Hence, my desire to explore it through practice.



‘Non-binary bodies we too have been othered and animalized, but because what medicine, psychiatry and psychoanalysis have done to sexual minorities over the course of the past two centuries is a comparable process of institutional and political extermination.’ *Transmutating the Monster*. Kate Holden 2023.

20 Braggins, *The Mystery Behind the Voice*, 44.

21 Pikes, N., and Carey, D. (2019) *Dark Voices: The Genesis of Roy Hart Theatre*. Whole Voice Publishing, p. 123.

22 Pikes, M., and Campbell, P. (2020) *Owning Our Voices*. Routledge Voice Studies.

queering the queen: rebranding femme darkness and wild madness

A tactic of femme identity is replicating heterosexual signifiers in order to signal one's queerness. A tactic of Wolfsohn's voice research was that he 'imagined a way out' of his war trauma by using the voice, through the practice of replication. He replicated the sounds he heard in the trenches as a stretcher-bearer in World War I to attempt to cure auditory hallucinations and to reengage with his lost singing voice and sense of self which accompanied his Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.²³ This precept informed my methodology and use of mimicry as a tactic. To illustrate how these concepts might be used with a contemporary understanding of exploring gender through the voice, I invoke trans scholarship and sentiments. For example, Paul Preciado's *Can The Monster Speak?* describes his experience of transness as 'imagining a way out', not a search for liberation or freedom, but imagining a way out of the gender binary.²⁴ I also embrace Susan Stryker's definition of transness, which she states as, 'those who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth, people who cross over (*trans-*) the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain the gender.'²⁵ While imagination and movement away from constraints of gender can take many forms, my practice research explores what archetypes can offer in creating sonic imaginal landscapes and the use of vocal timbre. Methodologically, I align with Wolfsohn's practice of replication as a femme performer. Because femme identity relies on visual signifiers, I use the practice of timbral mimicry to imagine a way out of the gender binary through the voice.

This tactic of replication enlivened my studio practice through reading and listening to Diamanda Galás, who is an extended vocal artist and auteur. Galás is classically trained, a polyglot, and uses her extreme range to confront themes of horrors of humanity. Themes include mourning AIDS victims, including her brother, in works such as the album *Plague Mass*.²⁶ Her sounds and extreme ranges map onto these themes and can be heard in works such as 'Wild Women With Steak Knives: A Homicidal Love song for Solo Scream'.²⁷ Through practice including close reading as an embodied practice, I explored the intersection of Ferrett's *Dark Sound: Feminine Voices in Sonic Shadow*²⁸ and Galás' work. Close listening to the track and reading (and vice versa) several of Ferrett's observations about Galás' voice enhanced my understanding. Her high range is at the upper end of the vocal limit,

23 Newham, P., and Günther, M. (1997) *The Prophet of Song: The Life and Work of Alfred Wolfsohn*. Tigers Eye Press, p. 22.

24 Preciado, *Can the Monster Speak*, 205.

25 Stryker, S. (2008) *Transgender History*. Seal Press.

26 Galás, D. (1991) *Plague Mass*. Mute Records.

27 Galás, D. (1982). 'Wild Women With Steak Knives' on *The Litanies Of Satan*. Mute Records.

28 Ferrett, *Dark Sound*.

engaging with pitches so high that it becomes heavily associated with femininity and madness. This dual coloratura—the dark feminine—is associated with shrill, madness, and preverbal high sounds conjure associations to the ‘Queen of the Night’.²⁹ The queer vocality in ‘Wild Women With Steak Knives’ enabled me to see the queer potential in this archetype, which could only be understood through practice. Through practice, I queered the understanding of this archetype from a cisgender understanding. Rather than reciting part of Mozart’s opera or practice in a way that reinforces the RHVW mythos, such as reciting the aria in some extended way, I instead treated Galás’ timbral qualities and voice as an archetypal image to understand queering of these timbral qualities and how this might reconfigure the archetype. I would then conduct my own improvisations based on what I heard, replicating timbral quality.

Oscillating between reading Ferrett’s *Dark Sound: Feminine Voices in Sonic Shadow* and Jarman-Ivens’ case study on Galás in her book *Queer Voices: Technologies, Vocalities, and the Musical Flam*, and listening to ‘Wild Women With Steak Knives’, Ferrett’s critique explains that Galás disrupts gender vocally through ‘excessive and abnormal pitches, ranges, tones, and timbres’.³⁰ Ferrett further explains that through her excessive range and malleable timbre, she is able to ‘blur between sounding feminine, masculine and non-binary’;³¹ she reconfigures what the ‘Queen of the Night’ could be through her voice.

After reading, I integrated this material vocally and conducted my own series of improvisations over the course of several sessions which resulted in the video essay. Linking the concept of *imagining a way out* into my practice, I voiced parts of Preciado’s text featured in the video essay. This meta-textuality creates a dynamism within the text: I embody it, it is superimposed onto the video, and I voice parts of it. Therefore, we arrive at new understandings of timbre based on the way materials can be linked through video as a format. Uniquely, this mode of practice increases the capaciousness of connections that can be made theoretically but also foregrounds practical discoveries.

While this theoretically explains the materials I engaged with, it is through practice and through experiencing the video essay that best demonstrates how this process materialised and how the qualities of femme timbre were explored. What occurs vocally are timbres conceptually adjacent to Galás, replicating her timbral quality in *Wild Woman With Steak Knives*, exploring dark, low, femme timbres, and high, shrill, eerie shrieks. I arrive at a sense of expanse as to what femme timbre might be.

29 Ferrett, *Dark Sound*, 198-199.

30 Ferrett, *Dark Sound*, 193.

31 Ferrett, *Dark Sound*, 193.

conclusion

To revisit Bonenfant's idea of queer timbre,³² I have worked to queerly attune to these timbres. Through excessive height, as well as darkness, femme timbre penetrates and ruptures mythos within a particular artistic lineage through the inclusion of queer sounds and understanding of queer timbre. In a femme context, the 'Queen of the Night' could be a duality of high and low depth, proving archetypes in this sense can be a generative catalyst for understanding femme timbre. The queer virtuosity Bonenfant speaks of is the vocal ability to penetrate dominant cultural conceptions, and through vocal excess, queer understandings of who or what sounds and reigns supreme.

³² Bonenfant, *Queer Listening*, 74-80.



Contributors

Charlie Sdraulig composes quiet, intimate music, which focuses on subtle sonic and gestural behaviours. His work has been presented at numerous festivals, including Lucerne Festival Forward (Switzerland), MATA (USA), and SPOR (Denmark). Recent close collaborators include ELISION (Australia), Gwen Rouger (France), Marco Fusi (Italy), and Winnie Huang (Australia). His primary research areas are social dynamics and innovative notations in experimental sonic practices. His writing has been published in *TEMPO* and *Perspectives of New Music*. He holds a DMA in Music Composition from Stanford University, and is currently a teaching associate in theory, composition, sound art, and ear training at several tertiary institutions in Melbourne, Australia.

Marco Fusi is a violinist/violist, a researcher in music performance, and a passionate advocate for the music of our time. Among many collaborations with emerging and established composers, he has premiered works by Jessie Marino, Giacinto Scelsi, Yu Kuwabara, Salvatore Sciarrino and Kristine Tjøgersen, among others. Marco has performed with Pierre Boulez, Elena Schwarz, Lorin Maazel, Susanna Mälkki, Alan Gilbert, and frequently plays with leading contemporary ensembles including Klangforum Wien, MusikFabrik, Meitar Ensemble, Mivos Quartet, Ensemble Linea. He has recorded several solo albums, published by Kairos, Stradivarius, Col Legno, Da Vinci, Geiger Grammofon, New Focus Recordings. Marco also plays viola d'amore, commissioning new pieces and collaborating with composers to promote and expand existing repertoire for the instrument. After his Masters in Violin and Composition at the Conservatory of Milan, Marco's received his PhD from the University of Antwerp / docARTES program with a dissertation on the performance practice of Giacinto Scelsi's works for string instruments. He is currently Professor of Violin at the Conservatory of Alessandria and Fellow Researcher at the Orpheus Instituut of Gent.

Winnie Huang is a Chinese-Australian violinist, violist, gestural performance artist and composer currently based between Belgium and France. An active performer of new music, Winnie is co-artistic director and violinist of Paris based new music ensemble soundinitiative, one part of experimental instrumental duo hoodwink, and also part of the performative duo LOOKOUT. As one of the

Lucerne Contemporary Leaders, Winnie is also currently co-curating the Lucerne Forward Festival and violin coach at the summer Lucerne Festival Academy.

She continually works with emerging and established composers and regularly performs with international ensembles at international festivals. Career highlights have included solo performances at the Berlin Philharmonie (DE), KKL Lucerne (CH) and the Elb Philharmonie (DE), among many international ensemble tours in Europe, USA and Australia.

Winnie's strong interest in the performance of musical-gestural pieces is explored frequently through her own original compositions and collaborating with other composers, developing highly gestural contemporary works. Academically, Winnie's doctoral artistic research was on interdisciplinary musical-gestural performance and collaborative processes, and she is expanding her artistic research further along those fields. Having consistently taught and lectured around Australia and Europe, she is currently Junior Professor of Artistic Research at the Hochschule für Musik und Tanz Köln, Germany.

Gwen Rouger. *Since everything is doomed to disappear, both beings and works of art, only the moment of encounter and what it creates interests me. A moment of doubt, of adaptation, listening, testing, research. From the artist as well as from the spectator. To get out of preconceived ideas, and work to be free.* Gwen Rouger, pianist-keyboardist and artistic director of company ENTRE, creates piano performances for a single spectator placed in public space (Caravan, Tente de Chantier..). Her in-situ sound experiences open listening to the environment through interpersonal relationships and bring a space for creativity that is continuous with real and daily life. Gwen Rouger was artist in residence at the Cité des Arts (Paris/France) in 2015/2016, and at the Akademie Schloss Solitude (Stuttgart/Germany) in 2016/2017. She performs abroad and in France (Cafe OTO, BBC Radio 3 London, Radio France, Centre Pompidou France, Festival Ear to the Ground Belgium, BIFEM Festival Australia, LEE Foundation Theater Singapur, Festival Klang, Festival Spor Danemark).

Henry McPherson is a musician, interdisciplinary artist, and academic working across composition, improvisation, performance, practice research, and pedagogy. His creative portfolio includes sound and music for concert, stage, and broadcast, site-specific pieces and gallery installation, experimental improvisation performance in sound and movement, and collaborative intermedia and hybrid-digital art pieces. His work has been shown internationally across diverse settings – from concert halls to galleries, from bathrooms to dance studios, from parks and warehouses to cafes, virtual halls and radio. His current creative interests lie in the intersections of improvisation performance and ecology, knowledge exchange and collaboration with the more-than-human, integrated sound and movement practices, and illustrated notation.

Henry is currently a postdoctoral Research Associate at the University of Manchester, working between the Creative Manchester Platform, and an NIHR SSRC funded study evaluating the impact of an improvised music-making programme on the wellbeing of staff and family carers in dementia care contexts. Henry's research interests lie in intersections of artistic performance and practice-as-research, improvisation studies and applied arts practice in health and social care, critical race theory and queer-feminist social critique, trans- and inter-disciplinary scholarship.

Anthony J. Stillabower embraces a variety of technologies to create compositional and collaborative approaches to the material interests that emerge through his vocal practice. These approaches include spatialization through handheld transducers, corpus-driven musicking, improvisation and methods of engaging multimedia scores. In recent projects, he is exploring machine learning as a bridge between these ways of making music.

Sasha Elina is a curator and musician based in London. She specialises in experimental and new music, sound installation and interdisciplinary practices. Her work is driven by the fascination with the relationship between sound and space, with the projects and research focusing on the ways in which music situations are embedded into different physical and social contexts.

Sasha is the founder and artistic director of Music Space Architecture, an international project dedicated to identifying and investigating different areas of interaction between music and architecture. As a vocalist and flautist, Sasha performs solo and in various collectives playing composed experimental and improvised music. She was a founding member of The Same Ensemble (2013-2023), performed with the Moscow Contemporary Music Ensemble (MCME), the Moscow Scratch Orchestra, Splitter Orchester, FIII (Glintshake), and others. Sasha was selected as a fellow of OneBeat 2019, a U.S. State Department Programme produced by Bang on a Can's Found Sound Nation. Sasha received her Music BA in Flute and Baroque flute at the Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory (2017), and Music MA by Research at the University of Huddersfield (2023), with the thesis titled 'Music curation as a site-oriented practice. Approaches to creating and staging listening experiences'.

Maria Sappho is a Puerto Rican American, working as an artist and researcher in the UK. Maria specialises in multi-species collaborative projects working with the AI named 'Chimere' (in collaboration with the Swiss based AiiA festival) and with mushrooms.

Maria has worked with a number of large ensembles including the International Contemporary Ensemble (US), BBC Scottish symphony orchestra (UK),

Australian Art Orchestra (AU), and the Instant Composers Pool (ND). Maria is a long-time member of the Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra (GIO) and founding member of the Noisebringers ensemble (CH/UK).

Maria is a winner of the BBC radiophonic Daphne Oram award (2021), Dewar awards (2018) and New Piano Stars Competition (2015). She gained her PhD as part of the European Research Council project IRiMaS where she assisted in the development of new musicological software (TIAALS) through her research investigating the global practices of contemporary experimental improvisers. Maria also holds a MMus and BMus from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and is the current module coordinator for Sonic Improvisation at the Conservatoire. She runs the Feminist Free Improvisation Archive (for gender minority artists), curates for Mopomoso (vortex Jazz bar London) and co-edits the political arts magazine the Mass. Her work has been published in the Cambridge University Press Organised Sound, Frontiers Psychology and she is currently working towards her first book in collaboration with Raymond MacDonald, Tia DeNora, Robert Burke and Ross Birrell (Oxford University Press).

Kate Holden is a PhD researcher at the University of Huddersfield in Drama, Dance and Performance. They earned an MFA in Theatre: Contemporary Performance from Naropa University. Specialising in devising and extended voice, Kate applies experimental and extended performance modalities, to devised theatre processes, foregrounding techniques such as Roy Hart Voice Work (which they studied at the CAIRH in France). Their research interests also include feminist and queer studies in performance contexts.

Colin Frank is a percussionist, field recordist, installation artist, improviser, and multimedia composer. He is a founding member of Brutalust and Drift Ensemble, and has worked notably with the International Contemporary Ensemble, the Noisebringers, TAK Ensemble, AndPlay, Gods Entertainment, and the Moscow Contemporary Music Ensemble. He has performed internationally at hcmf//, Berlin's CTM festival, the Darmstadt Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik, Electric Springs, Beast Feast, SoundThought, and PAS Quebec Days amongst others. His installations often involve audience interactivity and have been exhibited at Salem Art Works, Dai Hall, and Analix Forever. Colin has released music on Crow Verses Crow, Verz, Another Timbre, and Accidental, and his solo album of performances on outdoor objects was released on Impulsive Habitat, with a track receiving the Hildegard Westerkamp award for soundscape composition from JTTP.

Colin's PhD dissertation at the University of Huddersfield, titled 'Making With Agential Objects: an Autoethnographic Account of Fluidity in Artistic Practice', considered how unconventional instruments and objects influence his creative

process. His academic writing has appeared in the Comparative Media Arts journal, Filigrane, and Pulse, and he was editor of issue 7 of the Centre for Research in New Music (CeReNeM) journal. He teaches percussion at the Leeds Conservatoire, and has taught improvisation and experimental music at the University of Huddersfield.

Jakob Bragg is a composer, researcher, educator, and PhD candidate at the University of Huddersfield, UK. He has developed a compositional practice that engages in unconventional approaches to acoustic instruments and navigates the exploratory, ritual, and ornamentation. Jakob's works has been performed across Europe, Asia, Australia and America by artists including ELISION (AU), International Contemporary Ensemble (US), Arditti Quartet (UK), Cikada (NO), Zöllner-Roche Duo (UK/DE), London Philharmonic Orchestra (UK), and Australia's Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, Australian Youth Orchestra, Amber Evans, and Alex Raineri. Jakob is the editor of the CeReNeM Journal, issue 8.

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