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Futuring – A Performer’s Praxis

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Musical Arts

in

Contemporary Music Performance

by

Fiona Digney

Committee in charge:

Professor Steven Schick, Chair
Professor Anthony Burr
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Professor Stephanie Richards
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2021

The dissertation of Fiona Digney is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego

2021

DEDICATION

This paper and all of the work that led to it is dedicated to my mother, Ruth Digney. Her resilience, strength, tenacity, organizational skills, and appreciation of the absurd continue to be guiding attributes in my life.

I would also like to extend my deepest appreciation to my advisor Steven Schick for his many years of guidance, support, encouragement, integrity, and wisdom. For almost twenty years you have been a gravitational force for good in my life and career.

Thank you to my darling husband Michael Parker Jr for his patience, understanding, encouragement, and positive energy during the completion of this degree.

And I thank both my parents, Ruth and Clive Digney. I hope that this achievement in part fulfills the dreams you had for me all those years ago when you provided me with the best education and opportunities you could.

EPIGRAPH

Art as praxis, as well as situated inter-subjectivity, can offer a medium, a ground, a middle way for freedom, reflexivity and existential meaning. Play – and thus art – is indeed in the middle, between beginning and end, between birth and death. Like a transformation force, it goes beyond dualisms, beyond contradictory experiences, beyond even the destruction of dualisms, inspiring the renewal of praxis again and again, and with it, our embodied understanding of being human.

- Kathleen Coessens et al.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Futuring – A Performer’s Praxis

by

Fiona Digney

Doctor of Musical Arts of Contemporary Music Performance

University of California San Diego, 2020

Professor Steven Schick, Chair

Futuring: A Performer’s Praxis explores a praxis-based approach to performance, where the primary focus is the work-in-action (rather than work-product) of *play* and the activities related to metabolizing a composition for its own merit rather than for its means-to-an-end (performance) instrumentality. Fiona Digney posits a praxis that connects musical interpretation to Gadamer’s *play*, Deleuze’s rhizomic thought, and Fry’s model of *futuring*. Rather than a methodology or instruction manual, Digney proposes an approach to musical practice that has the potential to be applied to, and informed by, the wider contexts in which the musician exists.

Introduction

Performing musicians often find themselves alone and isolated in a practice room, wondering what to make of the score they have in front of them and attempting to imagine the long path between the present moment of first connection with the piece at hand and the eventual performance of that piece. The path is often viewed as a single line, no matter how meandering, rather than an open plain to be explored and re-explored in what Deleuze refers to as ‘radically horizontal’ or ‘rhizomic’ thought.¹ In singular linear thought and action, the *performance* is often the focal point or end-goal of the work-in-action; a piece is selected for performance at a particular time, place, and in a particular context. Often, the performer’s focal point is also the moment of performance; a performer without any future performances will often experience a loss of motivation to practice. Although there are occasions when a piece is chosen to learn ‘for fun’ or for pedagogical reasons (in the case of etudes in particular), most often there is a specific future event in mind in which the piece will be ‘brought to life.’

The physical isolation experienced in the practice room and the psychological isolation that emerges as a result of disconnection from others who are working on the same piece (as is often the case), can sometimes feel monotonous or unsustainable. Whether a future performance date is known or unknown, the continual, largely subjective work of the performing musician can feel repetitive - either stuck in long periods of isolated practice or swinging between isolated practice and public performance. For a percussionist, there is also the added challenge of the monotony of continual newness. A percussionist whose repertoire is largely solo absolute music will likely face a seemingly endless variety of notation and instrument configurations as well as playing

¹ Paul Ramshaw, "Lost in Music: Understanding the Hermeneutic Overlap in Musical Composition, Performance and Improvisation," proceedings of 5th International Music Theory Conference, Principles of Musical Composition, Lithuania, Vilnius (2005), 2.

techniques, with each new piece. Before even beginning to engage with the musical elements of a piece, the percussionist must gather the required instruments, engineer an instrument configuration (known colloquially as a set-up), and decipher the notational system used in the score. To a freelance percussionist without connection to the financial, logistical, instrumental, and collaborative resources often associated with an orchestra, established ensemble, or university, these challenges are doubly apparent and can contribute further to the feeling of an unsustainable practice.

Contrary to the focus on the moment of performance arriving after a singular, linear process, this paper proposes an approach to work-in-action that is heavily weighted on the praxis of play; of exploring the rhizomic landscape of understanding. That is, focused on the *work* of art, rather than the artwork.² Said another way, an approach to musical interpretation that puts action before theory, play before method, and the process before the product. This does not mean that the latter elements (theory, method, product) are of no use or not important. To the contrary, they are most useful only *after* a dedicated focus on praxis through play. In other words, what is being presented is a way of combining three means of understanding.³ The structuralist, nuts and bolts understanding, the sociological angle of a continually cycling hermeneutic understanding, and the physical, tacit understanding gained through playful interaction during the work-in-action (during practice).

In the beginning of the 21st century, although there were rumblings of this much earlier, a felt experience of diminishing futures began to develop. This sense of what some describe as impending doom is described by Australian theorist and designer Tony Fry as *defuturing*; a

² As we will later explore through the work of Barbara Bolt.

³ With understanding being a continual progression of depth and breadth, rather than the knowing of a end point in a linear progression.

continually diminishing number of possible futures for our world. Fry points to the homogenization of global cultures and a subsequent desperate need for hope, possibility, and personal agency as symptoms of a defuturing world.⁴ As artists, musicians are in the privileged position of having the capacity to create an open space for the possibility of hope and personal agency,⁵ to model possible ways of being in the world that are not of a defuturing nature. By taking a praxical rather than poiesical stance in regard to our work, for a rhizomic rather than linear interpretive understanding, we open up the possibilities for a more diverse range of interpretive outcomes; we demonstrate the possibility for possibilities. As defuturing describes a future with diminished futures, demonstrating the possibility for possibilities shows a future *with* futures; what Fry refers to as *futuring*.

This paper will explore the ideas of moving away from an anthroparchy⁶ and inherent patriarchy of *mastery* of the object (score/text-as-instruction and performance) and towards a co-responsibility of creation that seeks to de-centralize and de-privilege the performer. Rather than offering a definitive methodology or pedagogy with case studies, a philosophy of approach to bringing a musical work from the score to sound-in-action will be presented. Although focused on solo absolute percussion music, this approach is intended to have a wider usefulness both within musical practice and in extra-musical contexts. This philosophy of approach will be based in the world of Heidegger and the theory of handling as care, Gadamer's play, Deleuze's rhizomic

⁴ Tony Fry, *Design as Politics* (New York: Berg, 2011).

⁵ Barbara Bolt, *Heidegger, Handlability and Praxical Knowledge* (Proceedings of Australian Council of University Art and Design Schools Conf., 2004), 23-25.

⁶ Where domination over nature, including human nature, is of central importance. This is in contrast to the more common anthropocentric, wherein the human needs are central, but not explicitly in domination over nature. These terms and the overarching concept of anthroprivilege are discussed in Simon Springer's "Check Your Anthroprivilege! Situated Knowledge and Geographical Imagination as an Antidote to Environmental Speciesism, Anthroparchy, and Human Fragility" from the upcoming book, *Vegan Geographies* (June 2021).

thought, and informed by Fry's transition initiative (including futuring) and relevant historical materials.

This research asserts the importance of the arts' engagement with the current transition initiatives with the aim to embody and perhaps model an imagined future of Sustainment. As Kramer writes;⁷

All the terms involved - values, civilization, the humanities, identity, culture, archive, knowledge, music itself – have been wrenched from their traditional contexts and opened to reevaluation and rethinking. Some of these changes have come from self-questioning in the humanities themselves and a creeping feeling of bad conscience about Western culture. Some have come from the dramatic transformation in the dominant forms of knowledge wrought by digital technology and by the application of scientific empiricism (in fields ranging from cognitive science and neurobiology to economics) to areas of subjectivity traditionally exempted from empiricist inquiry. Some have come from the alarming rise in religious and ideological dogmatism, the upsurge of a spirit of counter-Enlightenment, and some from a sense of ecological crisis and the anxieties of globalization. For the humanities, the net effect has been the threat of reduction to the status of a narcissistic amusement, a niche entertainment pretending – or no longer pretending-to dreams of glory.

Through the lens of a percussionist's musical practice, an approach to addressing the current world-state of unsustainability is offered through a praxical focus on individual musical practice. It is hoped that this bottom-up approach can be expanded and transplanted onto larger musical and extra-musical contexts both directly and indirectly. That is, by the performer themselves and by those who engage with the performer and their work. Musicians hold a vital role in addressing the reality and structural unsustainability of our time. As Fry notes, "...a confrontation with structural unsustainability demands a seismic shift in political, economic *and cultural* [italics added] agendas."⁸

⁷ Lawrence Kramer, *Interpreting Music* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), 278.

⁸ Fry, *Design as Politics*, 42.

Chapter one will explore mastery as viewed through praxis and poiesis, forming the basis for the seemingly counterintuitive argument of a performer's goal being the *work* of art, rather than the artwork. Invoking Fry, Aristotle, Heidegger, Deleuze, and extra-musical analogies, a praxical focus in musical practice is presented. Rather than an instrumentalist approach wherein tools are used to master, triumph, or dominate over an object (score, skill, technique, phrase etc.), a mastery achieved through *care* is developed. By cultivating the environment around which the musical event comes into being, we are engaging in a praxis of rhizomic thought, which has the potential to lead to unexpected avenues of thought and action.

Chapter two addresses the current unsustainability⁹ as outlined by Australian theorist and designer Tony Fry. Looking at the effects of a heavily weighted poiesis in the arts and sciences, and the effects of globalization on culture and identity, an exploration is made into how musicians might move away from an often sheltered and privileged position (particularly in the academic context) into one that engages with the surrounding world. Not through overt activism (although that is valid, meaningful, and needed also) but through a fundamental shift in thinking and approach to artistic practice.

Chapter three begins to explore the central elements of the suggested praxical approach; Heidegger's handling as care, and Gadamer's intentional free play. Through play and care, we can gain what Heidegger terms a "tacit knowledge," and it is through this approach that multiple possibilities are brought to the fore, represented as rhizomic thought. Through handling as care, co-responsibility is invoked, deconstructing elements of the musician's privilege, as well as sharing agency; the opposite of mastery by domination.

⁹ As coined by Fry, commonly linked to unsustainability, although key differences will be outlined.

Chapter four explores the futuring results of the play discussed in chapter three. Most importantly, an argument is made for a futuring artistic praxis as antithetical to an anything-goes approach to interpretation. Interpretative outcomes will be explored within a framework of plausibility and implausibility rather than within a correct/incorrect dichotomy. An approach combining radical hermeneutics and radically horizontal thought will be outlined involving exploration, discovery, and metabolization of a multiplicity of plausible outcomes.

Chapter five brings all of the aforementioned concepts together into the radical hermeneutic approach of play, interpretation, and play once more. The futuring praxis and exercise in metabolization is expounded upon and small illustrative examples are given when needed, with the expectation that this approach will have a wider usage and resonance beyond that of a percussionist's artistic praxis.

Chapter six explores the potential for performance outcomes of a rhizomic interpretive structure and the possibilities that are created from that exploration.

Chapter 1. Praxis, Poesis, and the Concept of Mastery

A categorization is only a conceptual tool,
but it can clarify our interpretation and understanding
of the world of artistic practice.

- Kathleen Coessens

PRAXIS, POIESIS, AND MASTERY

The following research should be viewed as an approach to a creative or artistic practice that may (or may not) result in a performance. To understand the reasoning behind the focus on the musician's work prior to the moment of performance, I suggest that we look to how praxis and poiesis currently present in musical performance (and performance preparation) in relation to differing definitions of mastery. Subsequently, the broader context of Fry's theory of Sustainment will be explored, giving cultural and societal context to the argument for a praxical approach. After all, musicians are not only a part of society, but are often visible and respected members of that society.

Aristotle's ways of knowing began as a *tri*-chotomy of theory, practice, and creative knowledge. These being *theoria* (*θεωρία*), which produces the knowledge of *episteme* (*ἐπιστήμη*); *praxis* (*πρᾶξις*), which produces the knowledge of *phronesis* (*φρονησις*); and *poiesis* (*ποίησις*), which produces the knowledge *techne* (*τέχνη*). That is; *theoria/episteme*, *praxis/phronesis*, and *poiesis/techne*. Poiesis is understood to be "an activity which aims at an end distinct from the activity."¹⁰ The activity of creating a tangible or intangible object that is separate from the activity that made it. For Aristotle, poiesis was connected to craftsmanship, such as a silversmith producing

¹⁰ Robert Bernasconi, "The Fate of the Distinction Between Praxis and Poiesis," *Heidegger Studies* 2 (1986): 111, accessed July 27, 2020, doi:10.5840/heideggerstud198629

a chalice. The work of melting and molding silver has little to do with the object and use of the chalice that is produced. The type of knowledge gained through this poiesis is techne; technical knowledge. Techne formed the basis for terms technique and technical, and as we will discover, came to be the dominate form of knowledge in artmaking through its instrumentalist leanings. “Poiesis, the ‘instrumentalist means-to-an-end has come to define the contemporary engagement of humans with the world’.”¹¹

Praxis on the other hand is described as an “activity whose end is nothing other than the activity itself.”¹² There is a fundamental difficulty in providing pure examples of praxis, though it is useful as a conceptual tool for thinking about the act of musical practice without the explicit need or desire for a public performance product as an end-goal. Through praxis, or thoughtful, practical action, one gains practical knowledge; phronesis. In his book *Being and Time*, Heidegger relates praxis to handling as care and phronesis to tacit knowledge.

There is a general tradition of subordination of praxis to poiesis,¹³ and this is no different in the arts, where poiesis is favored. Art and music-making are generally thought of to be in the realm of productive, creative knowledge; techne through poiesis. It is my contention that rather than the vocation of music performance (or a musical practice) being grounded in poiesis and the resulting technical knowledge (techne), there is merit to approaching music-making from a praxical point of view; a way of gaining phronesis, or tacit knowledge, through thoughtful action.

Although techne did once have a creative, inventive aspect, this has largely been lost through the commodification of creative production in the modern era.¹⁴

It is clear that the knowledge contained in different acts of artistic practice requires attention through these multiple points of view, acknowledging the tacit, as well as

¹¹ Bolt, *Heidegger, Handlability and Praxical Knowledge*, 2.

¹² Bernasconi, “The Fate of the Distinction Between Praxis and Poiesis,” 111.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹⁴ Coessens et al., *The Artistic Turn: A Manifesto*, 78.

*the explicit, the embodied as well as the cognitive, the techne as well as the episteme and praxis.*¹⁵

Music-making indisputably marries theoria, praxis, and poiesis, however given that theoria is largely involved in both praxis and poiesis, only the latter two modes of understanding are under consideration here. This research does not dispute the presence of a plurality of knowledge modalities in musical practice, rather it aims to shift the focus from the outcome (poiesis) to the action of practice - in both the sense of the practice room and one's artistic practice.

Poiesis is concerned with action in the service of bringing into presence a specific product; of acting upon an object or objects to create, build, and present a pre-determined object. Alternatively, praxis is the action of engaging with an object for the purpose of that engagement alone. It is a present action, rather than a future-focused and product-focused activity. In other words, "Poiesis is about acting upon, doing to; it is about working with objects. *Praxis*, however, is creative: it is other-seeking and dialogic."¹⁶

In many ways, the performer's goal of bringing a score to life, of translating a written text/score (which itself is already a translation of the composer's imaginary sound-world) into performed action, is generally a process of poiesis. The performer has an idea, a goal, a vision of the product they will produce before they begin the work to create that product. They may read over the score, think about how it could sound, and imagine a performance. They may be influenced toward a particular realization/execution of a score through exposure to prior recordings of the piece, and/or may be informed by knowledge of the composer, or the context within which the piece was written. They may be influenced by having seen a performance of the piece before (the closest experience to that which they are trying to achieve), or if working with a teacher, they

¹⁵ Coessens et al., *The Artistic Turn: A Manifesto*, 79.

¹⁶ Posted Byinfed.org, "What Is Praxis?" Infedorg, October 19, 2019, accessed June 2, 2020, <https://infed.org/mobi/what-is-praxis/>

may be guided towards a particular end product through intentional or unintentional pedagogical authority.

Without a specific end goal or product in mind, a praxical approach can appear to be inherently directionless, or at least be marked by an absence of a clearly defined objective endpoint. However, lack of singular direction creates the possibility for emphasis on exploration rather than destination. This moves away from what Deleuze describes as vertical thought and towards radically horizontal, or rhizomic thought. The rhizomic form of thought “by-passes (it does not oppose) the vertical thought of everyday, bureaucratic hierarchy – the thought which entails the consolidation of identities.”¹⁷ Here we see vertical thought associated with homogenized outcomes (consolidated identities), or put in musical terms, rigid performance practice. It is rhizomic thought that allows for continual movement and change; for difference. Musically, rhizomic thought clears the way for interpretive flexibility, which will be explored in later chapters. The rhizomic mode of thought and exploration is inherently playful and with any luck, one becomes lost in the act of play. As Gadamer explains in *Truth and Method*, we are only ‘truly’ capable of learning, understanding, and interpreting if we are fully absorbed in and lost in play.¹⁸ The explorative, absorbing play produces less reliable outcomes, as Arendt explains when retelling Aristotle’s likening of legislators to craftsmen “This is no longer or, rather, not yet action (praxis), properly speaking, but making (poiesis), which they prefer because of its great reliability.”¹⁹ It is precisely this unreliability that I argue is (within reason) desirable. ‘Unreliable

¹⁷ John Lechte, *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers - From Structuralism to Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1998), 102.

¹⁸ Ramshaw, “Lost in Music,” 2.

¹⁹ Hannah Arendt, Danielle Allen, and Margaret Canovan, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press., 2018), 195.

outcome' said another way could be described as multiple or divergent outcomes and viewed in a positive light if one's goal is *not* a singular, replicable product.

When engaging in poiesis, the outcome is more reliable because it is predetermined and in constant dialogue with the action that is creating it. The outcome informs all aspects of the action.²⁰

As we think about what we want to achieve, we alter the way we might achieve that. As we think about the way we might go about something, we change what we might aim at. There is a continual interplay between ends and means. In just the same way there is a continual interplay between thought and action.

As Gadamer explains above, the act of poiesis involves future presencing; we project ourselves into the future to imagine the product of our work and that imagined future informs our present moment's actions. Rather than a dialogue between present objects/subjects, it is a dialogue with a future predetermined outcome.

As poiesis develops technical knowledge (techne) these tools and techniques shape the object in question into its imagined future form. Through command, control, and domination, poiesis moves forward bringing the present towards the predetermined future. The domination and exertion of control over an object can also be called mastery. Mastery, and the closely related term virtuosity,²¹ is often used in music to describe a musician who has a firm grasp (another term for control) over technique. A high level of musicality is often also associated with virtuosity and mastery, but it is rare to find a musician who has an astounding level of musicality without some level of mastery. We see that through the common usage of "mastery" in music there is a strong link to poiesis; a technical knowledge resulting in a product that is commodified.

Mastery and virtuosity are also terms with heavily patriarchal connotations. A master is inherently masculine; there is no 'mistressry,' and certainly not yet an inclusive, non-binary term

²⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 275.

²¹ Musicians are more often referred to as virtuosic than masterful, although when referencing a musical performance, these terms often appear interchangeable.

for extreme proficiency. The master of a household is the dominant voice, decision-maker, and authoritarian of the home. The master holds the power, and freely exerts this power at his will. Similarly, virtuosity suggests athleticism in performance, specifically speed, agility, and strength; physical attributes that are also traditionally associated primarily with masculinity. From personal experience, it has only been when playing music that is fast, loud, and seemingly technically advanced that my playing is referred to as virtuosic. As a non-male musician in a male-dominated field (speaking of the United States in particular), when my playing is referred to as virtuosic, it is often followed by a comment about my strong physicality. One would hope that there is more to a meaningful performance than fast notes and defined biceps.

This view of mastery as domination over a skill, triumph over a technical issue in a piece, or victory over the metronome is one based in a presupposed future ideal. Mastery in poiesis has a goal of constricted control over an end product. To dominate, master, or triumph, one must know what one is dominating, mastering, or triumphing over. Poiesis references the acting-upon or doing-to; it is about working with, or *on* objects. Praxis on the other hand is creative; it is dialogic. It is not a single-sided practice of domination, or command of a desired skill, nor is it success in mastering an object for instrumental use, such as learning to use a computer, a gun, or play a flute. It is a practice that sheds its ego and develops a tactile knowledge and understanding through a dialectical relationship with the object. Presented another way, poiesis is analogous to tracing, while praxis is analogous to creating a map (phronesis);

Make a map, not a tracing. (...)What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. (...)The map is open and connectable in all its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation. (...) A map has multiple entryways, as opposed to the tracing, which

*always comes back 'to the same'. The map has to do with performance, whereas the tracing always involves an alleged 'competence'.*²²

In this analogy, we see the tracing as the poiesical approach; wherein a technique has been developed (a technical knowledge, *techne*) to accurately reproduce the original item with great fidelity. The object is subordinate to the tools and techniques at hand. But what of creativity, exploration, and subjectivity? The map (*phronesis*) invokes that which the tracing lacks; plurality, flexibility, creativity, and subjectivity.

As outlined, music as an artform in the modern age has largely been a matter of poiesis. Traditionally, music was created for distinct purposes; religious rites, spiritual or ritualistic events, or for entertainment or festivities. These musical occasions, explains Attali, were largely replaced by concert hall events as composers, and so music itself, became autonomous after the American Revolution (1776) and then the French Revolution (1789). Specifically, he adds, music became a commodity, produced and exchanged for money. Music made the transition from having *worth* to having market *value*, which arguably impoverished it in many ways. Artists have "...lost the real sense of what art-as-process is, and what it means. In experiencing institutionalized forms of artmaking within galleries and museums, [Kaprow] detected entropy brought about because artists were absorbed by the same pursuit of material success and power as everyone else."²³

THE FARMER AND THE CARROT

Take the organic and non-organic farming of carrots as examples of praxis and poiesis. The farmer of the non-organic carrot is most concerned with producing the most *valuable* product; a carrot whose shape, size, color, taste, and texture are as consistent and free from perceived

²² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie* (Paris: Editions De Minuit, 1980), 20.

²³ Coessens et al., *The Artistic Turn: A Manifesto*, 34.

imperfection as possible. The focus is on *reliably* producing large, clean, regular-shaped²⁴ carrots, and the farmer will take the most direct and efficient route to produce this result. They will engage all the technological resources (machinery, chemicals, genetically modified seeds) at hand to control the carrot and produce the presupposed definition of the perfect, most commercially valuable carrot. In effect, the farmer is engaging in poiesis and developing techne – the tools and knowledge required to reliably produce the most valuable carrot.

Rather than desiring a carrot for its economic worth alone, the organic farmer is also concerned with the *worth* of the carrot. They are focused on the *action* of growing a carrot; without pesticides, ideally without genetically modified seeds, and with natural fertilizer, experimenting with all the various parameters of light, soil pH, temperature, seed depth, and a number of other elements that can influence the growth of the carrot. The organic farmer focuses on the praxis of growing the carrot not with a specific idea of a “correct” carrot in mind but trusting that by focusing on the action of growing the carrot, the result will be a carrot with *worth* as well as value. They are not engaging with lab-created chemical solutions to natural problems such as pests and genetic variety. They are focused on the carrot having substance; lacking in pesticides and abounding with nutritional value. Because the organic farmer is primarily focused on the action of growing the carrot, this can be seen as a praxical approach of building and sustaining the soil for the carrot to grow, which is much the same for cultural soil, as noted by Tilton; “Organic gardening is all about building and sustaining the soil, and whether it's garden soil, cultural soil, or life itself, the ecological principles are pretty much the same.”²⁵

²⁴ What has been widely agreed as regular, ignoring the fact there are over forty varieties of carrot in existence, the humble carrot has been largely globalized and universalized.

²⁵ Timothy J. Cooley and Jeff Todd Tilton, *Cultural Sustainabilities: Music, Media, Language, Advocacy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019), xii)

Of course, there is still market value in the organic carrot, and the end product (the fully-grown carrot) is a necessary part of the process, but the farmer is focused on the action of growing the carrot rather than the end product of the carrot itself. Perhaps this carrot could arguably have more *worth* than the non-organic carrot. The phronesis gained through the praxical approach to growing carrots is clear when considering people with a ‘green thumb.’ They may not be able to explain with scientific accuracy and certainty what they do to achieve the results they produce, but they have the tacit knowledge that produces the results anyway. The resulting carrot for the organic farmer will still be recognized as a carrot although it will present in a larger variety of realizations than the non-organic carrot. The organic carrot has possibility to have a hand in its creation, to be co-responsible, as later discussed in reference to Heidegger. Perhaps the organic carrot splits into two roots, displays a wider variety of size discrepancy than the non-organic carrot, is corkscrewed rather than straight, or is a shade of yellow or purple rather than orange. These differences in execution of ‘carrot’ do not make it any less of a carrot, and in fact it could be argued that the organic carrot is more the *essence* of carrot because it developed/grew naturally rather than being shepherded towards a particular and homogenized idea of ‘carrot.’

The analogy of the non-/organic carrot farmers can be extended to the concepts of mastery previously outlined. The mastery of the object in the service of creating a particular product in poiesis can be likened to the non-organic carrot farmer. For the non-organic carrot farmer, mastery is achieved when they can reliably reproduce a large, straight, smooth, bright orange, pest resistant carrot with a very small margin of variance. For the organic farmer who is engaging in praxis (the action) of growing the organic carrot, mastery is a natural byproduct of the handling as care (Heidegger) that the farmer engages in when tending to their carrots without the use of lab-

produced chemicals. Handling as care is a concept we will return to and expound upon in chapter three, but for now we can think about it as *concerned play*.

As we can see with the analogy of the carrot farmers, the praxical organic approach has the potential to produce a wider variety of equally plausible carrot outcomes. That is, outcomes that could all be within the realm of possibility for the generally accepted definition of carrot-hood. There is greater variety in terms of the details of the end product, but no organic carrot could be said to *not* be a carrot. Similarly, a praxical approach to music performance has the potential to produce a wider variety of musical outcomes, without changing the essence of the piece, which I argue is of great worth *and* value.

TAOIST WU WEI NON-ACTION

The praxical approach to a musical practice is similar to a Taoist approach in that there is a concerned focus and thoughtful action at the heart of both. Neither a Taoist nor a praxical approach involves forceful handling of materials (score, instruments, processes, methods etc.) or a pre-determined future outcome. In both cases, the philosophy of approach often involves a sense of exploration, of child-like wonder, and of play, in the serious sense of the word. It encourages a focus on the present moment because there is no forgone conclusion for where one will be in the future. “In praxis there can be no prior knowledge of the right means by which we realize the end in a particular situation. For the end itself is only specified in deliberating about the means appropriate to a particular situation.”²⁶

²⁶ Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 147.

As a philosophical approach to the process of artistic research/creative action, the Taoist religio-philosophical theory of *Wu Wei* (無爲) combines both the praxical philosophical approach and the playful action that is explored in chapter three. The conceptual frameworks are not prescriptive as such, but inform a way of thinking about futuring - a performer's praxis. *Wu Wei* is a pervasive, broad, and all-encompassing theme of being. There exists a plethora of definitions and understandings of *Wu Wei* that can be variably translated as doing nothing, effortless action, actionless action, or doing through not doing. Cotton describes this sentiment as "being at peace while engaged in the most frenetic tasks so that one can carry these out with maximum skill and efficiency."²⁷ It is a state of being in the zone; there is not thought of a desired end-goal or product, a person is "at one with what [they] are doing, in a state of profound concentration and flow."²⁸ Described as "acting effortlessly and spontaneously in perfect harmony with a normative standard and thereby acquiring an almost magical efficaciousness in moving through the world,"²⁹ *Wu Wei* speaks to the possibilities and multiplicity of outcomes that can be brought about through a gentle-action approach. By being focused completely on the action one is involved in, but without exerting force to influence a certain outcome, one is engaged in the concept of *Wu Wei*.

Applied to theories of painting from the Tang period onwards (after 618 A.D.), *Wu Wei* became central to the approach and process of artistic practice. Rather than being determined to faithfully reproduce the image of nature, the artist "should find nature within themselves and surrender to its calls."³⁰ Through this approach, the act of painting came to be seen as applied

²⁷ Jess Cotton, "Wu Wei – Doing Nothing 無爲 -," The School of Life Articles, March 18, 2019, accessed August 18, 2020, <https://www.theschooloflife.com/thebookoflife/wu-wei-doing-nothing/>

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ E. Slingerland, "Effortless Action: The Chinese Spiritual Ideal of Wu-wei," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 68, no. 2 (2000): doi:10.1093/jaar/68.2.293

³⁰ Cotton, "Wu Wei – Doing Nothing 無爲."

philosophy, and thus became revered as equal in worth to the resulting painting. In other words, the *work* of art and the artwork were seen to have equal worth.

Chapter 2. The Artist for the Sustainment

[We are] naive to think that our art is immune to
and separate from the very real problem
of structural Unsustainment.

- Tony Fry, *Design As Politics*.

ANTHROPOCENTRISM AND GLOBALIZATION

As artists we do not exist in isolation; we are a part of, not apart from, the larger context within which we operate, in this case the modern Western world. The wider values and ethics of the modern age, and anthroparchal focus on poiesis have resulted in an insatiable desire for consumption, and in the Western world, a collective turning of a blind eye to the large-scale waste that increased exponentially at the beginning of the industrial age.³¹ Poiesis as an instrumentalist means-to-end approach at the foundation of most modern economized artistic practices can be understood through the work of Australian theorist and designer Tony Fry. Through the work of Fry and others we will investigate praxis and poiesis in relation to anthroparchy and globalization.

To trace back to some of the defining moments that set us on a course for our current moment of world transition (which will be explored throughout this chapter) we must begin with the advent of the Modern Age as described by Arendt.

Three great events stand at the threshold of the modern age and determine its character: the discovery of America³² and the ensuing exploration of the whole earth; the Reformation, which by expropriating ecclesiastical and monastic possessions started the twofold process of individual expropriation and the accumulation of social wealth; the invention of the telescope and the development of a new science that considers the nature of the earth from the viewpoint of the universe.³³

³¹ Which the West largely relocated to less powerful and more impoverished countries, declaring a cleaner modern world.

³² We know of course that what Arendt is referring to here is not really the ‘discovery’ of the North American continent, but the ‘official’ beginning of its colonization.

³³ Arendt, Canovan, and Allen, *The Human Condition*, 248.

Two of these events can be considered forms of mastery in the patriarchal *techne* definition outlined in chapter one. The discovery of America (and Britain's colonization strategy in general) was a triumphant domination over geographical space and the natural world. The invention of the telescope and its associated master, Galileo Galilei's scientific and mathematic discoveries display a perceived mastery over nature by declaring that nature was entirely governed by mathematical principles, and all one need do is learn the language of mathematics to understand nature.

The Modern Age went hand in hand with Humanism, which put man at the center of importance. This anthroparchal, instrumentalist, mastery-driven approach to resources has brought us ever closer to brink of these resources' capacity to sustain our ever-growing needs. Although this anthroparchal means-to-an-end approach has resulted in staggering advances in all forms of technology, it has been at the cost of the natural world around us. We have dominated, and in-so doing destroyed many parts of nature that we have proclaimed to be mastered. We see here that while domination has tones of negativity and destruction, mastery is simply the shiny side of the same coin. One conceptual result of this mastery over nature, and as Arendt stated "accumulation of social wealth" is that of *sustainable growth* that began in the 17th century.³⁴

*Historically, political theorists from the seventeenth century onward were confronted with a hitherto unheard-of process of growing wealth, growing property, growing acquisition. In the attempt to account for this steady growth, their attention was naturally drawn to the phenomenon of a progressing process itself, so that ... the concept of process became the very key term of the new age as well as the science, historical and natural, developed by it.*³⁵

This focus on steady/sustainable growth is poiesical; the aim is accumulation. Sustainable growth is inherently unsustainable. A negative example of naturally occurring sustainable growth

³⁴ Arendt, Canovan, and Allen, *The Human Condition*, 105.

³⁵ Ibid.

can be found in all forms of cancer. The rapid rate at which cancer cells continually multiply is - if left untreated, and sometimes even with aggressive treatment - often fatal.

Conversely to the instrumental means-to-an-end route associated with anthropocentrism, praxis is often associated with animality - a rageful outburst without thought of consequences or an impassioned moment with a stranger for example. Often these animalistic, primal actions are viewed as being the exception rather than the norm. These actions are also mostly seen as masculine and acts of mastery; heroic, dominating, courageous, or physically strong. The general constriction of animalistic tendencies to that of negative, stereotypically masculine traits does a disservice to all. Animalistic tendencies are rooted in emotional expressions, which when allowed to be expressed in their fullness and complexity, are one of the fundamental tenets of musical expression.

Through humanism, we have largely negated our animalistic nature and alienated ourselves from the world in which we live; we have created a world-within-a-world that is, most prominently in the West, anthropocentric. As Fry notes, to confront our anthropocentrism, we must recognize our role in our own destruction. The question of anthropocentrism "...not only exposes humanity's need to confront responsibility for its own being but brings to the fore the human condition as auto-conflictual. In creating the denaturalized world of our own construction, that in large part creates us, we unknowingly turned on ourselves: we made our animality enemy."³⁶ The unsustainability of mastery as viewed through a patriarchal lens is here expanded upon by Escobar;

Patriarchal culture is defined as characterized by actions and emotions that value competition, war, hierarchies, power, growth, procreation, the domination of others, and the appropriation of resources, combined with the rational justification of it all in the name of truth. In this culture, which engulfs most modern humans,

³⁶ Fry, *Design as Politics*, 119.

*we live in mistrust and seek certitude through control, including control of the natural world.*³⁷

In this quotation we can clearly see the role of a dominating mastery in patriarchal culture that is pervasive in modern society and is one of the major contributors to the current position of unsustainability. Although unsustainability is clearly a result of a state of anthroparchy, and in particular patriarchy as described above, it is often attributed to environmental or ecological systems, a "...reification of biophysical system dysfunction (normally expressed as environmental or ecological 'crisis')."³⁸ But in reality as we are beginning to see, unsustainability is not a problem of nature, but a problem of human nature; "...what goes unrecognized is that unsustainability is essentially a flaw in 'our being',"³⁹ and springs from the cultural structure of modernity itself.⁴⁰

Globalization is another anthropocentric reality resulting in the current world-position of Unsustainment as described by Fry; "one of the 'attainments' of globalization has been the *universalization of the unsustainable* [emphasis added]."⁴¹ Generally speaking globalization refers to the minimization of limitations and borders; geographical and temporal, and is characterized by the free global flow of commodities, capital, people, and cultures as well as the integration of political and cultural elements towards a kind of universalism.

"In general, the term 'globalization' refers to the transformation of temporal and spatial limitations, that is, the shrinking of distance due to the dramatic reduction in the time needed to bridge spatial differences which has, in turn, resulted in the gradual integration of political, economic, and social space across national borders."⁴² This shrinking of the world that began with

³⁷ Arturo Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 31.

³⁸ Fry, *Design as Politics*, 120.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁴⁰ Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, 122.

⁴¹ Fry, *Design as Politics*, 50.

⁴² Elirea Bornman, "Struggles of Identity in the Age of Globalisation," *Communicatio* 29, no. 1-2 (2003): 24, doi:10.1080/02500160308538019)

geographic exploration/colonization has developed into the current situation of cultural, economic, and political colonization, which has inevitably had negative effects culturally, socially, politically, economically, and ecologically.⁴³ In research undertaken in regards to the effects of these trends on culture and identity, we see that the creation of community and communal experience is direly important in an age where;

...in many instances globalization and modernity have brought about the collapse of a sense of community. The loss of the safe shelter offered by communal relationships has, in turn, reinforced the fear and anxiety associated with identity achievement. It has also left the highly privatized and isolated individual powerless and defenseless against the powers of the state. Feelings of powerlessness are enhanced by the fact that the powers that shape the conditions under which people have to live and solve their problems are becoming increasingly global in nature and therefore almost completely beyond the reach of the individual/social atomism bears little hope of joining forces with others against national and global powers to change the rules of the game.⁴⁴

Fry examines the fundamental difference in the world that the structure of globalism has imputed; that all people are seen as fundamentally the same. This is simply not true, and as Fry notes, only superficial differences are acknowledged.

*Added to this view is the globally dominant perspective of all people being fundamentally the same (evidenced by the discourse of human rights). Difference is only acknowledged at a super-structural level, epitomized by multiculturalist understandings whereby difference becomes reduced to customs and tradition, food, dress, music and visual arts. Fundamental differences in world view, value systems, mythologies, cosmologies, psychologies, morality, emotional mindscapes, and so forth all go by the board. ... The empirical facticity of the world may be beyond dispute, but it can never be experienced and viewed independently from the perceptual frame of cultural difference. For those cultures defending their right to maintain their difference, **globalization is just the latest face of colonial violence** [emphasis added].⁴⁵*

Clearly this erasure of fundamental difference is a violence which needs to be corrected or at least redirected to learning and living what Fry calls “commonality in difference.” There is

⁴³ Fry, *Design as Politics*, 6.

⁴⁴ Bornman, “Struggles of Identity,” 29.

⁴⁵ Fry, *Design as Politics*, 44.

surely not an apples-to-apples connection to be drawn between this idea and a musical praxis. However, it provides an interesting framework within which to view the potential for difference in the formation of interpretation and execution of performance that allows for fundamental difference, whilst maintaining the essence of the artwork. Two people have different feelings, associations, mythologies, and connotations when they look at a carrot, but both will still regard the carrot as a carrot. It is these important linkages between the artistic work and the realities of the world outside the practice room that are vital to creating meaningful artworks that have worth and substance.

The focus on products and on human-centered solutions to human-made problems has resulted in a reduction in possible futures, a term designated by Fry as *defuturing*; "...the systematic destruction of possible futures by the structured unsustainability of modernity."⁴⁶ And as James Baldwin notes, once we as a species get used to something, it is extremely difficult to conceive of any other way to approach or view that thing. This is why the shift in thought to the opposite of *defuturing*; *futuring*, is so laden with difficulty. "... it is absolutely inevitable that when a tradition has been evolved, whatever the tradition is, the people, in general, will suppose it to have existed from before the beginning of time and will be most unwilling and indeed unable to conceive of any changes in it."⁴⁷ This is at the heart of the difficulty in the transition out of the current *defuturing* position of sustainable growth that we find ourselves in.

⁴⁶ Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, 117.

⁴⁷ James Baldwin, *Collected Essays* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1998).

SUSTAINMENT AND FUTURING

The Sustainment is prefigurative, as was the Enlightenment with its belief in universal reason and the imperative of order and progress, no doubt the civilizational dream that is unraveling under our eyes.

- Arturo Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*

How can we conceive of a future that is so fundamentally different to the current falsity of sustainability that we inhabit, and shift to what Fry calls the *Sustainment*, and at its core the activity of futuring?

Unlike sustainable development, the green economy, or the liberal ethic of saving the planet – all of which continue to function within the defuturing ontology - the Sustainment challenges us moderns to secure futures for the kinds of relational forms of being capable of countering the still-pervasive conditions of defuturing and unsustainability.⁴⁸

Futuring conveys the creation of a future with futures. Ironically, this way of thinking could be considered a mode of sustainable growth, where the desired outcome is a future that has in its potential a multiplicity of futures. However unlike sustainable growth, which is a defuturing mechanism due to the related domination and destruction of resources that results in a reduction of possible futures, futuring can only be ascribed to actions that create or regenerate resources to open up possibility for those resources to be utilized in a plurality of possible futures.

It is with this concept of futuring in mind that I develop my praxis-based interpretive approach grounded in Heidegger's handling as care principle, expounded upon in the next chapter. It is worth noting that Fry's transitional discourse of Enlightenment to Sustainment is not the only one in existence; it is merely the discourse I chose to inform my proposed interpretive praxis. Transitional discourses are discourses resulting from the acknowledgement of, and confrontation

⁴⁸ Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, 118.

with the fact that humans as a species are on the precipice of a monumental paradigm shift - or at least the belief that there is a dire need for a monumental paradigm shift. Some interesting transition initiatives that vary widely in scope but stem from this common impetus include the Transition Town Initiative (in the United Kingdom), the Great Work or transition to an Ecozoic era (Berry 1999), and transitions from an Age of Separation to an Age of Reunion, from Enlightenment to Enlivenment (Weber 2013), from industrial civilization to ecological-cultural civilization (Greene 2015),⁴⁹ and the Earthship Bioteecture building project.⁵⁰ There are myriad organizations, institutions, and communities committed to this purpose located around the world. Many are re-constructionist as opposed to dystopian, although there certainly are many of those as well.

⁴⁹ Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, 140.

⁵⁰ “EarthshipGlobal,” *Earthship Bioteecture* Michael Reynolds, accessed August 02, 2020, <http://www.earthshipglobal.com/>

Chapter 3. Practice-Led Research

In the modern world, ecological necessity has re-awakened a concern to establish a different relation to the technological.

If humans continue to posit the world as standing reserve (i.e. as a resource in reserve for use by humans), the real danger is that we will not have a world at all.

Heidegger's critique of technological thinking and his ability to rethink the human relation to technology offers us a way to differently configure the relations involved in art practice.

- Barbara Bolt, *A Non-Standard Deviation*

In his seminal work 'Truth and Method', Hans Georg Gadamer wrote of being 'lost in play': the way towards understanding and interpretation was to recognize that we are only 'truly' capable of interpreting something if we are totally absorbed in it.

- Paul Ramshaw, *Lost in Music*

TECHNE, TOOLS, AND HANDLABILITY

Now that we have established and peeked into the reality of our existence in an unsustainable world of our own creation, let us discuss the small ways in which artists can attempt to model, or embody an imagined future of Sustainment; of futuring. To provide an intermediary link between the work of Fry's Sustainment and practice-led creative research we can look to Heidegger's critique of technological thinking on knowledge (techne).⁵¹ This connection is made by Barbara Bolt;

In this essay [Heidegger] questions the contemporary instrumentalist understanding of the human-tool relationship—using tools and materials as a means to an end—and in a challenge to this relationship of mastery, posits one of co-responsibility and indebtedness. ... Tools are no longer conceived of as a means to an end, but rather are co-responsible (along with other elements) for bringing forth something into appearance.⁵²

⁵¹ Martin Heidegger, *The Question concerning Technology, and Other Essays* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2013).

⁵² Bolt, "A Non-Standard Deviation: Handlability, Praxical Knowledge and Practice Led Research."

Engaging with tools in a sense other than one of domination/mastery, Heidegger outlines a handling of said tools which creates, or is realized as, care. Heidegger's handling as care in practice-led or creative research, can provide an antidote to anthropocentric instrumentalism through a shared responsibility for a work's arrival. We have already noted that anthropocentric instrumentalism in music practice can result in a dominating, or controlling form of mastery, which I argue is undesirable. "In creative practice, handling as care comes to supplant the instrumentalist means-to-an-end that defines the contemporary engagement of humans with the world."⁵³

To elucidate the concept of handling as care, we look to Heidegger's example of the chalice being "presenced" (brought forth into being) and the indebtedness that results. Heidegger's example has basis in Aristotle's doctrine of the four causes, though he converts them into the four ways of being responsible;⁵⁴

Silver is that out of which the silver chalice is made. As this matter (hyle), it is co-responsible for the chalice. The chalice is indebted to, that is, owes thanks to, the silver out of which it consists. But the sacrificial vessel is indebted not only to the silver. As a chalice, that which is indebted to the silver appears in the aspect of a chalice and not in that of a brooch or a ring. Thus the sacrificial vessel is at the same time indebted to the aspect (eidōs) or idea of chaliceness. Both the silver into which the aspect is admitted as chalice and the aspect in which the silver appears are in their respective ways co-responsible for the sacrificial vessel.... But there remains yet a third that is above all responsible for the sacrificial vessel. It is that which in advance confines the chalice within the realm of consecration and bestowal... Finally there is a fourth participant in the responsibility for the finished sacrificial vessel's lying before us ready for use, i.e., the silversmith.⁵⁵

Preparation for performance of pre-existing works is not directly translatable to the chalice analogy because the performer is (re)creating the object. That is, they are taking the score as raw material, entering into play, a handling as care relationship with the tools, processes, materials, and relevant ideas, and are (re)creating the original object (score) as something new, but in *essence*

⁵³ Bolt, "Heidegger, Handlability and Praxical Knowledge."

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, 8.

still the same. To return to the carrots; the score is the genetic material found in the seed that is transformed through the work of the farmer, the soil, sun, wind, and rain, to (re)create the carrot from which it came. The resulting carrot will not be the same carrot that created it, but the essence will remain.

Heidegger's thinking when related to the world of the musician makes space for a way of thinking that deconstructs the concept of the performance being the end goal / the presupposed product, and instead outlines the work (the handling, the play) as being the point at which something is started upon its way into arrival. Heidegger's theory of handleability (handling as care) and praxical or as he called it, tacit knowledge (phronesis) is at the core of *Futuring: A Performer's Praxis*. In the non-instrumentalist handling of tools, a tacit knowledge is gained, and the subject is removed from the privileged central position of power.

In the theory of means and ends which has dominated our understanding of technology (including the making of art), we have focused on the cause that brings something about, the cause that gets results. ... According to this accepted view, the artist and craftsman is the one who obtains results and consequently the one who is assigned authorship and ownership for the work. In harnessing means to ends, the artist justifiably can sign her/his name as the one who has made or caused a work to come into being.⁵⁶

By sharing authorship we share agency, and by sharing agency we allow for a multiplicity of outcomes; a plurality of possible futures. By decentralizing the artist and engaging materials and processes as equal partners in creation, we move away from the anthropomorphic and patriarchal view of performance mastery, as well as the hierarchical structure that places the composer above the performer. Indeed, we move away from the metaphysical 'subject', 'object', and 'cause' notions that according to Deleuze are characteristic of the vertical axis of thought,

⁵⁶ Bolt, "Heidegger, Handleability and Praxical Knowledge."

which is “entrenched and relatively unchanging”⁵⁷ and move towards radically horizontal thought that is “always in movement.”⁵⁸

Without theoretical explorations and some level of prior *techne* and *episteme*, a *praxis* may be hollow and fruitless, and so the proposed model of a performer’s *praxis* does not preclude the inclusion of these elements, but asks the musician to put aside any related presuppositions whilst engaging in the handling of materials, ideas, tools, and processes. Bolt notes that in this relationship of handling as care, “...the work of art is the particular understanding that is realized through our concerned dealings with ideas, tools, and materials of production. The work of art is not the artwork.”⁵⁹

The concerned dealings (handling as care) employed by Heidegger implies an ethics other than the ethics of mastery. There is an ethics of co-creation (of performance) and of balance. The dialectical relationship between artist/musician and the materials, tools, processes, where co-responsibility and indebtedness lay can similarly be thought of as play. In play and handling as care, as Heidegger discusses, the object that is the focal point of the play becomes co-responsible. The item takes on its own subjectivity in a way that allows for moments of unexpected newness; of surprise outcomes. In this interplay, understanding is formed. Not in the cognitive sense but understanding as the care that results from the handling of object; a tacit knowledge. “Handling as care produces a crucial moment of understanding and that understanding reveals possibility in its very possibility.”⁶⁰

Whereas for some, particularly when confronting a score from a historically significant composer, there is often a sense of being indebted or subservient to the composer. In Heidegger’s

⁵⁷ Lechte, “Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers,” 103.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Bolt, “Heidegger, Handlability and Praxical Knowledge.”

⁶⁰ Bolt, “A Non-Standard Deviation: Handlability, Praxical Knowledge and Practice Led Research.”

explanation of handling as care, indebtedness can be read as not only being indebted to the creator of the artifact with which you are engaging (the composer), but also to the objects that are being activated in that handling, which are also indebted to the musician for their activation. In reaching for an understanding that includes the composer's subjectivity, the musician is engaging in the sociological approach of hermeneutics, which includes "discursive or socio-historical circumstances of the musical work."⁶¹

The idea of indebtedness, play, and co-responsibility is expressed another way through Aristotle to Gadamer, and then to Fry. In the action of making something, both the maker and the made are made; the creator and the product are created.⁶² Through this process the maker gains a "embodied futural ability to make from an ability to recall and reproduce." This is a form of *techne* and *phronesis* but much like the tracing analogy from page 19. The made is metabolized into the maker. The implied exchange of self between the maker and the made returns in chapter five in reference to metabolization. If this state of indebtedness and humility is extended into the performance, the instantiation of the artwork, perhaps the distance between performer and audience will be diminished; as Bolt mentioned earlier, "it is through handling as care that tools, materials and processes become co-collaborators in opening that space [of possibility]."⁶³

PLAY AS WU WEI ACTION-NON-ACTION

As touched upon, another way to envision handling as care is through what Gadamer discusses as play.⁶⁴

The condition of play is to be totally and knowingly immersed in the process itself, in the to and fro of action and response—in that sense it is literally 'affective'.

⁶¹ Ramshaw, "Lost in Music," 2.

⁶² Fry, *Design as Politics*, 197.

⁶³ Bolt, "Heidegger, Handlability and Praxical Knowledge."

⁶⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 106-178.

*Correspondingly, the work of art's state of being is not as 'object' but as experience. This experience should be without strain, absorbing the player/artist as a form of relaxation within its structure. The child engaged in play is self-absorbed in receiving what the game presents.*⁶⁵

One does not necessarily need to have a second living being to play with. It is entirely possible to be engrossed in play with an inanimate object; a child with a toy for example. "Play is dependent upon move and counter-move, though not necessarily in the form of another human being's response. The cat plays in response to a ball of string, the artist with the work as it emerges. Play is thus realized in action, in the 'use' of play."⁶⁶

Engaging with the object as an experience, in serious play; without goal, product, or outcome in mind, is central to my proposed performer's praxis. Immersing oneself in the play of exploration and dialogue with the score, materials, processes, ideas, unexpected elements may arise; not everything is in the control of the performer. The notion of play contains an inherent ease that is in opposition to the established effort involved in attempting to dominate something through mastery. With domination, there lies implied conflict, violence, and an exertion of power. Play brings to mind innocence, ease, joy, discovery, and creativity; "a light bulb goes off," "play of the light," "light of my life," and "bring to light" for example. "This ease of play – which naturally does not mean that there is any real absence of effort but refers phenomenologically only to the absence of strain – is experienced subjectively as relaxation."⁶⁷ The focus on play does not discount a sociological approach of hermeneutical understanding, as discussed, nor does it exclude a structuralist musicological approach to understanding. Rather, it sets aside these two meaningful and needed analytical approaches temporarily as to fully embrace the path toward a tacit knowledge through play.

⁶⁵ Coessen et al., *The Artistic Turn: A Manifesto*, 32.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 109.

The release of total control and engagement with play not only opens up the situation for creativity and unexpected outcomes but opens up a greater possibility for flow to take place - as discussed in relation to Wu Wei. In this state of play, there is varied repetition without goal (not even the goal of repetition itself), and there exists an element of deep listening on the part of the musician. When engaging in serious free play with elements rather than exerting power over them, the musician listens carefully not in an analytical sense, but in an effort to hear, to know the unexpected and unintended consequences of their physical actions and to metabolize the tacit knowledge that materializes. The play is intentionally and unintentionally creative. Play is inventive, instructive, participatory, and transformative; “Art as play thus participates in a dynamic process of activity, immersion and participation in the imaginative, cognitive and affective realms.”⁶⁸ Whereas the anthropocentric instrumentalist domination tactic creates tension and often frustration (when one is not able to triumph swiftly enough in one’s own eyes), the praxical approach involving play and handling as care opens the situation up to being one of ease and enjoyment.

In a world that ties together the terms *work* and *progress*, the concept of play without expectation of measurable progress when *working* (on a piece) can be challenging to embrace. How can one justify play in their work process, when the entire concept of work is tied to an economic value and outcome-driven motivation? When it is “tied to an ontology of objects and consumption.”⁶⁹ This concept of play is often relegated to the activities of children, who do not yet have the weight of responsibility nor the concept of work, and do not have to explain cause or reason for what they do. Why is this? Why can adults not engage in free play without being accused of not taking things seriously? “The fact is that the advocates for free play meet resistance at every

⁶⁸ Coessen et al., *The Artistic Turn: A Manifesto*, 32.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

step. They are suspected of anarchism, nihilism, of intellectual, social, and moral irresponsibility.”⁷⁰ When suggesting play as a viable, and much-needed aspect of a creative process, one is often met with resistance and skepticism. Engaging in play does not, as Caputo states, “...abandon us to the wolves of irrationality, moral license, and despair and does not succumb to nihilism and anarchism.”⁷¹

Free play in musical practice in fact results in *multiplism*, which is defined as “the view that for a given object of interpretation there may be more than one admissible interpretation.”⁷² Multiplism is in contrast to singularism, which is the view that there is only *one* admissible interpretation of an object. Krausz argues that “multiplism does not entail that there can be no good reasons for rationally preferring one admissible interpretation over another, and that multiplism does not entail and interpretative anarchism.”⁷³ In a way, the engagement of play in the praxis of a musical practice is a Dadaist approach rather than an anarchist one: “A Dadaist is convinced that a worthwhile life will arise only when we start taking things *lightly* ... A Dadaist is prepared to initiate joyful experiments even in those domains where change and experimentation seem to be out of the question (example: the basic functions of language).”⁷⁴

So what does play, with its Dadaist, Taoist, handling as care multiplism look like in the context of the practice room? As we have seen, play/handling as care with focus on the present moment rather than working towards a specific imagined future, leaves open the possibility for multiple futures; it is inherently a practice in futuring. It is a **futuring praxis**.

⁷⁰ Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 211.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷² Michael Krausz, "Interpretation and Its "Metaphysical" Entanglements." *Metaphilosophy* 31, no. 1/2 (2000): 125.

⁷³ Michael Krausz, *The Interpretation of Music: Philosophical Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 5.

⁷⁴ Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: Verso, 1993), 21.

Although *Futuring - A Performer's Praxis* centralizes around serious free play, other approaches to understanding are very much a part of the process of metabolizing a piece, of creating the rhizomic structure of understanding. A positivist musicologist's approach based in structuralism⁷⁵ and a sociological approach of hermeneutics together create an architecture within which serious play can take place. Engaging with this architecture requires the musician to possess a level of *theorie* and *techne* to create and then navigate the architecture.

⁷⁵ A philosophical system that holds that every rationally justifiable assertion can be scientifically verified or is capable of logical or mathematical proof, and that therefore rejects metaphysics and theism.

Chapter 4. A Futuring Interpretive Model

...what composers clearly do create – instructions to performers for creating performances – is something different from musical works as they exist in the world of listeners. Put otherwise, a work of music is no one thing as between composer, performer, and audience.

- Michael Krausz, *The Interpretation of Music*

IN THE REALM OF PLAUSIBILITY

In the previous chapter the concept of play was introduced as a futuring tool. In this chapter the concept of futuring in musical practice will be further explored, and the interpretive mechanisms that guide play away from an anarchist, anything-goes praxis will be investigated. Through the process of play, co-responsibility, and handling as care, a multiplistic world of possibilities is created. As discussed, a multiplism doesn't allow for just *any* interpretation, but allows for a realm of possible options that are all viewed as plausible. There is a proximity of recognition needed for an interpretation to be deemed plausible. As Ramshaw explains, this proximity of recognition allows for a continuum of identifiability at one end and the opportunity for innovation by the performer at the other. If taken too far, the performer could step into the realm of implausible interpretation, resulting in a derivative rather than "standard" performance.⁷⁶ According to Wolterstorff, the performance of a piece is only required to "come fairly close to exemplifying the acoustic and instrumental properties normative within that work"⁷⁷ to be considered a plausible representation of the piece.

In the process of assessing the multiplicity of results of free play, we search for plausible and implausible results that together form a rhizomic structure. The theories of interpretation one would subscribe to with this suggested praxis are not concerned with true and false interpretations - or perhaps more correctly, executions in performance - but are concerned with plausible or implausible interpretive decisions. The question then is; how does one determine the plausibility of a result? Plausibility and implausibility are in alignment with the larger transitional initiatives that aim to move away from a dualist,

⁷⁶ Ramshaw, "Lost in Music," 12.

⁷⁷ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Works and Worlds of Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 81.

reductionist age⁷⁸ and towards an age of futuring and Sustainment. While it is true that the line between plausible and implausible interpretation is perhaps a little indistinct, there are some guiding principles that can be employed, some of which have already been addressed. Importantly, it is not only the performer who is engaged in the act of interpretation. The composer interprets a thought into musical notation and engages in this interpretive cycle between thought and notation ad libitum, the musician interprets the notation into action and imputes meaning (or not) into it. The performer then presents their interpretation to an audience in music-as-action form, to be interpreted into thought and feeling by the audience member, who then in turn interprets those thoughts/feelings into a written or spoken language. For the purposes of the performer's praxis, we will be focusing on the musician's interpretation of the text/score into physical action.

Across interpretive philosophies there exists a wide range of principles. Göran Hermerén succinctly categorizes them as follows:

- P1 – Interpretation has to do with meaning*
- P2 – Interpretation facilitates understanding*
- P3 – Interpretation has to do with intention*
- P4 – Interpretation implies explanation*
- P5 – Interpretation suffers from process-result ambiguity*
- P6 – Interpretation always involves application*
- P7 – Interpretation presupposes the truth (of that which is interpreted)*
- P8 – Interpretation presupposes the truth (of the interpretation)*
- P9 – Interpretation presupposes norms (a normative stance)*
- P10 – Interpretation requires skill and talent*
- P11 – Interpretation guides action⁷⁹*

As can be seen from examining this list, there cannot be one singular concept of interpretation that satisfies all of the above principles. Hermerén also outlines conditions for what constitutes an object for consideration of interpretation, seeing as interpretation of an x-ray by a radiologist will likely have different guiding principles than that of a score by a percussionist. Hermerén's requirements for the object of interpretation are listed as;

- R1 – The object of an interpretation is an intentional object*
- R2 – The object of interpretation is open and indeterminate*

⁷⁸ Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, 140.

⁷⁹ Krausz, *The Interpretation of Music*, 10-11.

- R3 – The object of interpretation poses problems*
R4 - The object of interpretation is to some extent understandable
R5 - The problems of interpretation cannot be solved by consulting the composer or the author (songwriter)⁸⁰

It is not my intention to delve into the why's, how's, and what's of the above lists, but to outline the principles of interpretation that come into play for the performer's praxis. For this, I to Hermerén as well as theorists Tobias Pontara, Joseph Margolis, Lawrence Kramer, and David Saltz.

For the Performer's Praxis, a futuring model with a multiplism of interpretive outcomes is desired. Meaning in a linguistic sense cannot be imputed into the sound-as-action execution of a musical performance of a piece that is itself without a spoken/written language. Narratives can be ascribed for various purposes but cannot be said to inhabit definitive meaning. However, language is not the only mode of transmitting meaning, and so while there may not be a meaning imputed that can be explained in word or even thought, (which is also often linguistic in nature) it is entirely possible to be understood by the musician and imputed into the execution of a piece as a non-tangible, non-describable *affect*. This non-verbal meaning may or may not be interpreted as intended by the audience in the moment of performance, and it is my contention that that is of little consequence. In fact, the indescribable feeling that is shared between musician and audience member is often the most desirable outcome of engaging in live performance of musical works.

As Hermerén states, the process of the interpretation is also the *result*, meaning the result of the interpretation is a series or sequence of actions that take time, making it a process.⁸¹ For the Performer's Praxis, this requires elucidation. Hermerén's statement implies a linear series of actions that are decided upon in the practice room during the interpretive process. I posit that rather than a singular linear process, an act of interpretation creates a rhizomic structure of plausible interpretive choices.

Plausibility of interpretation is central to Pontara's method of "historical imputation," which "...provides a theorization of hermeneutical interpretation that at the same time is both generous and

⁸⁰ Krausz, *The Interpretation of Music*, 15-16.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

disciplined.”⁸² In other words, there is wiggle room. While no two performance instantiations of a musical work will ever be *exactly* the same, Pontara’s historical imputation (a sociological hermeneutic approach) allows for more than one plausible interpretation. Pontara’s general principles for musical hermeneutics are listed as follows:

- (1) that hermeneutical interpretations of music should be evaluated as plausible or implausible rather than true or false;*
- (2) that the meanings specified by such interpretations are imputed to rather than pre-existent in the musical object under study;*
- (3) that plausible interpretations must be compatible with what are consensually taken to be adequate descriptions of the music; and*
- (4) that plausible interpretations are constrained by requirements of historico-contextual relevance, requirements which, while falling short of being objective in the strong sense of the word, are nevertheless central to our interpretive practices.”⁸³*

Beginning with Pontara’s first principle of plausible or implausible rather than true or false interpretations, we see a common theme; multiplism of interpretation. We already see that rather than a plurality of interpretations resulting in anarchy of outcome, results are limited to their plausibility or implausibility. As put by Pontara; “This pluralism does not have to lead to methodological impasse, as is sometimes claimed, because conceding that our interpretations cannot be (or cannot be determined to be) true or false does not in any way affect the stringency of the interpretive effort.”⁸⁴

Pontara’s second principle states that music cannot (or does not) in itself have inherent meaning, and that meaning must be imputed upon it by the musician and then on the performance by the audience. In this case meaning is not plucked out of thin air by the musician, but informed

⁸² Tobias Pontara, "Interpretation, Imputation, Plausibility: Towards a Theoretical Model for Musical Hermeneutics." *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 46, no. 1 (June 2015): 26.

⁸³ Pontara, "Interpretation, Imputation, Plausibility," 5.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

by relevant historical, notational, and cultural information; a combination of sociological and structuralist interpretations.

Thus, instead of stating that there is a fixed and unchanging meaning to be found in the musical work - what Stecker would call 'work-meaning' - historical imputationalism should be regarded as a moderate anti-essentialist position in that it conceives of the musical work as a culturally and consensually preserved unicity affording a broad but not unlimited field of semantic potentialities.⁸⁵

It follows then that we must put into place guidelines for what constitutes plausible and implausible interpretation. Here enters Pontara's third and fourth principles. His third states that interpretations "must be compatible with what are consensually taken to be adequate descriptions of the music."⁸⁶ Put simplistically, Pontara is stating that if the piece is generally considered to be described as a work for solo percussionist playing vibraphone that is 6-8minutes long, tonal, and the piece/notation was executed over twenty minutes on a guitar, it would no longer be an interpretation of the piece, but an arrangement of it. It would be derivative of the original work.

The final, arguably most important and perhaps tricky to define principle is that "plausible interpretations are constrained by requirements of historico-contextual relevance, requirements which, while falling short of being objective in the strong sense of the word, are nevertheless central to our interpretive practices."⁸⁷ So to be considered plausible, the interpretation must take into account the context within which the piece was originally conceived. This is somewhat open-ended. For immediate consideration would be the historical point in which it was written, then perhaps the other output from the composer. Taken further, the cultural background of the composer including their nationality and place of residence. The composer's educational background and influences could also be taken into account. In the case of percussion, so too could

⁸⁵ Pontara, "Interpretation, Imputation, Plausibility," 22.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

the potential particular instruments and percussionists with which the composer had interacted. One could also investigate the writings by the composer about the piece, which can be tricky given that the composer would be translating into text a thought regarding a memory of a thought that was translated into notation.

Margolis states that the goal of interpretation should be seen as “the imputation of a coherent design under conditions descriptively insufficient for that purpose,”⁸⁸ which raises some interesting points. As mentioned earlier, there are multiple layers of interpretation (or translation) that occur between the distillation of ideas inside the mind of the composer and the audience member’s understanding of the music they just saw in performance. Margolis’ statement aptly describes the conditions created by this multi-layered interpretation as being insufficient for the purpose of imputing a coherent design. The notational language created (and in the realm of percussion works, sometimes create from scratch) by the composer to describe their imagined sound-world will inevitably fall short of perfect reproduction, largely due to the varying modes of communication; thought and notation. Additionally, it raises questions of what is meant by coherent design. Imputation of course implies that the musician is inserting missing information; using their technical skills associated with their instrument to add information in the form of sound. Coherent design begs questions: Who assesses coherence? What is being designed? For the Performer’s Praxis, it is perhaps more correct to state that the goal of interpretation is in part to *impute a translation into sound-as-action under conditions descriptively insufficient for that purpose.*

⁸⁸ Joseph Margolis, "Robust Relativism." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 35, no. 1 (1976): 37. doi:10.2307/430843, 41.

Similar to Pontara's third and fourth principles, Margolis believes a plausible interpretation - and in the Performer's Praxis version, rhizomatic structure of interpretation - must fulfill the following two requirements;^{89,90}

- (1) *it must be consistent or compatible with the describable features of a given artwork*
- (2) *it must conform with relativized canons of interpretation that themselves fall within the tolerance of a historically continuous tradition of interpretation*

Margolis's holds similar views to Pontara in the sense that there can exist plausible interpretations that may not be strictly true, but still fall within an acceptable range of perceptibility. That is, that the piece is recognizable as the work as the composer intended and within a range of plausible likeness to the performance practice of this piece. In both the case of Pontara and Margolis, the principles for interpretation run up against complexities when dealing with aleatoric or open scores, but in the realm of most notated solo percussion works this holds true, and so is applicable for the Performer's Praxis.

Taken together, Margolis's two requirements would amount to the following statement: if interpretative claims are compatible with (a relevantly specified number of) correct descriptions of the work. And if they, moreover, accord with or otherwise relate to interpretative canons grounded in historically and culturally pertinent 'myths.' Then we will have reason to accept them as plausible accounts of the given work in question.⁹¹

Kramer has a slightly more relaxed view on interpretation, which he calls 'open interpretation.' "Firstly, open interpretation represents an alternative to both empiricism and dogmatism as sources of knowledge"⁹² where dogmatism could be seen as a prescribed performance practice of singularism, and empiricism would be a very dry, structuralist reading of the score - score as instruction manual. "Second, open interpretation is the essential vehicle of subjectivity in the strong sense, not of private sensation or

⁸⁹ Margolis, "Robust Relativism," 43.

⁹⁰ Pontara, "Interpretation, Imputation, Plausibility," 7.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹² Kramer, *Interpreting Music*, 2.

idiosyncrasy, but of intelligent agency in its concrete historical being. Subjectivity, the capacity to be in being knowing, is fundamentally the capacity to interpret.”⁹³

All of the interpretive principles above seem to empower the musician to have agency in the translation of text/score to sound-in-action/performance, in addition to the unavoidable factors such as an individual performer’s instrument sounds and minor differences in phrasing and dynamic control. As Kramer notes, open interpretation, specifically related to historical imputation is;

*...a concept of potential or virtual meaning. The intent is to say something consistent with what could have been said, whether or not it actually was, and in so doing to suggest how the work may have operated in, with, on, and against the life of its culture. Approached this way, the work loses its traditional status as a bounded, prestige-laden object wedded to an individual artist, and becomes a relay in an open process of material and symbolic exchange.*⁹⁴

Saltz employs an interesting analogy when discussing the difference between interpretation and execution, which can be quite useful when conceptualizing the difficulty in translating text to action (score to performance) and the potential for wide-ranging results. In his analogy, Saltz likens the score to a recipe;⁹⁵

We agree that the recipe calls for five apples without specifying any particular kind of apple. In other words, we both interpret the recipe as allowing leeway with regard to apple selection. So I select Granny Smith apples because I like their tartness, and you select Roma apples because they respond well to baking. You use a shallow pie tin, and make your crust from scratch, laying the top crust in a lattice pattern. I use a deep tin, make my crust from a mix, and lay down a thick top crust. We end up with two very different pies, not because we have inter-pretend the recipe differently, but rather because we have executed it differently.

This analogy aligns well with the carrot fable from chapter one in that in both cases, the interpretation of carrot or apple is not in question, rather it is the execution of that interpretation that reveals difference. It is inevitable that when translating from notation to sound-in-action that although the interpretation of the instruction may be the same between two performers, the

⁹³ Kramer, *Interpreting Music*, 2.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁹⁵ David Z, Saltz, "What Theatrical Performance Is (Not): The Interpretation Fallacy." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 59, no. 3 (2001): 299-306. doi:10.1111/1540-6245.00027.

execution will invariably differ. This is particularly apparent when dealing with percussion scores, specifically pieces written for non-pitched instruments, which can vary greatly, as will be discussed.

This discrepancy in execution between multiple performers can be illustrated using a number of percussion works. Firstly, Xenakis' *Rebonds B* calls for five woodblocks. Variably, percussionists will employ standard woodblocks, temple blocks, or even wooden slats resting on foam to enhance their resonance. Although the various sounds that these instruments create can all be considered to inhabit the same sound-world, the timbre of a wooden slat is far removed from that of a woodblock. While wooden slats are single planks of wood, often placed on foam, which slightly increases their natural resonance, with a thin sound with a quiet fundamental tone, woodblocks are hollowed out to create an internal resonating chamber and produce a rounder sound with a stronger fundamental tone. In this case, the decision to use wooden slats is often born out of logistical necessity. The other instruments used in *Rebonds B* include tom-toms, bongos, a conga, and a bass drum. These instruments have a wide variety of attack response; that is they give varying amounts of rebound when struck. Woodblocks give an almost imperceptible amount of rebound. The choreographic complexities of the piece do not allow for multiple mallet changes, even just two sets of mallets; one for the skin-drums and one for the wooden instruments. The percussionist then has a choice. If they use mallets that would work well on woodblocks, they will only produce a thin sound from the drums, and with too much force, they will snap their mallets. If however they choose drumsticks or mallets that are more suitable to the drums in the instrument set-up, they are likely to crack their woodblocks given that these mallets or sticks are generally much heavier and made of harder material than the mallets used solely for woodblocks. Although I would argue a strong performance practice for the choice of woodblocks, temple blocks, or

wooden slats has not yet solidified, there are many percussionists who choose wooden slats so that they can activate the timbre from the drums that they want with heavier sticks without breaking their wood blocks.

In the case of a piece like Michael Gordon's *XY*, which calls for "five drums," there is no question of interpretation in the same sense of the interpretation of "apple" in the apple pie analogy, although there *is* room for variation in execution. Feasibly, a percussionist could opt to use five snare drums, five bass drums, five tom-toms, five Chinese toms, or five djembes. Further, there is no reason a percussionist couldn't reasonably decide to employ a low tom-tom, two congas, a Chinese tom and a single bongo to create their five-drum set-up. That is, there does not exist in the score an indication that mixing drum timbres within the set-up would be outside of the realm of plausibility. Employing Margolis' two principles that you will remember as; (1) it must be consistent or compatible with the describable features of a given artwork; and (2) it must conform with relativized canons of interpretation that themselves fall within the tolerance of a historically continuous tradition of interpretation, the execution of the interpretation of "five drums" is reduced. Due to the performance practice that has emerged through eminent percussionists such as Steven Schick, percussionists tend to gravitate towards a combination of two bongos and three congas. Although there is a slight difference in timbre between congas and bongos, they are largely considered to be in the same sound-world and allow for a wider pitch range between the lowest and highest drum than would occur with five bongos or five congas. This wider pitch range increases the chances of individual musical lines being heard clearly. This does not preclude the use of five tom-toms, but an execution of *XY* that employs five tom-toms would be perhaps to some be considered a plausible interpretation, while others an implausible interpretation.

In the acceptance of plausible and implausible interpretations, we can see performer holds a greater sense of agency, where the performer tries to "...match the composer's creativity with his own by searching in his experience for a stimulus equal to the stimulus that went into the composition."^{96,97}

⁹⁶ David Carrier, "Interpreting Musical Performances," *Monist* 66, no. 2 (1983): 207, doi:10.5840/monist198366215

⁹⁷ David Barnett, *The Performance of Music: A Study in Terms of the Pianoforte* (New York: Universe Books, 1972), 110.

Chapter 5. Futuring - A Performer's Praxis

The two-way action or mutual reflection between practice and theory, in what has become termed praxis, becomes central to my rethinking of the relationship of theory and practice in creativity.

- Barbara Bolt, *A Non-Standard Deviation*

Having explored the concepts of praxis, futuring, play, Wu Wei, and principles of interpretation, let us take a closer look at how these concepts can be applied in the practice room. The aim is not to present a methodology or instruction manual, but to offer an approach to *being* with the aim of creating a future with futures; both in the execution-as-interpretation sense, but also for the musician's own artistic practice. Although specific repertoire may be employed in an illustrative manner, this approach is designed to be applicable to a wide range of repertoire and non-musical situations. It is, at its core, a philosophy of approach.

Through chapters three and four, play and interpretation have been partitioned although these two elements of an artistic practice can never be fully separated. Nevertheless it is crucial to this approach that the musician compartmentalize their interpretive (sociological and structuralist) brain as much as possible when engaging in play. Put simply, the approach that is suggested consists of three parts, or perhaps in practice this will form somewhat of a hermeneutic circle - or rather a hermeneutic *cycle* - where each aspect informs the other in an (ideally) never-ending search for, and development of, plausible performance futures. These three steps are:

- 1) *Develop tacit knowledge through play – phronesis through praxis*
- 2) *Engage in musical hermeneutics with the aim of categorizing the tacit knowledge gained into plausible and implausible interpretive-execution outcomes*
- 3) *Return to play with a focus on exploring and metabolizing the plausible interpretations into a rhizomic structure of possibilities*

PLAY

For a percussionist, the first step of play can take many forms, and often modes of play that other instrumentalists do not necessarily deal with. Take for example instrument selection. A work such as Xenakis' *Psappha* has six instrument categories; groups A, B, and C can be wood *or* skin instruments, and groups D, E, and F contain metal instruments. The choice of specific instruments within each group is left up to the performer, meaning a performer could choose to use wood instruments for instrument groups A and C, skin instruments for group B, and metal instruments for groups D, E, and F. Or, they could choose skin instruments for group A, wood instruments for groups B and C, and metal instruments for groups D, E, and F. While there does exist some level of performance practice around instrument choices,⁹⁸ even within the parameters of an accepted performance practice the performer has a fair amount of agency in instrument selection. This process of choosing what type of instrument (metal, wood, skin) should be associated with which instrument group can sometimes take days of work. From investigating what instruments are available to the percussionist, to comparing and playing with the timbres of instrument groups against each other, to the logistics of how the instruments will work together physically in a set-up; there is a lot of work to be done. One could approach this task with a predetermined idea of what instruments to use and what organization they will arrange the instruments into, as there is no diagram for this in the score. These choices could be informed by their teacher's preferences, what they view as performance practice from instantiations of the work they have seen before, or written articles on prior performances, among other influences. However, this is a defuturing approach to instrument selection. To approach instrument selection in the case of *Psappha* with a futuring mindset, the percussionist may take the playful angle of grabbing whatever instruments

⁹⁸ A – wood, B – bongos/congas, C – tom-toms and bass drums, D – low metal, E – metal, F – high metal.

were most readily available at the time, leaving open the possibility of adjusting their instrument choices as they delve deeper into the piece.

Mallet choice is a similar situation. A defuturing approach might involve making a mallet selection early on in the process based on perceived performance practice, logistical concerns, or initial aesthetic instincts. Conversely, a futuring approach based in play would involve experimentation without limits on preconceived ideas of plausibility or implausibility. One example of this not at all related to *Psappha* is the use of a bass drum beater on the low end of a vibraphone. Without a sense of play and an abandonment of pre-conceived ideas of plausible mallet choices, one would never think to use a mallet designed to play a bass drum on a vibraphone. However, the sound that is produced is quite magical and produces a stunning timbre that has inspired composers and percussionists alike.

For a percussionist, Heidegger's handling as care approach to gaining tacit knowledge requires the musician to listen and play simultaneously. Although almost impossible to *not* impart interpretive judgements on what is being heard, the musician should be informed in play by the instruments/tools they are using. How does a certain arm movement effect the sound? What would happen if a particular mallet was selected for a single note, and only that single note, in a piece? One example of this in practice can be seen in some executions of *Psappha*. Around a third of the way through the piece, the texture is suddenly ripped apart and the percussionist plays their lowest pitched and highest pitched instrument one after the other with long, irregular silences in-between. The lowest instrument is often a concert bass drum (although there is no indication in the score that it need be), and the highest instrument is from group A, which is often realized as a woodblock group. It is not uncommon for the percussionist to have a fourth, piccolo woodblock for use solely

in this moment to highlight the pitch difference between it (the highest pitched instrument in the set-up) and the bass drum (the lowest).

These considerations however are still under the umbrella of logistical concerns, which although important, do not get at the essence of a praxical approach. An exploration of a praxical approach to Michael Gordon's *XY* is more illuminating. In this solo percussion piece for five drums, the percussionist navigates a variety of elements simultaneously. Throughout the piece (with one exception), the percussionist executes a two-line polyphony - one in each hand - with dynamics that cross-fade between the hands. While one hand decrescendos, the other crescendos, meeting every one or two measures (in various sections of the piece) at *mezzo forte* in the middle of the cross-fade, and *forte* in one hand and *piano* in the other at the peak of the cross-fade. This only changes in the last fifth of the piece when the cross-fade is replaced by *subito piano/forte*. There are no rests in the roughly sixteen-minute long piece, and only two written dynamics; *piano* and *forte*. While navigating equally oppositional dynamics, the percussionist also executes a variety of rhythmic ratios; 1:1, 3:2, 4:5, 5:6, 5:12, and 10:12. To complicate things further, subdivisions within these ratios occur by way of drum patterns within a single line. For example in the eight-measure section from measure 413 to 436 (see Figure 1), dynamically the performer moves from one-measure cross-fades, to two-measure *subito piano/forte* (in each hand), and then to a six-measure *forte* in both hands followed by a two-measure *piano* in both hands.

413 M.413-420 THREE TIMES

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Figure 1: Score excerpt, Michael Gordon, *XY* (1997) 5.

Rhythmically the performer is executing the ratio of 5:6. However this is further complicated by implied ratios within each hand, highlighted by changes of drum within each line. In this case, the phrase can be viewed as a two-measure segment of 20:24, with 20 (or five groups of four) in the left hand and 24 (or six groups of four) in the right hand. Within the left hand's fives, a new drum is struck after four notes, resulting in five groupings of four notes, where the four notes are played on one drum. Over a two-measure period, the left hand is performing a 5:20 ratio where the five is emphasized by a drum change and the twenty is the overall number of hits. This could also be expressed as 20:16 or 20 quintuplet eighth notes over 16 eighth notes. Also, 5:20 or 20:16 could be simplified to a large 5:4 where the beginning of each grouping constitutes the five and the beat (four half notes) constitutes the four. Already we see the complexity of multiple ratios employed simultaneously. Just in the left hand we have (20:16) : (5:4)

The right hand also changes drum after every four hits, resulting in a large 6:24 ratio, or 3:12 in one measure. Similarly to the left hand, this can be expressed as 24:16, or 24 triplet eighths over 16 eighths, or simply as 6:4 where the six is represented by six drum changes over two measures and the four by the four half-note beats over two measures. So, between the two hands, the performer is cross-fading whilst also executing $((5:4):(20:16)) : ((6:4):(24:16))$. This begs the question; What to focus on?

Already we see the multiplicity of interpretive outcomes; instrumentation choice, mallet choice, but also with such little dynamic information, how is one to execute the cross-faded dynamics? Is *forte* a set decibel level that should remain the same throughout the piece? Should the crescendo and decrescendo be linear or parabolic? Perhaps somewhere in between, or varied throughout the piece depending on the complexity or density of the ratio and drum changes? How does the performer bring out the ratios within ratio? In a practical approach, I suggest the performer play with larger musical elements rather than take a pedantic, mastery approach that stops at accurate execution of the already complex elements at play.

The non-stop fluid movement of dynamics over a seemingly rigid rhythmical base creates an ambiguity of perception. For example in the opening measures, the performer outlines the basis for the work, a 1:1 ratio where drum changes only occur at the peak or trough of the cross-fade (see Figure 2), not within a phrase or ratio as seen later in measures 413-436.



Figure 2: Score excerpt from Michael Gordon, *XY* (1997), 1.

Immediately, the audience (and often the performer) lose track of where the beat or measure lines lay. The hands appear in perfect polyphony; no one hand rules over the other, and both move physically and dynamically independent of one another. A praxical approach would enter into play with this ambiguity of perception, variably leaning into and away from the ambiguity, gaining a tacit knowledge of the outcomes. In this relatively simplistic opening, the performer can also play with the shape of the cross-fades, exploring how the shape of the dynamic flux lengthens or shortens the implied phrase, or blurs the polyphony into a homophonic exploration of ‘chords’ created between the drums that although unpitched, take on a chordal character when struck continually and in rapid succession. If in play the percussionist emphasizes the chordal character - the ‘rhythm as harmony’ created by the rapid ratios - then the character of the piece can be influenced greatly by the specific tuning of the drums. The percussionist may also play with the study of tensions inherent between all of the above elements; polyphony, homophony, rhythmic ratios (and multiple levels of nested ratios), dynamics, phrasing, and dramatic arc of the piece, which is not immediately apparent when viewing the score.

By engaging in a futuring performer's praxis and play with the extramusical elements created by the score, the performer is not focused on mastering the technique of playing the 5:6 ratio, or making singularist decisions regarding the execution of dynamics, but opening up a multiplism of interpretations for each element, which interact with each other to create a future with futures for the performance of that work. By concentrating on the mastery of the elements, one might describe the percussionists as having missed the forest for the trees. Their view when executing the piece is narrowed, and in my experience as an audience member for multiple performances of this piece, this narrowed, mastery approach is evident in performance. It results in a virtuosic - in the dominating, patriarchal, and athletic sense outlined earlier - performance that presents more as an etude than as a piece meant for public performance.

It is the goal of play, of the performer's praxis, to gain as much tacit knowledge – phronesis - as possible. To explore all possible options for realizing the instruction on the page. Following Saltz's analogy from the previous chapter, to bake as many pies as apple varieties you have access to. And with each of the apple varieties, bake as many pies as crust recipes. In the case of *XY*, by exploring and playing with the ambiguity of perception and relation of tensions within the piece, the percussionist creates a rhizomic structure of interpretative plausibilities. A non-linear map of possible futures that can be re/explored in performance, giving the instantiation of performance freshness and the feeling of mutual discovery between performer and audience.

PLAUSIBILITY – ALIENATION FROM PLAY

Once as many 'apple pies' - if we are following Saltz's score as recipe analogy - as possible have been baked, the musician can step back, and taste the pies. By alienating themselves from the play in a way, they are taking a theoretical stance on the results of their play to assess the

plausibility of each result. Could this pie still be considered an apple pie? Or because a custard apple and a chocolate cherry crust was used, is it outside of the plausible range of what would be considered an apple pie? Notice we are not at this stage deciding whether we like the taste of the pie or not – it could be a delicious pie, just not recognizable as an apple pie. This is where the performer re-engages with their structuralist and sociological thought processes and applies them to the results of their play to assess plausibility and implausibility.

...to have a theoretical stance is, as such, already alienation, namely the demand that one 'deal with something that is not immediate, something that is alien, with something that belongs to memory and thought'. ...Learning to affirm what is different from oneself and to find universal viewpoints from which to grasp the thing, 'the objective thing in its freedom' without selfish interest.⁹⁹

As outlined in the previous chapter, the assessment of plausibility and implausibility is based on multiple factors and can be variably influenced by historical and cultural context (that of composer, composition, performer, and performance) and existing performance practice standards (if in existence) among others. In this stage of the cycle, results of play that fall outside of plausibility are not deemed useless, but perhaps not viable for the rhizomic structure. Further, it is often through the exploration of implausible options that we can assess plausible ones;

...it should be obvious that an implausible interpretation can have great value and that it may be acceptable on grounds other than plausibility. As Robert Stecker has pointed out, we interpret 'with different aims'¹⁰⁰ and some of those aims may be less concerned with the hermeneutic plausibility of the interpretations promoted than with, say, their didactic or practical value.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 13.

¹⁰⁰ Robert Stecker, *Artworks: Definition, Meaning, Value*. (University Park (Pa.): Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 244.

¹⁰¹ Pontara, "Interpretation, Imputation, Plausibility," 35.

METABOLIZATION THROUGH PLAY

The return to play after assessing (im)plausibility is one of metabolization. Whereas the initial play was one of exploration, the return involves a deeper connection with the processes/tools/materials, to the point of metabolization. What is meant by this is that the objects with which one plays become not just familiar, or in-hand but as co-responsible elements, they become a part of the performer and the performer becomes part of them. The merits of this intentional metabolization (rather than mastery over) will be explored in the following chapter. One approach to metabolization through play involves improvised interpretation. This does not mean an anything-goes approach. Much like improvisers accessing a tool-bag or library of sounds, motifs, and textures, the musician at play with a score has a tool-bag of plausible interpretations from which to borrow. The play comes from exploring the rhizomic structure of this tool-bag in a playful way; one interpretive decision does not necessarily lead to the next. One leads to many, which leads to many more. In the return to interpretive analysis, the performer may reduce the rhizomic structure slightly by deciding that if x is employed in measure five, only a , b , c , and d , are plausible options for measure six, but if y is employed, perhaps b , c , e , f , and, g are plausible for measure six, for example. As Watts explains in relation to Zen philosophy;

That does not mean that the art forms of Zen are left to mere chance, as if one were to dip a snake in ink and let it wriggle around on a sheet of paper. The point is rather that for Zen there is no duality, no conflict between the natural element of chance and the human element of control...it is no contradiction.¹⁰²

This metabolization through play can also be described as (re)search. The performer is searching through plausible options one more time, researching plausibility yet again without

¹⁰² Alan Watt, *The Way of Zen* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1989), 174.

definitive decisions being made on a singular approach to a certain phrase, measure, or problem, but gathering and metabolizing a range of plausible possibilities.

Chapter 6. Instantiation

The answers of both authors, Kaprow and Gadamer, come near to our idea of art as an intrinsic expression and instantiation of the human condition. Both consider art as bridging or emerging out of life and play, world and imagination, action and thought.

- Kathleen Coessens, *The Artistic Turn: A Manifesto*

Although the focus of this research is the praxis of music-making, rather than the presentation of a musical product (performance), the performance itself is still an important part of the life of a musician. A musical performance can be viewed much like crossing the ocean in a tugboat. The performance itself is the crossing, the journey. The score as chart (ocean map), the musician as the ship's captain, and the instrument/tools/materials as the ship. In this analogy, the ship's captain has to have an intimate knowledge of the ocean, the ship, and the charts. They maintain the ship's seaworthiness, they study charts and make corrections, and they adjust as things change during the journey. There is a destination in mind (the end of the performance), and there is a course charted, but the conditions of the journey can never be fully known. The length of the journey is dependent on weather, the curvature of the Earth, potential mechanical issues, perhaps a stranded boat that needs rescue, and so forth. We also do not know how the journey itself will change *us*, and so our concept of the destination at the beginning of the journey will be different to our concept of the destination once we have arrived.

Let us first consider the ship sailing out as a metaphor for artistic research, as well as for the process of artistic creativity itself. The image of the ship embarking on its journey epitomizes a purposeful trajectory towards an experience yet to come which is as yet unknown and may be uncharted. Even where there is a chart, the maritime equivalent of a map, this informs but does not determine the journey's precise texture. In any case, the reliability of charts is more fluid than that of land maps owing to the fact that they must reflect a range of tidal states, and the features which they plot are subject to far more rapid and significant change than those on land—itself a telling metaphor for artist flux and innovation. Our ship moves

*towards an open horizon, held in tension on the water between the elements — the sea and the sky.*¹⁰³

Bringing the analogy to music, once the destination is reached, the ship is not left abandoned in the port of arrival. It is mended if needed, it is loaded up with fuel, water, and supplies, and it returns to the ocean. Through the journey it, and its crew, have been changed. The experience of the journey has now become a part of them and informs future journeys. For a piece to be sustainable in a musician's practice, it must have a plurality of futures/instantiations, and as time waits for no (wo)man, the performer's relation to the piece and the context within which it is performed changes over time. The musician must *return* to a state of play with the materials and explore the new relationships that have developed. The next instantiation of the piece *should* be different, for it is in a different time, and the performer is not the same person who performed it even a week or two before. This change must be acknowledged.

*It means not only wrestling tangible insights from the wandering, searching viewpoint of the artist in his or her creative process, but also a movement of 're-'search, of re-immersing oneself in the processes of searching and finding, trying out and experimenting, rather than being content, once the artwork is achieved and declared 'complete', to move on and jettison the processes that brought it into being and the consequences of its existence.*¹⁰⁴

Through extensive metabolization of materials there lies the potential for what I argue would be a more engaging, effervescent performance instantiation, which lays bare the possibility for a more open communal experience for the audience and performer. By presenting a work that is fully metabolized and improvising through one of a plurality of plausible interpretations - one of the multiplism of paths through the rhizomic structure - there is no discernable space between

¹⁰³ Coessen et al., *The Artistic Turn: A Manifesto*, 98-9.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

performer and piece. The performance of the piece is then a *performance of the performer, through the medium of a pre-composed work*. Whether the musician reads from a score or not, the intimate tacit knowledge of the work-in-action and of the piece/score work together to dissolve the barrier between audience and performer communication.

The full metabolization of the piece and the improvisation of metabolized interpretations through the rhizomic structure of plausible interpretations that was created, models and therefore opens up for the audience the possibility of exploration, wonder, and unexpected outcomes.

*In the process of making art, it is art in itself that is set on its way. Through this dynamic and productive relation, art emerges as a revealing. According to this conception, then, each event or occasioning, involves a unique encounter of inexhaustible complexity that can neither be known in advance nor predicted.*¹⁰⁵

As Bolt states, it opens the event up to possibilities; it is an invitation for the audience to share in an understanding, or as Heidegger calls it a tacit knowledge, through a different medium than through that which the musician gained the tacit, or material, knowledge. While the musician gained this knowledge through a tactile handling of the material through the processes of play, the audience engages in tacit understanding through listening/watching a performance. It is the musician who opens up the possibility of this exchange to occur. “Art’s capacity to create an open space of possibility...[and] it is through handling as care that tools, materials and processes become co-collaborators in opening that space.”¹⁰⁶

Creative practices can be a way of modeling, inserting, or proposing one’s artistic practice into the world, or engaging others in one’s process. Allen Kaprow expressed this idea through his

¹⁰⁵ Bolt, "A Non-Standard Deviation: Handlability, Praxical Knowledge and Practice Led Research."

¹⁰⁶ Bolt, "Heidegger, Handlability and Praxical Knowledge."

happenings as a moment of spontaneous creativity that focused or “framed” life.¹⁰⁷ For example, his piece *Charity* provided a modeling of an imagined future

Charity
buying piles of old clothes
washing them
in all-night laundromats
giving them back
to used-clothing stores

- *Activity, A.K.*, Berkeley Unified School District, March 7, 1969.¹⁰⁸

Of course Kaprow’s approach is far more direct for a number of reasons, namely; he created the structure for the happening, and the instructions are text-based. This models an imagined future in a far more precise and comprehensible way than a musician could hope for when presenting their sound-as-action translation of a text-as-score by a composer.

¹⁰⁷ Coessen et al., *The Artistic Turn: A Manifesto*, 34.

¹⁰⁸ Allan Kaprow and Jeff Kelley, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 122.

Conclusion

The level of risk that the musician takes in free play and moving through a rhizomic structure of interpretive plausibility in real-time in front of an audience can be daunting. Perhaps for some this is less daunting than having very well-defined ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ executions of interpretation to present in a linear manner in front of an audience. That is, in a way in which there are no, or very few, plausible options from which to choose in the moment of performance. This linear interpretation is in contrast to the rhizomic, or radically horizontal interpretation explored throughout this paper. There is risk in play. It is perhaps the excitement of risk in play, and the audience’s sense of the performer’s improvised journey through the rhizomatic structure that is most compelling and enables the audience to enter into the play with the musician. It is this play *between* audience and musician and the dialectic nature of this relationship that enlivens the performance space and creates the possibility for a meaningful experience for everyone involved, even if that meaning cannot be articulated with written or spoken language.

In a time when the world is a serious place, when there are very real problems in all dimensions; social, cultural, political, environmental, economical...(the list goes on...) it is vital that as musicians we continue to do what we do best, but to do it in a meaningful and engaged way. In a time when our imagined future of an academic career, or performance career, cannot be guaranteed, or indeed can be taken away from us in the blink of an eye, we must be nimble. We must, through play and exploration, engage in a futuring praxis for ourselves, to create and engage in futures that have futures. So that, if one part of the rhizomic structure of our life is cut off, we can easily navigate a different path, or better yet a multiplicity of paths simultaneously. The ability to be nimble and multi-faceted as a musician is becoming an increasingly valuable skill. For example, the performing musician who is also a producer and a teacher has not only the potential

for multiple income streams but also a wider professional network, leading to further opportunities. They also have the skillset to produce their own concerts without relying on a third party to do so and have a ready-made audience through their students' families and friends. The old adage "those who can't do, teach" should be wholly defenestrated (if it hasn't been already), especially amongst musicians. In an age where all information (including misinformation) is at our fingertips, it is vital to have teachers that are not only facilitating knowledge-*techne* and knowledge-*episteme*, but also knowledge-*phronesis*, and perhaps most importantly; critical thinking, adaptability, and resilience.

In a volatile and fast-changing world, any number of one's income streams could be cut short and as artists we need to be able to support ourselves so that we can keep making art and keep performing, even in the absence of performances. Through a futuring performer's praxis, it is hoped that a musician may become more resilient to events that reduce their scheduled performances or reduce their audience sizes; the elements that usually bring professional and personal satisfaction. It is hoped that through praxis they can gain at least part of the joy and satisfaction they would usually gain from performance. Outside of music, it is hoped that through creating a strong rhizomic futuring structure for ourselves, we become stronger as individuals, and have a stronger basis to be able to support those around us, and it is imperative that we do.

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