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The informed performer : towards a bio-culturally informed performers' practice

Vanmaele, J.

Citation

Vanmaele, J. (2017, November 20). *The informed performer : towards a bio-culturally informed performers' practice*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/59504>

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Author: Vanmaele, J.

Title: The informed performer : towards a bio-culturally informed performers' practice

Issue Date: 2017-12-20

The Informed Performer

Towards a bio-culturally informed performers' practice

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van

de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden

op gezag van Rector Magnificus prof.mr. C.J.J.M. Stolker,

volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties

te verdedigen op woensdag 20 december 2017

klokke 13.45 uur

door

Joost Vanmaele

geboren te Brugge (BE)

in 1971

Promotor

Prof. Frans de Ruiter

Universiteit Leiden

Copromotor

Dr. Luk Vaes

Orpheus Instituut, Gent/ docARTES

Promotiecommissie

Dr. Alessandro Cervino

Katholieke Universiteit Leuven/
Lemmens Instituut Leuven

Prof.dr. Anne Douglas

Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen

Dr. Hubert Eiholzer

Conservatoria della Svizzera italiana, Lugano

Prof.dr. Ton van Haaften

Universiteit Leiden

Prof.dr. Gery van Outryve d'Ydewalle

Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

The Informed Performer

Towards a bio-culturally informed performers' practice

The following work presented for this thesis contains, to the best of my knowledge, no material previously published or written by another person, nor submitted for the award of any other degree at this or any other university, except where due reference is made in the text.

This dissertation is written in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the doctoral degree program docARTES of the Orpheus Institute and Leiden University. The remaining precondition consists of a demonstration of the research and its findings in the form of a lecture-performance.

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Abstract

This dissertation is directed at carefully and systematically evaluating the state of musicianship in an age of informative abundance and connectedness, to consider ways of re-balancing its epistemic grounds and attuning its information systems, with a view to artistic development, enrichment and/or liberation, and to put these contextual re-arrangements to the test in practical situations.

Technological advances in our Information Age and the renewed institutional architectures of the European Higher Education Area in recent decades have been rather generous in facilitating access to an abundant amount of knowledge via information, but for some reason(s), musical practice still seems to be reluctant (or unable) to meet the challenge of practically engaging with knowledge and insights generated by an extensive field of practical, academic and para-academic enquiry. The grounds for such a state of affairs seem to be both of an ideological-epistemic nature as well as of a more practical and operational kind. In the dissertation, a conceptual and contextual space is created with regard to the notion of an 'informed performer' where these systemic bottlenecks are discussed and a way forward is proposed under the heading of *a Bio-Culturally informed Performers' Practice* of Western Art Music [BCiPP].

Throughout the investigation, which is primarily meta-practical in its focus, the following elements are proposed in support of such a new conceptual space: 1/ a discipline-specific, activity-based understanding of *information*, one that safeguards the role of imagination and freedom in artistic practice; 2/ a specification of the concept of an *informed performer* by relating it to an active, prospective, and systematic interest in information originating from extra-disciplinary fields; 3/ the creation of a multilevel context that supports the exchange of knowledge via information, stimulates the integration of a theoretical, practical and productive track in musical enquiry, and creates a dedicated research space for *Artistic Information Researchers*; 4/ the interposition of *personal theory* as an experienced-based and processual mediator between theory and practice; 5/ considering *performers' practice* as a performers-centred social practice and as an interconnected array of activities and metapactical/(proto-)theoretical understandings; 6/ the introduction of a bio-cultural approach to music which can function, via a focus on experience, action and interaction, as a common ground between musical practice and *academia*; and finally 7/ a process-oriented topical attractor-model that acts as an information system mediating between a performer's concerns and the abundance of an information galaxy.

The impact of a bio-culturally informed performership on the concerns of score-based musicians is illustrated by presenting two case-studies that pragmatically and consiliently integrate extra-disciplinary information units in score-based performance. On the action-side, the *Quadrant-technique* is proposed as a framework to reflect on the basic stroke(s) in piano-playing. In the field of musical

interaction, the concept of an *Interactional and Bio-topical Performative Analysis* is proposed as an experience- and interaction-based analytical tool to vitalise performances.

Finally, and in conclusion, the concept of a *Bio-Culturally informed Performers' Practice* [BCiPP] is situated within a larger framework of an *Informed Pluralistic and Creative Pragmatism* [IPCP].

Orthography

- Spelling:
 - British English
 - Sources in American English will preserve their original spelling.
 - Greek terms will be introduced in their original spelling (Greek alphabet, not italicized) with their transliteration (ISO basic Latin alphabet, italicized) and translation in English.
- Citation style:
 - APA Format–6th Edition
- As far as reprinted, republished or translated books are concerned, the parenthetical in-text citations will use this model: (Freud, 1923/1961).
- When the original source text is not in English, a translation will be provided either by reference to an existing translation or by own translation. If not indicated otherwise, it concerns a translation by the author.
- Double inverted commas are indicative of ‘within text citations’.
- Single inverted commas are used to indicate citations within a citation or to mark off a word or phrase that’s being discussed.
- Italics are used to indicate book titles, foreign words and phrases, words used as words, and emphases.
- Square brackets indicate:
 - a text or words as found in the original source text.
 - translations.
 - language identification.
 - reference to passages in classical books without a particular bibliographical reference (Plato’s Republic, Augustinus’ Confessions, Kant’s *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Oxford English Dictionary) e.g. [Plat. Rep. 10.596b], (Kant, 2000, p. 188 [KU §47]), [Aug. Conf. IV.xv.25], [OED, *educated*, 2].
 - own remarks or additional information within quotations.

Acknowledgements

The document before us is a pianist's report on an extensive journey into extra-disciplinary domains of expertise and inquiry and recalls the title of the first piece in Schumann's *Kinderszenen* op.15: *von fremden Ländern und Menschen*. Leaving the piano-studio to explore what a 21st century knowledge society can offer in terms of information also reminds the archetypical *theoros* in antiquity, a member of society, send out to visit other town-states to explore interesting patterns of living and culture. *Theoroi* were of two types: some of them were guided by private interest and lived a life of personal enrichment in terms of ideas and experiences, the 'official' *theoros* however was asked to report back to the polis on his findings and ensuing proposals. Embarking upon a doctoral research at the *Academy of Creative and Performing Arts* in Leiden made me a *theoros* of the second type and was a continuous and structural motivation to punctually recount the findings and insights that I encountered and developed.

I thank the academic and office staff of the *Academy of Creative and Performing Arts* at Leiden University, for their outstanding functional professionalism and support over more than a decade. I value the long-term relation between Leiden University and myself as a *buitenpromovendus* as an ultimate instance of trusted commitment, patience and loyalty.

The *Orpheus Instituut* in Ghent has been another encouraging environment. I thank Peter Dejans, director of the Orpheus Institute, the office-staff, the docARTES teaching staff and students, the ORCiM-researchers, the invited speakers and artists for supporting my research ambitions and for sharing insights on the future and value of Artistic Research.

The *Stedelijk Conservatorium Brugge* has been the practical and didactical environment in which many of the ideas presented in the dissertation below have been tested and discussed. I thank my colleagues and students for their attention, support and critical questions.

Next to institutional support, there are many people that have been directional along the way by showing a particular interest in my project or by pointing out new avenues of enquiry. I mention Michael Scheck, former director of the Antwerp Conservatory and former president of the Orpheus Institute, who was the first to discover research potential in my ongoing interests; Prof. Dr. Em. Géry d'Ydewalle introduced me to the field of psychology and was the first to support the broadening of my epistemic horizon; the late lamented Prof. dr. Willem Albert Wagenaar (1941-2011) guided the project in the first years of its doctoral status and encouraged me in the direction of systematic punctuality;

violinist Dirk van de Velde taught me the first principles of human functioning via the Alexander technique; the long-time cooperation with soprano (and nightingale) Sylvie De Pauw has been an invaluable source of motivation and performance experience; by implementing the research outcomes in his teaching at the *KunstAcademie Zaventem*, Jan Heynderickx, one of my first students at the Bruges conservatory, provided stimulating practical and artistic feedback.

A separate and profound thank you is in order to my promotor Prof. Frans de Ruiter and co-promotor dr. Luk Vaes who brought me back home *von fremden Ländern und Menschen*. Without their support, personal engagement and genuine interest, I would have stayed almost certainly a *theoros* of the first type, one who travels for pleasure without ever reporting back on the insights and experiences. The many hours that they interrogated me on form and content of the research, both critically and empathically, have been very enriching and were the ultimate encouragement needed to arrive at this point of destination.

Finally, I feel fortunate to be part of a family that values academic and artistic effort in life. All these years, my parents have been the informal focus-group that endured weekly reports (mostly over Sunday lunch) on the progress in my research; their attentive interest and remarks certainly made a difference. The engineering- and consulting-oriented minds of my brother, Hendrik, my sister-in-law, Sandrine, and my nephews Thomas, Jeroen, Frederik and Karel provided privileged access to scientific modes of reasoning; the interest they showed in a research project based in the arts convinced me of the value of it beyond the borders of musicianship.

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List of Recorded Fragments (referred to in Chapter 13)

- A recording of the first 33 bars of Chopin’s *Mazurka* op.67 nr.4 in a monadic style <https://vimeo.com/231298237> [Password: JoostPhD].
- A recording of the first 33 bars of Chopin’s *Mazurka* op.67 nr.4 in a dyadic, entrainment-oriented style <https://vimeo.com/231297883> [Password: JoostPhD].
- A recording of Chopin’s *Mazurka* op.67 nr.4 in a quadratic-mimetic style <https://vimeo.com/231296869> [password: JoostPhD].

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Glossary

- Action: a process of doing something which usually involves and integrates elements such as attitudes, beliefs, motivations, intentions, goals, cognition and motor behaviour.
- Affect: an encompassing term referring to a pre-personal and universal way in which the body prepares itself for action in a given circumstance. Within the category of affect at least four affective phenomena can be distinguished: emotion, feeling, mood, temperament.
- Affect attunement: “the performance of behaviours that express the quality of feeling of a shared affect state without imitating the exact behavioural expression of the inner state” (Stern, 1985, p. 142).
- Attractor: a super-concept that acts as a magnet and emerges within a field of initial undisciplined, chaotic and non-linear activity or inquiry.
- Attunement: being or bringing into harmony; a feeling of being "at one" with another being.
- Behaviour: all the activities that living organisms exhibit and which are perceivable.
- Bio-cultural (in a musical context): adopting a bio-cultural perspective with regard to music is to consider the wide variety of musical activities not as phenomena *sui generis* but rather as cultural instances or personal particularisations of the human capacity to meaningfully and intentionally generate and react to temporally patterned sounds.
- BCiPP – Bio-Culturally informed Performers’ Practice: an interconnected array of activities and understandings within the broader category of score-based performership that is underpinned by a shared and active interest in information on generics and particulars in musical action and interaction as a factor in creating a sonic environment from which musical experiences can evolve (the ‘i’ of informed is not capitalised to symbolize its mediating role).
- Bio-topics: frequently encountered (embodied) states of vitality when performing a piece of music.
- Cognitivy fluidity: the capacity to integrate ways of thinking and stores of knowledge from separate intelligences so as to create types of thoughts that could never have existed within a domain-specific mind (Mithen, 2005, pp. 263–264).
- Consilience: from *salire* (lat. ‘to jump’), and *con* (lat. ‘together’); the jumping together of items that appear to be so separate. The type of consilience proposed in the context of BCiPP is consilience between the science of phenomena (biology), their interpretations and situated manifestations (culture) and artistic practice (the sayings and doings of musicians). This type

of consilience is not directed at 'explanation' but at pragmatically and creatively invigorating and freeing the personal theories and beliefs that serve as a background for artistic behaviour.

- Deep learning: a learning process connected to the concept of neural networks. In the sphere of Information Technology, it refers to a particular way in which computers are trained and fine-tuned on the basis of lots of examples rather than by human programming. In score-based performance, deep learning refers to acquiring musical, stylistic and technical proficiency via long-term exposure to a variety of musical scores.
- Diegesis: the telling of a story by a narrator who represents events.
- Dyadic performative focus: (performer-audience) perspective where the focus of the score-based performer is on the effect of musical action on the listener.
- Emotion: relates to a relatively brief episode of coordinated neural, autonomic, and behavioural changes that facilitate a response to an external or internal event of significance for the organism; emotions are the projection/display of a feeling – either genuine or feigned – which expresses our internal state or fulfils social expectations; emotion is often intertwined with mood, temperament, personality, disposition, and motivation. Examples of what are supposed to be universal emotions are anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise.
- Entrainment: a phenomenon in which two or more independent rhythmic processes synchronize with each other in such a way that they adjust towards and eventually 'lock in' to a common phase and/or periodicity. In music, rhythmic entrainment relates to metre and groove.
- Extra-disciplinary information: information that does not originate in one's own field of expertise. In the context of this dissertation, by 'extra-disciplinary' is meant information that does not originate in the field of musical practice but from other branches of learning or knowledge production. Musical practice is here considered as a discipline or as "a branch of learning or knowledge; a field of study or expertise; a subject" [OED, 'discipline', 7.a.].
- Fallibilism: the thesis that no belief (theory, view, thesis, framework, model) can ever be rationally supported or justified in a conclusive and error-free way.
- Feeling: the subjective representation of emotions; feelings are personal and biographical; they are based on sensation which have been checked against previous experiences.
- GIM – Generally Informed Musicianship: see GIP.
- GIP – Generally Informed Performership: a mental space within the broader category of musicianship where a score-based performer (habitually) orients her/himself in an active, prospective, and systematic manner to information originating from extra-disciplinary fields as a complement to intra-disciplinary paths of artistic training, learning, and development, and

allows this information to potentially make a difference to her/his *Image* of music-making and to the actions and imaginations that build upon that *Image*.

- GIPP – Generally Informed Performers’ Practice: a mental space within the broader category of musicianship where a score-based performer looks in an active, prospective and systematic manner for information originating from extra-disciplinary fields as a complement to intra-disciplinary paths of artistic training, learning, and development, and allows this information to potentially make a difference to her/his *Image* of music-making, and the actions and imaginations that build upon that image. The effectuation of a GIPP builds on the increased transfer-capacity of knowledge in an Information Age, on the integrative turn in education and on a dedicated research space within the framework of Artistic Research.
- HIP – Historically Informed Performance: an orientation in the performance of music that takes historical information (scores, instruments, practices) as a basis for musical action.
- Image: (indicated in italics) a personal world-view (Boulding, 1961).
- Imagery: a technical term that relates to the development of mental images without the presence of an external stimulus.
- Imagination: a term that pertains to the arts and poetics; linked to discovery, invention and originality because it is thought of in relation to the possible rather than to the actual. See also ‘cognitive fluidity’.
- Information (in an artistic context): a difference which (potentially) makes a difference with regard to our personal and collective *Image* related to art production and reception and the actions and imaginations that build upon that *Image*.
- Interactional and Bio-topical Performative Analysis: identifying affordances for musical interaction and communicative musicality in a musical score and linking these affordances to embodied states of mind (bio-topics) of a performer.
- IPCP – Informed Pluralistic and Creative Pragmatism: an epistemic framework that addresses (research-)questions by: 1/ creating a reservoir with personal theories; 2/ locating and gathering punctual information; 3/ organising a stake-holder discussion with the information as intentional object; and 4/ coming to a creative and/or pragmatic way forward, one that includes fallibilism.
- Meta-practical: concerning the practice of reflecting on a practice. Meta-practice provides meanings (formal and informal) by which practitioners understand the work that they do.
- MSP – Main Stream Performance: an orientation in music performance that takes performance tradition (masters and guiding examples) as a main reference.
- Mood: refers to a diffuse affective state that is often of lower intensity than emotion, but

considerably longer in duration – moods are not usually associated with the patterned expressive signs that typically accompany emotion and sometimes occur without apparent cause.

- Mimesis: enactment or imitation of an extra-contextual experience by using the body as a representational canvas (action-metaphor).
- Monadic performative focus: (performer) perspective where the focus of the score-based performer is on self-expression.
- Personal theory: In score-based performance, personal theory refers to a systematic and transmissible understanding gained from reflection on practical experience. It consists of beliefs, opinions, understandings and rules of thumb that have been pragmatically abstracted from particular practical contexts or that have been retained from existing practice traditions and models. Personal theory is the epistemic backbone by which practitioners judge new practice situations and is amenable to revision if new situations necessitate it. If personal theories seem to be unable to provide efficacious answers to practice-based questions, or in cases where reviewing or assessing these personal repertoires is called for, the practitioner will dialogue with extra-disciplinary modes of information, including academic theory.
- Pragmatism: a philosophical tradition that emphasizes the practical consequences that follow from the acceptance of a belief and claims that the value and meaning of a proposition is in the practical consequences that follow upon accepting it.
- Quadratic performative focus: (performer-work-audience-universe) perspective where the focus of the score-based performer is on an element of the universe (persona, flora, fauna, event, habitat) which is presented (mimesis) or represented (diegesis).
- Recontextualisation: a process which is concerned with appropriating discourses and information from extra-disciplinary fields of production, and translating them into the discourse of another field.
- Repertoire (sociology): the set of strategies and their analogic potential that any one individual possesses (Bernstein, 2000, p. 158).
- Reservoir (sociology): the total of sets of strategies that any one individual possesses and its potential to the community (Bernstein, 2000, p. 158).
- Reproduction: the way in which recontextualized knowledge and information is presented in the context of education and pedagogy.
- Resonance: the condition in which an object or system is subject to an oscillating signal having a frequency at or close to that of a natural vibration of the object or system. By behavioural resonance (in the context of music) is meant the corporeal immersion in sound energy, which is a direct way of feeling musical reality.

- SIPP – Scientifically Informed Performers’ Practice: the framework of a scientific approach to musical performance which aims to ground the practice of performing on scientific facts.
- Topical attractor model: information system based on identifying attractors in a field of interest.
- Triadic performative focus: (performer-work-audience) perspective where the focus of the score-based performer is on paying joint attention to an element of the immediate environment (the coded or sonic environment).
- Vitality: the experience of life based on the internal dynamics of one’s own being, something not observable from outside.
- Vitality affects: “those dynamic, kinetic qualities of feeling that distinguish animate from inanimate and that correspond to the momentary changes in feeling states involved in the organic processes of being alive” (Stern, 1985, p. 156).
- Vitality contours: to refer to the manner in which an act is performed and the feeling that directs it.

Abbreviations

A Treatise: *A Treatise of Human Nature* (D. Hume)

AEC: Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen

AERs: Artistic Experimental Researchers

AIRs: Artistic Information Researchers

Anthr: *Anthropologie* (I. Kant)

AR: Artistic Research

ARRs: Artistic Reflective Researchers

B: Bar

BCiPP: Bio-Culturally informed Performers' Practice (the 'i' of informed is not capitalised to symbolize its mediating role)

Conf.: *Confessions* (St. Augustine)

Def.: definition

DIM: *De Institutione Musica* (Boëthius)

DIP: Distal interphalangeal joints

EHEA: European Higher Education Area

Essay: *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* (J. Locke)

GIM: Generally Informed Musicianship

GIP: Generally Informed Performership

GIPP: Generally Informed Performers' Practice

HIP: Historically Informed Performance

IBR: Information Behaviour Research

IPCP: Informed Pluralistic and Creative Pragmatism

KrV: *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (I. Kant)

KU: *Kritik der Urteilkraft* (I. Kant)

MSP: Main Stream Performance

MCP: Metacarpophalangeal joint

n.d.: no date

OED: Oxford English Dictionary

OLD: Oxford Latin Dictionary

PIP: Proximal Interphalangeal Joints

s.o.: A sense of

SIPP: Scientifically Informed Performers' Practice