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## Thinking through the guitar : the sound-cell-texture chain

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## Chapter 2 Research Context

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## Chapter 2 Research Context

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Both Coessens et al. and Borgdorff point out the importance of the researcher acknowledging and describing the context in which the artistic research is “situated” or “embedded” (Coessens et al., 2009, pp. 65-74; Borgdorff, 2010, pp. 56-57). Coessens et al. provide a framework for the description of situatedness of a given artistic research trajectory, consisting of an account of its social, epistemic and ecological aspects (Coessens et al., 2009). In this chapter, each of these aspects is discussed in order to sketch the research context of this study.

### 2.1 Social, epistemic and ecological situatedness

#### 2.1.1 Social situatedness

The subject of this research is socially situated in the classical guitar community, which can be considered as a “community of practice”. Wenger et al. describe a community of practice as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 4). The structure of a community of practice consists of a domain, a community and a practice (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 27). There are three levels of participation in a community of practice: a core group of the most active participants that take on a *de-facto* community leadership, an active group and a peripheral group of participants who rarely participate. Externally, there are people who show an interest in the community but that are not members, such as “customers, suppliers and ‘intellectual neighbors’” (Wenger et al., 2002, pp. 56-57). Through a process of “legitimate peripheral participation”, in which newcomers perform tasks beneficial to the community by learning from insiders, newcomers acquire the skills that are required to enter one of the groups in the community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Communities of practice play an important role in the transfer of tacit and explicit knowledge: they are “in the best position to codify knowledge, because they can combine its tacit and explicit aspects” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 9).

The classical guitar community, viewed as a community of practice, has the classical guitar as its domain. The community is distributed globally, and has meeting points in music schools, conservatories, guitar festivals, guitar competitions, concert halls and festivals with classical guitar programming, classical guitar magazines (e.g. *Classical Guitar Magazine*, *Gitarre und Laute*) and, increasingly, online communities such as forums (e.g. *classicalguitarofcamp.com*, *classicalguitarforum.com*) and Facebook groups (e.g. *Guitar Players on Facebook*, *Guitaromania*). The core group of the community is formed by its leading artistic and academic figures (such as Julian Bream, Eliot Fisk, Peter Pöfgen), while the group of participants consists of, but is not excluded to, professional guitarists, guitarist composers, composers who write for the guitar and cooperate with a guitarist, guitar makers, concert and festival organizers, guitar teachers, guitar students, guitar scholars, journalists writing for guitar journals. The peripheral

group in the community is formed by individuals of the above professions and specializations who rarely participate, and newcomers who are in the process of entering the group of active participants through the process of legitimate peripheral participation. In addition, there is an external group that consists of, but is not excluded to, the guitar audience, interested artists from other disciplines and those who aspire to enter the community. Within the larger community, we find sub-communities of performers specializing in a genre or breaking through expected forms of artistic expression within the classical guitar community, sometimes bordering on other artistic communities. Here we find, for instance, guitarists performing in prisons, performers specializing in improvisation on the classical guitar, composers, and guitarists or guitarist composers specializing in contemporary music on the guitar or the electric guitar. The practice of a community consists of its “set of frameworks, ideas, tools, information, styles, language, stories and documents that community members share” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 29). For the guitar community, features of its practice are, for instance, its shared ideas about sound production, guitar quality and guitar technique, its instruments, strings and other accessories, its performance styles and genres, and its scores and recordings.

### 2.1.2 Epistemic situatedness

Epistemically, the subject of research is located within a context of artistic and academic publications appearing in the guitar community. In recent years, guitar scholars have published works on various aspects of the classical guitar experience, adding to a growing body of academic knowledge on the subject. Artistic creations in the form of new compositions, meanwhile, also continue to populate the guitar community: part of the knowledge applied to create these compositions (technical knowledge of scoring for the guitar, compositional knowledge of form, content, and knowledge of creative processes), are tacitly present in these compositions. This knowledge may be reconstructed by distilling it from the composition, not just by reading the score, but also by performing the score, developing appropriate tools of analysis and description, analyzing alternative modes of performing, studying scholars’ comments on the work, and studying interviews with the respective composers. Indeed, according to Borgdorff, it is the task of the artistic research to “employ experimental and hermeneutic methods that reveal and articulate the tacit knowledge that is situated and embodied in specific artworks and artistic processes” (Borgdorff, 2006, p. 18).

The debate on the status and value of artistic research or “practice-led research” in art is very much a current one, and evidenced by contributions in the field by artistic research scholars and theorists in the steadily growing number of academic publications on the subject. Recent years have seen the publication of collected writings and lectures by various scholars (Biggs & Karlsson, 2010b; Balkema & Slager, 2004) and publications of individuals or cooperating scholars (Borgdorff, 2012; Coessens et al., 2009). Above all, it is the hidden dimension of the knowledge present in creative works that “causes problems and divides opinion” about and on its status and value (Cox, 2009, p. 8). This study intends to reveal the hidden dimension of scoring knowledge active in the creative process of composing new works for guitar and therefore adopts the position on artistic research presented by Coessens et al., who propose that “artistic research demands a reintegration of the artistic trajectory with the artistic manifestation, a more explicit dialogue between the research process and the end-product, outcome or

performance”, in order to reveal otherwise hidden aspects of the creative act (Coessens et al., 2009, pp. 117-118). It does so by presenting the artistic manifestation of the research, consisting of a set of new compositions written for the guitar, and the tools created and developed during the research process, in the form of the written dissertation and video examples. According to Coessens et al., artistic research demands not only the wish of an artist-researcher to create a new work of art, but also “a moment when the experience of making demands some kind of re-examination, reappraisal or renewal” (Coessens et al., 2009, p. 92). As described in the Theory Chapter, the knowledge available in previous studies on guitar scoring contains a number of serious voids that demand a re-thinking of the guitar potential, which in this research aims at creating new works for the guitar and developing tools for creation in the process.

### 2.1.3 Ecological situatedness

According to Coessens et al., ecological situatedness refers to the “ecological, physical and perceptual embeddedness of the action – and actor – in the specific context of research” (Coessens et al., 2009, p. 67). In terms of the physical and perceptual embeddedness, this research is located within a context of conventions on guitar technique, conventions on the position of the body in guitar performance, conventions on reading guitar scores, as well as conventions on ideal environments for performance (such as a concert hall) and recording (such as a chapel) due to their acoustically advantageous properties. Another aspect of ecological situatedness is the relation between the musician and the instrument, as she has to engage in “a profound interaction with the musical instrument and respond to its possibilities” (Coessens et al., 2009, p. 67). Although it is commonly known that ecology in general can be regarded as the mutual influence of all environmental (f)actors on the body and mind of a living being (and vice versa), within the context of this research I will mainly concentrate on one of those interactions, that is the one between a musician and her instrument. This is because the subject of my research is strongly connected to the classical guitar as an instrument: it has its shape, the materials, the type and number of strings, and the non-amplified sound as its starting point. As such, the ecological situatedness bears a relation to the social situatedness: performing on the classical guitar is a condition for a performer to be seen as part of the classical guitar community. There are many other options to enter an alternative guitar community with another type of guitar, such as a jazz guitar or an acoustic steel string guitar. These various guitar communities have been extensively documented by Dawe in his study *The new guitarscape in critical theory, cultural practice and musical performance* (Dawe, 2010), and are not the focus of this study.

### 2.1.4 Relevance

The specification of the social, epistemic and ecological situatedness is relevant as it clarifies the context in which the research takes place. The ecological situatedness of the classical guitar, determined in part by conventions on the materials used for its construction as well as conventions on ideal spaces for performance and recording (which are a result of the characteristics of classical guitar construction and the fact that amplification is not always used), and the resulting social situatedness, separate the classical guitar from other guitar communities. The ecological and social situatedness also relate to the epistemic situatedness. After all, the performer who enters the classical guitar community with a

classical guitar, should demonstrate knowledge of its body of knowledge (e.g. canonical compositions, conventions on technique) in order to be recognized as a member of the community. The ways in which guitarists and composers have related to the characteristics and the construction of the guitar through history, as well as their mutual relation, are discussed extensively in Chapter 4.