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Poiesis and the performance practice of physically polyphonic notations
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Appendix

Appendix: A short note on diversity of method

The following reflections were compiled following interviews with other performers experienced with repertoire covered in this dissertation. The performers—Matt Barbier, William Lang, Benjamin Marks, Stephen Menotti, and Weston Olencki—have all incorporated physically polyphonic notations into their public and performance personas to varying degrees.

In performing physically polyphonic repertoire over many years, and in developing a coherent and consistent practice related to it, I have been aided and guided throughout by the inestimable benefit of the small community of other performers engaged with these notations. These notations are by no means the norm within classical contemporary music; nonetheless, it is quite difficult to find a new music specialist who has not, at some point, had to engage with physical polyphony. Despite this, many do not specialize in it, and so even within the relatively small and close-knit new music community, there is an even smaller subset of performers who have specialized to varying extents in physically polyphonic repertoire. Although that subset remains relatively small, it is an invaluable learning and psychological aid. Personally, I found it heartening and motivating to see that there were other performers out there also willing to engage on this level and able to execute this music to such a convincing degree.

As a submission of doctoral work in artistic research, this dissertation has focused primarily on the forms of practice building that I have been able to research both scholastically as well as filtered through the crucible of my personal artistic practice. At the outset of this study, I remarked that I would be discussing only works for solo trombone, as those were the only works that I could honestly research as a performer. As has hopefully become clear by now, I have indeed developed a committed, holistic, and thoughtful learning practice when dealing with physically polyphonic notations, one that bleeds also into all other music that I play. However, I am far from the only one to do so, and I am deeply indebted to the community of other performers that helped to create and foster these pieces and the musical environment that produced them. Some of these other performers have also recorded their engagements and explorations with experimental notations. Although none engage specifically with physical polyphony, several performers have discussed complexity and virtuosity in close detail in ways that overlap with many of my own concerns. Grahame Klippel's doctoral dissertation from 2015 provides a very informative review of other performers' contributions to the discourse (Klippel, 2015, pp. 51-89), as does a 2007 issue of the *Contemporary Music Review* devoted to the topic (see Redgate, 2007; Webb, 2007). Two forerunners of the field, in particular, have written valuable and well-known contributions, namely Franklin Cox (Cox, 2002) and Steven Schick (Schick, 1994; Schick, 2006). Cox advocates for the use of computers to aid in the internalization of increasingly complex parameters, and his own work as a composer and performer bears out the validity of his approach. Schick offers an alternative somewhat closer emergence and embodiment. Precursing to some degree my own discussion of values and precision in chapter 1, Schick wrote of performing Brian Ferneyhough's *Bone Alphabet* in 1994 that "meaningful gesture is the ultimate measure of a committed performance, a kind of Richter Scale of the musical tectonic forces underlying the composition," and that in living with the piece he strove for "a kind of prolonged adolescence where the malleability of learning coexists with mature manifestations of performance" (Schick 1994, p. 152). These two attitudes fall in some ways on opposite ends of a spectrum, but as I will show in a closer examination of some of my fellow performers, there is no inherent conflict between these two attitudes. Rather, they readily coexist, and different performers use the tools that they provide to develop a variety of learning strategies for maneuvering through the difficulties inherent in complex and physically polyphonic scores.

After the long ruminations on poietic learning practices, I wanted to offer a short journey into the world of other contemporaneous performers as a palette cleanser of sorts. In the course of this research, I have augmented my own personal research and practice by reaching out to some members of this community, to other trombonists who have also performed some of the pieces that were examined in this dissertation. I tried to identify a set of performers who had not merely approached this repertoire at some point, but who had moreover allowed it to become a long-standing and constructive part of their overall performance practice and musical identity. To precisely what extent that is true varies from performer to performer, of course, but ultimately, all five of the trombonists addressed in this addendum have played a variety of physically polyphonic pieces over the course of their careers, successfully integrating them into their artistic personas. I approached them about both their general responses to these notations as a family, but also about specific pieces and learning patterns that emerged through the presence of these pieces in their long-term, evolving musical diet. This has been a particularly intriguing parallel line of inquiry since these performers were also inspirations and models for me as I first approached this repertoire.⁷⁴

In comparing their experiences with these pieces, both when first learning them and when relearning them, I discovered much about myself, and some of the insights that I have attempted to share thus far were sparked from the dialogues that I have been so lucky to have experienced with this small community of adventurous artists. After all, these are also the contaminations and disturbances that Haraway and Tsing celebrate, and without their superposition and interpolation in my own life, I could not have developed the practices described herein. And, much like with the unique spatiotemporal relationships that intervene in the composer-performer relationship, the fact that most of the performer-performer contamination that occurs transpires at similar removes (through recordings and concerts) means that the types of influence that run between performers can be augmented and diminished, as well, by the noise that inevitably bleeds in over such temporal and spatial separation. One performer's recording might very well influence a practice strategy of my own, as I attempt to emulate some desirable character, and yet what I interpret could easily be diametrically opposed to what that performer envisioned themselves. In this way, performer-performer communications are akin to the shared utterances examined in 3.2, as context allows one actor to predict and interpret and "hijack" some bit of content, which might then filter back to the original source in a new form, only to be "hijacked" once again. I hope that such contaminations and hijackings can be celebrated.

In addressing this sense of non-verbal, extra-temporal communication, I also hope to underline how interesting it has been to finally speak to some of the performers with whom I have been otherwise contaminating for all of these years! Having a serious verbal (or in some cases written) dialogue has been a fantastic complement to the years spent listening and responding to their work. Sometimes it was easy to see a connection between their descriptions of learning and the resultant performances with which I have previously been acquainted; other times, I found myself very surprised by these short glimpses behind-the-scenes. That alone stands to demonstrate that, as much as I may espouse a poietic learning practice (or as much as someone else may espouse some other strategy), the function lies much more in the qualitative experience of learning than it does in the pursuit of a particular resultant sound quality. Subjectively, I do believe that a conscientious learning practice must reap desirable aural effects; but in real world situations with many cross-contaminating variables in play, such one-to-one relationships are not always so easy to parse. All the more reason to learn a little bit about others' learning practices, then.

74 All but one are older than myself, and their recordings were the signposts and touchstones that guided me in my first forays into physically polyphonic repertoire.

Everyone seems to agree about the importance of holistic performance. Whatever one thinks, it is incontrovertible that at the end of the day, a physically polyphonic notation will be performed by a single body, and that that requires some sense of holism at the performative stage. Performers begin to diverge, though, when it comes to how they arrive at that holism, and to what degree they hold that in balance to a more cumulative strategy (i.e. treating physical parameters as discrete; to be layered, rather than entangled). I believe that for many performers, one of these practice strategies—either a cumulative or holistic approach to the polyphonic layers—seems to be the obvious solution. I heard performers say that they have to begin with separate strands of activity and slowly layer them (cumulative to holistic). But others also related that they have to begin from slow attempts at holistic reading and can only isolate parameters later in the process, as the most efficacious moments for doing so become apparent during the course of learning (holistic to cumulative). Already, the inversion of these strategies begins to suggest that, for all of the overlap between resultant effects, there are rather profound differences in approach.

William Lang, for example, begins from a holistic perspective. Despite experiencing a large transformation of his learning process over time (as any player would), from first encountering such a piece to a decade or more later, Lang has, nonetheless retained a framework of commencing by approaching the notation holistically. When recounting his first experiences with physically polyphonic repertoire, Lang describes excursions into the notation looking for sound worlds. For him, this entailed looking at the beginning of each (or successive) measures, finding the sound worlds that emerged from these vertical core samples of the notation. He would then isolate them to build a strong relationship to the resultant sounds of layered parameters before beginning to investigate the transformations and transitions to which those sounds are subsequently subjected. In the beginning, this takes more time, but by some years later, it becomes a much more fluid process. Although at the beginning, Lang might invoke such a practice strategy for the bulk of or for an entire piece, now he can spend such energy more intensively on the opening of a piece, until the sonic and physical vocabulary of a notation becomes more intuitive, and then proceed learning with a greater sense of reading the notation as one would read traditional notation. Notably, it seems that, through the skills accrued by working through this strategy of holistic sound samples slowly stitched together, the ability to more quickly reach a plane of intuitively parsing a new notation accelerates. Careful work welcoming the variability of a notation in one piece can (productively) contaminate the learning process of a completely different, unique notation years later. It is the skills of adaptability that survive as much as or more than any specific concatenations of parameters.

This idea of building the ability to internalize vocabularies is essential to Lang's working process. In speaking together, he repeatedly paid homage to situations from his non-musical life that built the fundamental skills of adaptability that enabled him to retain this intellectual attitude when confronted with experimental music. Additionally, he also couched his descriptions of the learning process in non-musical analogies, particularly from sports. For Lang, the skills that allow someone to play tennis, raquetball, or badminton interchangeably are directly related to the skills needed to parse a variety of musical notations (physically polyphonic or not). The combination of retained skills (e.g. racquet control, anaerobic stamina) and sport-specific constraints (e.g. varying raquet, court, and ball sizes) provide a framework for him to mentally accommodate the constant interchange of traditional and situation-specific performance practices. These analogies then infect his rehearsal strategies when approaching the often very athletic demands of the pieces in question.

Others, of course, have developed other strategies for maneuvering this spectrum between holistic and cumulative practice strategies. Matt Barbier, for example, starts also from a very holistic point, placing parameters together slowly and allowing the piece to indicate to him, over time, which elements seem fore- or backgrounded. In particular, as he progresses, he describes finding particular

passages with interesting duos and trios of parameters. These could be passages with only two or three parameters active, with others momentarily tacet, or they could be sections where two or three parameters seem more entangled, and the others momentarily ancillary. In both cases, he will isolate the sections, even if they include non-sounding elements, and practice them in these duo or trio settings. This is particularly interesting because it marries a key element of a cumulative approach (the identification of foregrounded material on which other elements may be layered hierarchically) but practices the foregrounded material in a locally holistic way (maintaining always some entanglement of two or three parameters, rather than isolating solos).

Barbier's approach relies heavily on a sense of emergence, in that physical practice over time leads to a tactile sense of which material is most critically entangled, in direct contrast to a purely intellectual approach, wherein an analytical perusal of the score would identify primary material and project a practice plan accordingly. Benjamin Marks suggests something very similar in his own approach. In his early work with Klaus K. Hübler's *Cercar*, he describes "a long process of translating sounds (again still quite pitched based in my learning when I started this), sketching in ideas, leaving some 'complexes' of sounds more or less untranslated and building up an idea of the piece's structure" (personal communication with the author). This initial reliance on pitch, though, evolved over time, as he became increasingly preoccupied with "exploring the breath accents and the interruptions they create. I remember being quite finicky with rhythmic alignments to find all these awkward points where actions collide and remake the sound" (personal communication with the author). Finding the interruptions and collisions can hijack the primacy of pitch, such that an equality begins to form, and he "could 'read' the Hübler as it was written, without a need to translate to a pitched line the combination of effects" (personal communication with the author).

Although not his first excursion into physically polyphonic repertoire, learning the Hübler was still one of the first, and (for anyone) one of the more intense. Over time, though, this process begins to accelerate. Marks, similarly to Lang, describes his learning process shifting to a period of intense work on the opening of a piece, in which he gains a sense of fluency with the notation, before proceeding to learn the remainder of the piece more quickly and intuitively. The preoccupation with interruptions and disturbances continues to inform this practice, forcing the parameters into relationships of collision and entanglement, and mining those situations for musical expression. Nowadays, he describes a learning process geared towards finding "the cracks in the music, which might suddenly expose the voice or some other sonic element," satisfying his "desire to find in the physical collision of processes sounds which somehow speak more directly to my own experiences and understanding of the world" (personal communication with the author). In this sense, the cracks create the doorways by which the different parameters may come into contact, disturbing each other, contaminating each other, and forcing themselves into the performer's physical practice as a holistic collision of gestures rather than a strictly cumulative layering of effects.

Stephen Menotti, on the other hand, speaks rather less of collisions, but focuses instead on finding the language away from the trombone. This stands in rather stark contrast to much of what I have developed and espoused myself, but there is perhaps more kinship between these approaches than first meets the eye. In discussing his learning process, Menotti remarked at one point on the choice between "renotating or renotating and then playing from the original score" (personal communication with the author). This in itself stuck out to me dramatically, as I work very hard to avoid renotation, especially with these pieces. Naturally, then, his framing of his practice strategy as one inevitably utilizing renotation but only potentially returning to the original piqued my curiosity. Upon further discussion, several interesting sides to this question, emerged, though. First of all, Menotti uses the term renotation rather loosely: it could be anything from a complete renotation of parameters into a more traditional notation, or it could just be a more streamlined format, or it could

mean merely the minor additions or elisions of material to aid efficiency of information parsing. In fact, it could be almost any annotation of the score, in his usage. Although someone like me will proceed very slowly with instrument in hand, rigorously maintaining entanglement, Menotti is far more likely to extrapolate parameters and explore them without the instrument. In some ways, this seems far preferenced to a cumulative approach, since it requires identifying some strand of primacy (or at least interestingness) in the parameters and then proceeding to isolate and explore those parameters. However, what struck me most in Menotti's description of this work was how much of it takes place away from the instrument. It seems that for him, the role of the renotation resides rather more in the intellectual engagement with the score away from the instrument than in the ability to more efficiently pick up the instrument and jump into a version of the piece. In fact, with at least one piece, he described also working on the pitch elements at a piano instead of with the trombone. This externalization of parameters through renotation before recombining them holistically in the (trombone-holding) performative body reveals another very fascinating way to navigate these two approaches. The interplay of these learning styles allows for a lot of cumulative work that isolates and hierarchizes parameters, and yet still allows for the reintegration of parameters in the instrumental practice to foster the development of holistic, idiomatic practices, unique to each piece and their variable physical polyphonies.

Perhaps the only player to describe a more purely cumulative approach is Weston Olencki. He also describes his process beginning more visually. Olencki analyzes the score beforehand, isolating the chief parameters, which he states is nearly always pitch, and then proceeds from that parameter as an attack point in the piece. In this case, he proceeds cumulatively, beginning from one parameter, isolated in its importance in advance of physically holding the instrument, and then layers other effects thereupon, in a loosely hierarchical order. Over the years, having learned a number of such pieces, Olencki's ability to accomplish this more quickly and intuitively has increased, such that now the initial steps of hierarchizing material are enfolded into the process of reading the music, effectively marrying the cumulative and the holistic in an idiosyncratic manner.

One of my chief interests in speaking to these performers was the way in which the learning processes change and streamline over time. I have organized this brief representation of others' learning practices around the poles of cumulative and holistic approaches precisely because, in speaking to all of them about the ways in which their methods have evolved over years-long engagements with these pieces, all of them ended up describing some way in which these two poles became enmeshed, like double helixes intertwined. Each performer has a different way of threading these intertwinings together, and yet each also finds a way to progress beyond a merely cumulative or merely holistic approach. In speaking with one composer whose work has been performed by all of these players (myself included), he relayed to me how fascinating it had been to see how divergent different performers' interpretations were, even as, while following along in the score, they all seemed very precise and accurate. This seems to sum up one of the chief advantages of physically polyphonic repertoire: by elevating the prism of the performative body to such a high level of engagement with the creative process, it allows each performative body to create a different diffraction of the notation. New forms of accuracy evolve as new bodies encounter a score. The conversations that we had in the course of this research continually circled around questions of why exactly some of us end up drawn to this repertoire. Much of the allure does seem to reside in the intimacy of engagement, in the way that the pieces demand so much from a performer, bombarding them with new stimuli, and yet also emerge at the end from within the performer's body, radiating a unique and personal idiomaticism. And just as a single performer's body becomes a kaleidoscope, shifting with each new notation to develop new angles and patterns of embodied activity, so also do multiple performers' bodies scale up that process, interweaving through shared pieces to similarly provoke the development of broader instrumental practices based in precisely these variable,

contingent physicalities. We are contaminants and contaminated. In performing these pieces, we diverge and converge physically, entangling ourselves in corporeal notations that provoke further creative responses from the world around us, diffracting through notational practices well beyond physical polyphony and evaporating into the world of sound around us. I count myself lucky to be in their company.