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Poiesis and the performance practice of physically polyphonic notations
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Summary

This thesis sets out to examine the learning process in music through the lens of a unique and relatively recent notational trend, physical polyphony (herein defined as notations of dyssynchronous physical actions within a single performative body). These notations sprang up in the latter half of the 20th century and, through the decoupling of different physical actions, posed radical new questions to previously existing instrumental performance practices. My research during the course of this study has used physical polyphony as a means to experiment with performance practices as embodied skills and the way in which those practices develop and metamorphose in new situations. While decoupled notations have garnered attention in musicological discourse, particularly with respect to their relationship to burgeoning trends of notational complexity, very little attention has been paid to the relationship that these notations have to performers and their individual instrumental practices. By isolating these notations' role in fostering freshly embodied idiomaticisms, I hope to illuminate both the performance practice of this trend in contemporary music as well as certain elements of the learning process as it pertains to music in general.

The first chapter of this dissertation begins with an exploration of the concept of poiesis, informed chiefly by Hannah Arendt's use of the term in *The Human Condition* (1958) to indicate a form of creativity married to craftsmanship. This poietic framework will then be used throughout the dissertation to inform a practice-based analysis of the learning process involved with physically polyphonic notations. Despite polyphonic asynchrony, the unifying performative demands of these pieces are the learning strategies necessary to accomplish this eventual *reassembly* of instrumental practice within a single, performing body. The following chapters explore the physically polyphonic repertoire of the trombone specifically as a laboratory for testing this poietic approach. In order to focus on the learning process relevant to these unique, recently-developed notations, the following chapters are not analyses focused on the compositions themselves, but instead examine the works in question as they pertain specifically to the situated challenges of learning, enskilment, and practice-building. Arendt's poiesis is closely tied to the concept of tool-building, wherein new practices and tools are designed and constructed to enable further development of human activity in both laboring and social environments. I examine this concept closely and propose ways in which it can be used as a means to build flexible value systems that can adapt to the unique interpretive demands of physically polyphonic notations. In chapter 1, this takes the form of two very different pieces, Vinko Globokar's *Echanges* (1973), the first piece to engage physical polyphony as a notational tool for trombone, and Joan Arnau Pàmies's *[Vltbn]^4 (o quatre panells per a trombó sol)* (2012), a more recent addition to the repertoire. Both pieces will be examined specifically through the lens of poiesis, mining the notations to find interpretive strategies that facilitate responsive practice strategies capable of developing new technical and interpretive skills answerable to the unique demands of each individual notation. In the case of these two pieces, my personal experiences with these notations will serve as a laboratory for how this process may occur.

Chapter 2 offers a series of theoretical templates that have proven useful in my own artistic practice. These templates are not prescriptive of successful learning strategies. Nonetheless, when taken together, they suggest the outlines of a methodology that can take advantage of the entanglement of conflicting strands of physically polyphonic actions to rediscover the unity of the body with the instrument and its environment. In doing so, these theoretical approaches aim to undergird specific learning strategies that help the performer to holistically learn and execute notations that seem, at first glance, to demand rather more fragmentation. The three essays that comprise the bulk of this chapter will be prefaced by a short excursion into the concepts of contamination and resurgence, after Donna Haraway and Anna Löwenhaupt Tsing (respectively). Their work helps outline a space in which variability itself becomes a necessary and welcome methodological tool.

Haraway appropriates the term “contamination” and interprets it as a positive attribute, a means by which ecological cohabitants entangle with and renew each other. Tsing refers to similar progressive interactions as “resurgence,” a phenomenon both directional while still ateleological. In this study, I tie their calls for situated, practice-based experimentation to older proposals of storytelling as a methodology. Storytelling, as a primarily singular and linear format, has proven a useful tool for developing research tools that take advantage of the primary benefits of artistic practice: namely, the individuality of the instantiations that emerge. In outlining a poietic approach to learning and performing music, I rely on this history, and also tie it to the focus on horizontalities and interdependencies of Haraway’s and Tsing’s work, preparing a space for the following essays to present necessarily singular but nonetheless generalizable learning strategies. As these notations request an embodied and enactive approach to discovering the poietic tool-building process, the essays in part 2 will explore not the physical anatomy of these tasks’ execution, but will instead offer a series of theoretical templates that have proven useful in my own artistic practice. The first theoretical template (2.1) traces the notion of *haecceitas* from its coinage by John Duns Scotus in the scholastic era to its appropriation by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in the 20th century, using it as a diffraction grating for learning the superposed technical demands of Aaron Cassidy’s *Because they mark the zone where the force is in the process of striking* (2008). The second theoretical template (2.2) mines Karen Barad’s agential realism for learning strategies that help access Michael Baldwin’s *Erasure* (2011). Barad’s scientific realism embraces real-world, non-metaphorical implications, and when considering the holistic embodiment of physically-polyphonic notations, the capacity her concepts demonstrate to transversally bridge mental learning strategies and their real-world enaction proves invaluable. The third theoretical template (2.3) traces the process of learning Sehyung Kim’s *Sijo_241015* (2015) alongside Humberto Maturana’s and Francisco J. Varela’s concept of autopoiesis, which explicates the organic processes by which complex, interdependent unities can be formed, revealing the nature of the learning process as a form of growth and symbiosis.

Chapter 3 takes a closer look at the physical implications for the holistic execution of decoupled actions. By exploring the history of embodied cognition and enactive learning (3.1), the experiences of learning Klaus K. Hübler’s *Cercar* and Richard Barrett’s *basalt* are examined through the lenses of shared performance (3.2) and radical embodied cognition (3.3). Together, these two subchapters will help to explain the cognitive and physical tasks that cohere in the learning of these dissociated practices, thereby also examining the nature of emergent enskilment. This emergence is dependent on the role that situated knowledges play in crafting the variable instrumental idiomatisms necessary to adapt to different pieces and situations both fluidly and efficiently. The concept of shared performance draws on Trevor Marchand’s work exploring how shared utterances (borrowed from the discourse of dynamic syntax) can become useful and necessary components of situated learning. This idea of shared performance and embodied communication helps to reveal how tablature notations can provoke the emergence of new physical techniques by way of the learning and performance process. This discussion invites, in turn, a larger discussion of radical embodied cognition and the ways in which learning strategies (can or must) bypass centralized cognitive control and embrace more distributed embodiments of cognitive cooperation. I examine closely the current research on how this transpires in the human learning process and then filter those ideas through my own learning processes with physically polyphonic notations, indicating ways in which an understanding of this process can streamline and improve the learning process. This discussion inevitably points towards the political implications that radical embodied cognition and variable, situated learning strategies imply to the traditional performance practice of the Western classical conservatory tradition. The final essay in this section (3.4) will examine the role that the anti-representational strategies central to many of these theories play in the notational process itself. A brief diversion from performance practice will comprise an examination of notations by Timothy McCormack, Joan Arnau Pàmies, and Kenn Kumpf, each of which demonstrates ways in which different critical notational

parameters are elided and presented in non-representational forms that provoke their emergence rather than prescribe their execution.

Throughout, Arendt's poiesis will provide a basic framework for addressing these disparate learning strategies. Chapter 4 returns to her poiesis as a unifying concept for these strategies. In so doing, her own extrapolation from poiesis to the broader domains of political action and social interaction is used to contextualize these learning strategies in a broader musical environment.

A short appendix offers insights gleaned from other trombonists who have performed some of these same pieces, indicating as well the variabilities of approach that these notations elicit.