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Leiden  
The Netherlands

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Fairbairn, K.T.

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# Learning trumpet with Quesalid

A study on skill and  
transformation

Kevin Toksöz Fairbairn

**Skill acquisition entails a slow but permanent metamorphosis of the body and the self. In the arts, these transformations emerge during and through the act of performance, which can obscure the material and corporeal qualities of enskilment. By investigating the autobiography of the Kwakiutl shaman Quesalid and its interpretations from anthropology to critical performance theory, this paper will examine the relationships between performance and identity while showing how Quesalid's model can inform contemporary artistic practice.**

Like many classically trained musicians, I feel a deep and intimate connection to my instrument, which is in my case the trombone. Over the decades since I first began playing trombone, it has become a seamless part of my body and identity. When I walk onstage with a trombone in my hands, I feel capable of anything, but without it, I can feel naked and alone. This feeling is certainly not reserved for musicians, though, and similar relationships to objects and places abound in life. Beyond my life as a performer, I am also a craftsman, having spent years building and designing brass instruments. In this case, I feel a similar comfort and connection to the tools of the metalworking trade, even as I feel adrift and insecure in a woodworking shop, despite the superficial similarities between many of their tools and techniques. These varying comforts and insecurities raise questions about how our immersion in particular settings dictate how our lives, bodies, and personalities evolve over time. What forces shape who we become? And how do our interactions with the world provoke the emergence of selves that we do not predict or choose?

In the past few years I have focused on these questions in various artistic research projects. I have focused in particular on studying the learning process in music, investigating the slow accrual of skills and the context in which that occurs. By analysing the progressive development of facility (or enskilment) that generates instrumental technique and virtuosity, this research on learning hopes to augment studies on the execution of these skills in musical performance. As a musician, I understand how easy it is to fixate on the execution of skills – and particularly difficult skills. Feats of virtuosity captivate the imagination and can appear completely dissociated from the practice rooms in which they are forged. I began asking myself questions about how I learn, what guides my learning, and how I can consciously and carefully manipulate, change, or curate that process. I was particularly interested in situations in which we do not always know or control what exactly we will learn. It is one thing to identify a skill I want, to understand the steps needed to accomplish it, and to then work progressively towards its execution. It is an altogether different thing to find settings and instruments that challenge me in different ways, that can force me to develop skills that are responsive rather than pre-planned. The predominant trends of music pedagogy in the Western conservatory system rarely welcome this type of skill, though, largely because so many musicians have already gone through such a long

period of progressive enskilment with their instruments that these situations may never arise. As such, I began to look outside of music for models of learning and enskilment that could inform this approach in music. Among other sources, I turned to the field of critical performance studies, where I discovered the story of the Kwakiutl shaman Quesalid. Although a real historical person who died less than a century ago, Quesalid's story has acquired an air of mythology as, like many mythological characters, his story has inspired a variety of interpretations across a diverse spectrum of disciplines, from anthropology to medicine to the arts.

In broad strokes, the story of Quesalid is one of reluctant transformation, of a personal metamorphosis that upended not only the author's basic beliefs, but indeed also his most fundamental sense of self. Written in 1925, Quesalid's autobiography comes to us through the dubious hands of Franz Boas, by way of George Hunt<sup>1</sup>, and begins: 'I desired to learn about the shaman, whether it is true or / whether it is made up and (whether) they pretend to be shamans.'<sup>2</sup> Made famous by Claude Lévi-Strauss in his work on shamanism and ritual, the steps in Quesalid's journey to answer this question have become famous and well-worn: '[H]e undertook training as a shaman in order to refute their claims. But, much to his amazement, his use of the bizarre procedures [...] produced cures. And he became the most powerful shaman of all.'<sup>3</sup> In the end, Quesalid became not only a famous practising shaman, but he also worked to expose and unmask other shamans whose techniques were less refined than his own.<sup>4</sup> At the end of his story, he drifts between acknowledgment of his own deceptive sleight-of-hand and belief in a greater sense of a real and true shamanism somewhere.

In Lévi-Strauss's reading, belief takes centre stage. Quesalid's scepticism does not prevent his patients' true belief from producing the cures they seek, and in fact, in his oft-quoted conclusion to the story, Lévi-Strauss asserts that it was precisely the potency of their belief and social consensus that effected Quesalid's transformation: 'Quesalid did not become a great shaman because he cured his patients; he cured his patients because he had become a great shaman.'<sup>5</sup> From this vantage point, Quesalid's story is a parable of social transformation rather than a personal evolution. Quesalid himself becomes a prism through which scepticism and belief are refracted, and since Lévi-Strauss's publication, this framing of the story has persisted as Quesalid's primary valence. Even Richard

Hidden behind the discourse of belief, ritual, and performance is a complicated case of personal metamorphosis, and of the ways in which skill acquisition transforms one's relationship to both themselves and the world. The act of learning is not a static or linear phenomenon but an incredibly dynamic vulnerability: it exposes one's body to a complex web of intersecting realities that inevitably and indelibly transform it.

Schechner's seminal work on shamanism, ritual, and critical performance theory largely retains this framing, although the shift from anthropology to performance studies replaces questions of belief with examinations of how public or social rituals enable the inhabitation, (re)creation, and transformation of identity.<sup>6</sup> In reading Schechner and Lévi-Strauss, I was continually struck by the elision of the role that skill acquisition played in his transformation. His vocational expertise as a performing shaman was always a secondary detail, incidental to the evolution of his sense of self in a social context. I intend this observation not as a critique of these other discourses, which are purposeful and deliberate in focusing on performance as part of larger-scale social networks, but rather merely to indicate that Quesalid's metamorphosis still has much to teach. I will argue that hidden behind the discourse of belief, ritual, and performance is a complicated case of personal metamorphosis, and of the ways in which skill acquisition transforms one's relationship to both themselves and the world. The act of learning is not a static or linear phenomenon but an incredibly dynamic vulnerability: it exposes one's body to a complex web of intersecting realities that inevitably and indelibly transform it.

## Music and skill acquisition

I approached the stories and explanations of Quesalid near the end of a long research project on the ways in which musicians learn complex notations.<sup>7</sup> I had been investigating how embodied cognition could be used as a conscious and effective tool for generating the new technical skills demanded of performers by experimental music notations. In this context, we can understand embodied cognition as an expression of the idea that 'sensory and motor processes, perception and action, are fundamentally inseparable in lived cognition.'<sup>8</sup> This means that, while the brain can still be an active agent in parsing and responding to the environment, the rest of the body is equally engaged, and the interactive entanglement of the body with its environment produces perception-action connections that can at times supersede and supplant the brain. Crucially, this is not a view of the body or its environment as a support network to the brain, as it could be construed in precursors to embodied cognition (such as James Gibson's object affordances theory or Jakob von Uexküll's concept of *Umwelt*). Rather, this accepts the body and the environment as the sites of a radical distribution of agency through space and time, describing the ways in which the situated activity of the body in its setting can augment the brain's functional dispositions rather than simply enhance or inform it. In other words, "our behavior emerges from the real-time interplay of task-specific resources distributed across the brain, body, and environment, coupled together via our perceptual systems."<sup>9</sup>

In applying these ideas to music, I sought to show how the distribution of cognitive work throughout the body was a crucial component in learning music, not only for internalizing complex rhythmic or harmonic passages by rote, but as much or more so for building practice patterns that enable performers to effectively learn and execute completely new skills and extended techniques in the future. This requires building a deep understanding of the perception-action relationships that are already entrained in the musician's body through years of practice and training, and then developing ways to shift and restructure those patterns to adapt them to new learning situations.

In examining embodied skill acquisition in music, I became convinced that the entrainment of new skills was not a lonely act, relying on the performer's agency by itself, but that this work must be distributed across other agencies, such as the notation itself or the musical instrument being used. As noted above, embodied cognition dissolves not only the border around the brain, distributing agency through the body, but dissolves also the border of the body itself, thereby embracing the role that other bodies and the environment play in the acts of

perception and cognition. As Donna Haraway famously noted, 'Situated knowledges require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not a screen or a ground or a resource, never finally as slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and authorship.'<sup>10</sup>

In approaching music, this entails, among other things, reimagining the role of the score and of music notation. Notes on the page are not just the outline of a plan to be learned and executed, but are now themselves – as 'objects of knowledge' in Haraway's sense – engaged agents in dialogue with the musician's body. They are not just guideposts in the act of learning, but are actors present and palpable in the performance itself. Within this interplay, notation can no longer be seen as static. Although fixed to the printed page, notation is still engaged in a complex interplay with musical instruments, performers' bodies, and performance spaces, collaborating and congealing with these other agencies to produce the performance of the music that it prescribes. From this perspective, notation becomes one among other active players in the performance of music, one body among others, reminding us that '[w]e should not think of bodies as fixed and stable, but as more fluid entities that are constantly constructed and reconstructed into different kinds of "task-specific" devices.'<sup>11</sup>

As an artistic researcher engaged with especially complex or contemporary music notations, the question then became: how does one apply this type of embodied learning to a set of skills that lacks the scaffolding of long-standing practice? As one encounters a music notation that demands a unique and hitherto never-executed instrumental skill, how can the necessary kinaesthetic information be communicated and

internalized? There is no template to imitate, nor guidebook to consult, just the as-yet-ungenerated form of a new bodily configuration and the sound it will produce. I began to view the notations and the musical instruments themselves as the guides for this learning, not as textual references but as forms of literally corporeal, kinaesthetic guidance.

This strategy proved extremely useful, and allowed me to describe and teach a style of learning that focused less on the *complexity* of experimental notations and more on the *collaborative* nature of skill acquisition that they provoke. I was able to learn complex musical notations more efficiently and effectively, showing that the skill of *how to learn* these virtuosic techniques was as valuable as the individual skills themselves. But behind this system lingered a very specific doubt: how much of this embodied skill acquisition still relied on the years of traditional instrumental practice that most performers have accrued?

The acquisition of new skills typically still occurs within a framework of at least some more traditional elements of instrumental performance. An entire piece comprised solely of a new technique is rare (although of course not entirely unknown, such as in Vinko Globokar's *Res/As/Ex/Ins-pirer* for brass instrument, in which the conceit of playing while both exhaling *and* inhaling occupies the entire piece). The bedrock of traditional instrumental praxis, then, still provides an invaluable foundation for approaching and internalizing a subset of new skills.

And so, even as I described and promoted the idea that notations and instruments could effectively build networks of embodied communication that enabled accelerated skill acquisition, I was unable to completely test that hypothesis while still performing my own instrument.

And so I embarked on a research project that would address these questions. As a trombonist, I decided to learn and perform several pieces on a foreign instrument. For this initial project, I decided to work with a trumpet, and indeed with a slide trumpet, which as a brass instrument of the same family as trombone, was a relatively circumspect first step. (Since then, I have also worked on similar projects with guitar and lap-steel guitar.) While my choice of instrument betrayed a slight conservatism (that is, by choosing an instrument closely related to the trombone), I was careful to choose pieces that would push beyond the easily translated traditional playing techniques of brass instruments. The pieces I chose to explore were characterized by extended techniques and technical demands outside the purview of normal trumpet (or brass) playing, thus rendering my background as a trombonist increasingly irrelevant. I did not want to simply learn a few tones on the trumpet and proclaim success, I wanted to construct a situation in which I was confronted by skills I did not have and would need to entrain.

## The trumpet

I structured my research around the following questions: could these notations and this instrument in fact teach me new skills? Could they communicate to me the necessary set of kinaesthetic information to allow me to actually perform these pieces on this instrument in public? Could I learn the specific skills required for these pieces directly from the notation and the instrument, without the foundation of a proper apprenticeship to traditional trumpet technique?

The first step, of course, was to obtain an instrument, and this was the second reason why I chose a brass instrument so closely related to trombone. Because this project relied on building an accelerated physical intimacy with an unfamiliar instrument, I decided to rely on my years of experience building brass instruments to help facilitate that process. Having built countless instruments over almost two decades (primarily trombones and French horns), I turned my attention to building a slide trumpet (Image 1).

By the time I had finished researching, designing, and building the instrument, and before I began to play it or learn music with it, I had already built up a strong sense of intimacy and collaboration with it. We were already acquainted, as it were, and I felt a sense of trust holding this little metal megaphone that I would not normally have had while holding a trumpet. For a non-musician, it is almost impossible to describe the importance of this physical relationship to an instrument. Instruments are prostheses, and going onstage as a trombonist while holding a trumpet or an oboe or a violin would be like asking a wheelchair athlete to compete on a bicycle – no amount of proficiency can mask the absolutely paralyzing fear of performing with an unfamiliar instrument. As such, my attempt to construct a craft-based sense of trust with my trumpet – in lieu of a more traditional performative relationship to a musical instrument – was a careful and deliberate research strategy designed to avoid any confounding interference from a lack of trust with the instrument.

At this point, though, with an instrument in hand, I finally had to confront the pieces that I'd chosen to initiate myself into the world of trumpet, Richard Barrett's *calyx* and Sehyung Kim's *Sijo\_170213*. Barrett's *calyx* was written explicitly for slide trumpet, an instrument itself quite foreign and uncomfortable to many trumpet players, which, allied to its extreme technical demands and unconventional tablature notation, rendered the piece almost unplayable and rarely attempted. It requires a near superhuman endurance, as it proceeds with



Image 1: Slide trumpet constructed by the author.

Image 2: Richard Barrett: *calyx* (2014), mm. 1-4. The upper staff provides precise technical information for the trumpet player, namely the slide position and the numbered harmonic series (translated into performance as degree of embouchure tension) for each note. The lower staff provides a rough translation of the above tablaturized physical notation, allowing the performer to follow the more traditional pitch notation as a reference.

Image 3: Richard Barrett: *calyx* (2014), m. 24. A typical excerpt from the first half of the piece, in which the technical demands of the opening measures unfold with ever greater virtuosity.

Image 4: Richard Barrett: *calyx* (2014), mm. 40-43. A typical excerpt from the second half of the piece, showing mid to low register lip multiphonics followed by a more virtuosic tablaturized passage.

Image 5: Sehyung Kim: *Sijo\_170213* (2013), mm. 11-15. The tablature notation indicated, from top to bottom, the valve combination (or slide position), the use of a wa-wa mute with the left hand, the occasional use of flutter tongue (between the staves in blue), and the sounding pitches (played pitches notated in black with lip multiphonics marked; sung multiphonics notated in red).

almost no rest for four minutes, most of which are spent in the extreme high register. The piece's one brief foray into the more comfortable middle register provides little respite, though, consisting almost entirely of lip multiphonics (an extended technique difficult to master and, though quite common within the specialized world of experimental music, often never attempted by traditional trumpet players). Essentially, the piece begins with a flurry of activity in the extreme high range and never lets up from there (Images 2-4).

By contrast, Kim's *Sijo\_170213* is a delicate miniature, comprising three lines of music that take less than two minutes to play, almost one quarter of which is silence. This simplicity belies the complexity of the technique, though. For almost the entirety of its short duration, it demands the performer to play both lip and sung multiphonics simultaneously. (Though sung multiphonics are much more common than lip multiphonics, the two techniques are quite difficult to perform simultaneously, as evidenced in part by the extreme rarity of this effect even in experimental music.) The short, soft delicacy of this piece masks a turmoil of technical difficulty (Image 5).

And so, I began. Having never played trumpet, I commenced learning by starting with the very first measure of *calyx* and daily pushing myself through the passages and skills required by these pieces. In the interest of this project, I was not attempting to actually learn to play the trumpet. I was attempting to learn to play *calyx* and *Sijo\_170213*; no more and no less. I did not practise scales or other fundamental etudes and I did not practise the extended techniques (sung and lip multiphonics) outside of the forms in which they appeared in these pieces. I attempted to learn really and truly *through* and *from* these two pieces, using the notations and the instrument as a technical education with no other guidance or foundation.

## Skill acquisition and the shaman

Let me return to Quesalid, as his story provided me with the model for my work with the trumpet. As previously noted, Lévi-Strauss's influential reading of Quesalid's personal metamorphosis is centred firmly around his reputation as a successful, practising shaman within his community. From that perspective, its primary lenses for analysis are the concepts of belief and scepticism, specifically as experienced by both Quesalid personally and his wider community. This reduces Quesalid's journey to a two-dimensional, static template, though, with a clear before (sceptical) and after (believing). But to show how this particular interpretation of Quesalid emerges, I will briefly relay the outline of his story as retold by Lévi-Strauss and in the form that it is most frequently repeated.

In order to determine the validity of the shamans' methods, Quesalid seeks out and eventually joins a group of shamans. Once among them, he begins to learn their methods, 'a curious mixture of pantomime, prestidigitation, and empirical knowledge', which relied on "dreamers", that is, spies who [...] secretly convey to the shaman [...] the origins and symptoms of the ills' and culminated in their '*ars magna*', whereby the Shamans masticate eagle down in their cheek before appearing to dramatically suck it from the sick person's body, revealing the extracted, wormlike sickness in hand.<sup>12</sup> He earns his shamanic name, Quesalid, after his first attempt at healing, when he is called urgently to attend to a sick person who had dreamed of him as their healer; he is astounded to discover that the tricks he had learned from the shamans actually heal the patient.<sup>13</sup> After experiencing the success of this method, though, Quesalid is shocked when he encounters a shaman from a native tribe who attempts to heal a patient with a vastly less sophisticated sickness-sucking performance. He promptly challenges his counterpart and humiliates him by successfully healing the patient with his own more elaborate ritual.<sup>14</sup> This pattern continues, as Quesalid continues to practise his own bloody-masticated-eagle-down method while occasionally challenging, exposing, and debunking other shamans. As Lévi-Strauss relates, Quesalid,

pursued his career, exposing impostors and full of contempt for the profession. [...] The radical negativism of the free thinker has given way to more moderate feelings. Real shamans do exist [he believes]. And what about him? At the end of the narrative we cannot tell [...] He seems to have completely lost sight of the fallaciousness of the technique which he had so disparaged at the beginning.<sup>15</sup>

This version of the story relies on Quesalid's repeated defence of his own shamanistic method and exposures of others' frauds to support the claim that he has lost sight of his scepticism and become mired in faith. However, neither Quesalid's initial scepticism nor his later ambiguity are quite as pronounced as Lévi-Strauss makes out. Quesalid's own narrative begins more circumspectly ('I desired to learn about the shaman')<sup>16</sup> and ends similarly open-ended. Having unmasked many inferior shamans, his final account is of a female shaman he encounters and seeks to expose, only to learn the story of pain and loss by which she herself was initiated in shamanism. He quotes her story, in which she goes to an old shaman to be healed, only to find that he not only cures her but pronounces her his successor, as well. "O friend, go home, and go into / your body. Then immediately sing the sacred song sung by my / shaman who set you right again. Now you will be a shaman and you will have mercy / and cure your people. Now I pass my name Xû'ngwid / over to you."<sup>17</sup> She repeats his song and, in so doing, takes over his shamanic role, singing: "and all sang after me as I sang my sacred song. Now I was a shaman / after that." Now it is ended.<sup>18</sup>

Because Quesalid neither confirms nor denies her validity, it is interesting how Quesalid's ambiguity about these matters transforms in Lévi-Strauss's interpretation. Rather than accepting that perhaps truth or belief might mean something different to Quesalid, Lévi-Strauss holds this ambiguity up as proof of a free thinker wandered astray. What is lost in all of this focus on belief and scepticism are the tools of Quesalid's trade. All of the crucibles of his transformation emerge not from provocations of belief, but rather from the specific method and its materials. His initial success with the eagle down method does not instantly make him believe, nor does it make him doubt the believer he has healed. Rather, he is impressed primarily by the efficacy of the method and the tool, and is proud of the talent he has gained in the pantomime and prestidigitation of his acquired skill. Similarly, his first unmasking of an impostor revolves not around the other shamans' duplicity, but is instigated primarily by Quesalid's quite personal offense at the crudeness of the craft in comparison to his own skilfulness. He does not attack other shamans as a shining knight of scepticism or free thinking, he exposes them as a matter of professional pride.

None of these events are radical, singular, transformative moments. They are all embedded in Quesalid's slow metamorphosis by way of his apprenticeship in a school of craft-based, tool-driven shamanistic performance. He did not unmask other shamans out of a virtuous religious scepticism, but out of a professional disgust at their technique. Quesalid's transformation is not a conversion to belief or to shamanism. It is, instead, a radical personal transformation precipitated by his intimacy with a specific set of materials and his acquisition of dexterous virtuosity in their usage.

## Shamanism and performance

As noted in the introduction, Quesalid suggested to me a template for how one can truly learn from materials and the context of their usage. Materials and their situatedness form a network that enables learning and skill acquisition. Although we often think of mastering instruments or skills, the idea that one actually collaborates with or learns from these exterior materials and situations can be a far simpler process than the concept of mastery suggests. In this conception, a skill is not just contextualized by the objects and settings that afford it, but is the product of a dialogue and interplay with these other

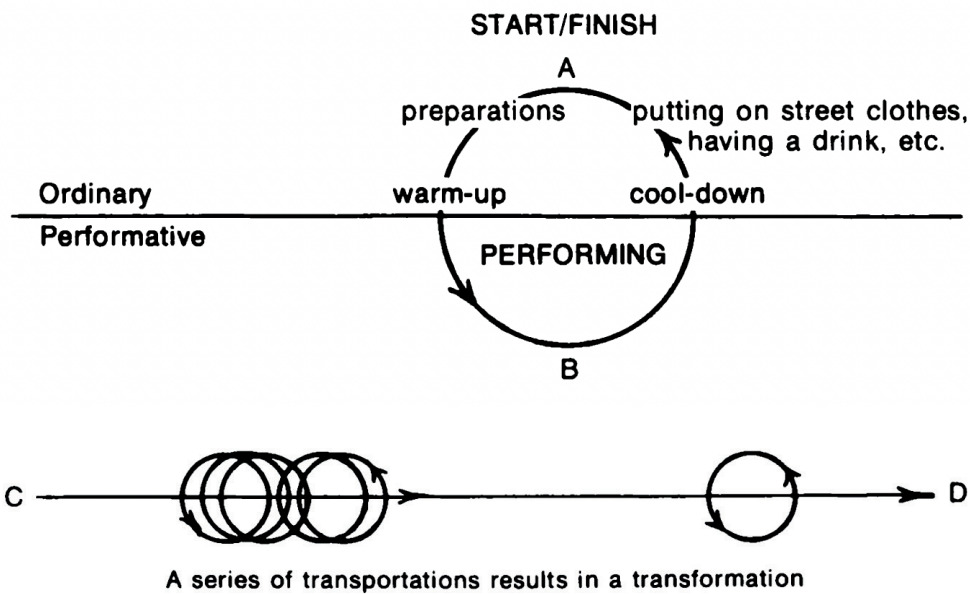


Image 6: Schechner, Richard. "Performers and Spectators Transported and Transformed." *The Kenyon Review* 3, no. 4, 1981, p. 91.

actors. The leap here is to avoid seeing external objects as inherently related to the body that uses them. Skill acquisition can easily be viewed through the lens of augmentation or prosthesis, incorporating the objects or relationships that the performer gains facility with as parts of their network. Indeed, research in embodied cognition often views the fusion of performers with their tools and their environment in precisely this way, namely, as progressively more complex scales of cognitive organization.<sup>19</sup>

While I acknowledge and welcome this idea of extension and fusion, I also want to examine these external elements as more powerful agents in their own right. In viewing Quesalid's vocational relationship with the eagle down and its healing ritual, I am curious about how the eagle down influences the development of this fusion. Rather than seeing it as a tool or prosthesis subsumed into the orbit of the performing shaman, I want to appreciate how the eagle down – or other tools of the trade – guide and influence the training shaman, and in so doing subsume this human performer into their own field of influence. In reassessing the version of Quesalid's story that Lévi-Strauss uses to analyse human theatres of ritual and belief, I am continually fixated on his surprise at his own initial success. This is not a classic rendition of tool mastery, although Quesalid's learned dexterity with the eagle down does enable his success. The moment of transformation occurs not through this dexterity, though, but rather through the unexpected gravity that the tools, the ritual, and the setting exert on an unsuspecting Quesalid, teaching him not only a new skill, but also completely altering his relationship to himself, his community, and his vocational practice. In this sense, I am using the concept of transformation to distinguish between a person who has mastered the application of a new tool or skill in a task they can already execute and a person who has been taught a new skill by the tool itself – who has, in some way, been inducted into a new capacity by the skills inherent to the situation in which they are embedded.

This transformative approach is not unique to Quesalid (or for that matter, to my own experiments with learning music).

There are, of course, other precedents for this strategy, such as method acting, in which situated prompts are utilized to manipulate the performer and their body into a particular transformation. For example, in David Levine's *Bauerntheater*, a piece of performance art that experiments with method acting, this mode of transformation is tested in a unique and unexpected way. In the piece, American method actor David Barlow trains intensively to perform the character of a Brandenburg potato farmer in a Heiner Müller play, only to be whisked away from rehearsals at the final stage and transported to a potato farm in Brandenburg, where he spends two weeks farming fourteen hours a day, producing a half ton of potatoes.<sup>20</sup> In Levine's piece, the traditional progression of method acting is inverted. Rather than inhabiting a real-life space in order to later act a role in performance, Barlow entrains a performance before then inhabiting that role in real life. The entire ordeal is an exercise investigating how performance methodologies can undergird 'accelerated knowledge acquisition'.<sup>21</sup>

By building replica Brandenburg potato fields in a Brooklyn rehearsal space, Levine was able to use the material constraints of the potato farm to provoke the actor's acquisition of a specific set of embodied skills (in this case, pertaining to farming). To achieve this, Barlow's performance relied on what Richard Schechner refers to as "restored behavior", "twice-behaved behavior", behavior that can be repeated, that is, rehearsed.<sup>22</sup> The skills are performative, their twiceness a reflection of their inherent mimesis. Schechner in fact includes both theatre performance and shamanistic rituals in this analysis, considering both to exemplify performative scenarios in which the actors undergo 'transportation'. This transportation entails the embodiment of the role and all its requisite skill (whether potato farming, eagle down chewing, or playing the trumpet), but is reached by a series of 'warmup' preparations and is followed by a 'cooldown' process in which the character recedes and the performer returns to their former self.<sup>23</sup> For Schechner, the difference in shamanistic ritual (as opposed to theatre) is that, by virtue of repetition, its transportations can ultimately become true transformations (Image 6).

The transformations in question, though, do not come about simply by dint of repetition. The progression from transported performer to transformed individual demands more than just the confirmation of a repeated ritual or theatre. Schechner analyses events that occur within performative situations and in the context of social networks. The transformation he describes is in large part a transformation of identity, both self-identity and social function. He describes the method actor's ambiguous transported identity as 'the "not me – not not me." The character actor in flow is not himself but he is not not himself at the same time.' For this reason, a method actor who has studied potato farming just enough to perform a Heiner Müller play might be subject to repeated transportations but not any indelible transformation. In contrast to these momentary situations, Schechner describes the transformative effects of 'initiation rites, whose very purpose it is to transform people from one status or social identity to another.'<sup>24</sup> In this sense, as the actor David Barlow leaves behind the Heiner Müller play to take on a new and literal social function in a Brandenburg potato field, he embarks on a more radical transformation beyond the arena of method acting and its transportations.

The transformation undergone by Quesalid combines elements of these two different types, melding his performative suspension of self-identity with an initiation process that indelibly altered his status and social identity. Nonetheless, his transformation also has notable differences from these two templates identified by Schechner, and those differences are instructive. Unlike the method actor's suspension of self-identity, Quesalid's immersion in his new performative role is continuous – although he approaches his first public display of shamanic power as a non-believer or imposter of sorts, his immersion in the craft practice of this shamanism serves as a parallel entry point to true belief. He hasn't engaged as a sceptic; in fact, he has engaged as a kind of 'true believer' after all, only his commitment is to an immersion in his manual craft rather than to a system of magic or religion. And similarly, his transformation differs from an initiation rite precisely because of this relationship to craft. His actual initiation is not into a human social network, but rather into a relationship to a certain set of materials and tools that have guided him and imbued him with this transformative potential. Although he has also achieved a different social status in his community, that shift occurred as a result of this other, personal transformation in relation to his tools and his craft practice. In other words, his transformation was material – a corporeal transformation produced by skill acquisition rather than the attainment of social status.

## Quesalid and the trumpet

I took the story of Quesalid as a mental model for my trumpet project because he embodied the narrow-focused zeal of learning through embedding in a dynamic, performative process. His metamorphosis exemplified a form of interplay with the environment and its tools, and it showed how immersion in performance can provide a scaffolding for embodied knowledge production. I aimed to cultivate my own version of this transformation, albeit on a much smaller scale. With Quesalid's progression in mind, I did not want this project to culminate in a single performance just to prove that it could be done. Even though I'd set out to learn specifically *calyx* and *Sjo\_170213* – rather than the complete praxis of how to play the trumpet – I still wanted to learn them both fully and replicably, as part of an artistic practice that could continue to grow and evolve after this project had ended. I did not want to be transported once, warming up into a performance and cooling back down into my former self; I wanted to learn them and to be transformed by them. And so, while acknowledging the modest scale of my transformation into a trumpet player in comparison to Quesalid's transformation into a shaman, I turned to his model to help structure my own learning strategies.

Quesalid's relationship to shamanism evolved and survived through the situated materiality of his performative craft, specifically the eagle down itself and the method for manipulating it that he championed. His entire conception of shamanism as a religious or healing method was inextricably linked to the very mundane material elements of his vocation. I hoped to approach my trumpet in the same way. Although I was in fact attempting two very difficult pieces, I approached them as quotidian tasks, neither complicated nor easy, but simply sets of actions to be executed with the instrument I had to hand, much as I would approach learning a craft task with a basic tool like a file or an awl. Rather than regarding them as pieces of music, I focused on using them primarily as a means to entrain my dexterity with and to enhance my kinaesthetic relationship to my instrument.

As previously mentioned, in striving to allow the instrument and the music notations themselves to guide the learning process, I avoided pedagogical aids such as scales, drills, and etudes. Because I sought to learn a highly specific set of contextualized skills, I distanced myself from such traditional studies. Learning from repertoire and context is by no means a new idea in music, and in fact there is a long tradition of 'deep learning', in which musicians are trained not through drills but through 'methods which are almost always structured as a collection of graded pieces.'<sup>25</sup> However, while these studies do embrace contextual, situated learning rather than isolated skill acquisition, they still rely on gradation. In place of a slow accrual of varied and variable skills (graded practice), the methods I have described here rely instead on immersion in highly specific and context-dependent tasks.

David Levine's *Bauerntheater* demonstrates this most explicitly, as the entire experiment is quite literally embedded in actual soil. The half a ton of potatoes yielded foregrounds this incredibly well. The actor is immersed in the full experience and site-specific demands of his particular task, and through his relationship to the soil, to his tools, and to the crops, he can be transformed into something approximating a Brandenburg potato farmer. This reliance on specificity over gradation is less clear in the case of Quesalid, as it can be presumed that he probably did practise certain elements of the shamanic craft in isolation or in gradations of complexity. Nonetheless, in his story, and in particular during his first – unplanned but ultimately transformative – shamanic ritual, those situated tools and rituals enacted something upon Quesalid that superseded his previous training. This type of enskilment eschews reliance on the slow accumulation of related, graded skills. Instead, it immerses itself in highly specific tasks wherein the surrounding materials and contexts guide the learning process and effect changes on the performer beyond the performer's conscious curation of their own practice.

With this in mind, I set out not so much to practise trumpet as to subject myself to the experience of trying to play these two pieces with the trumpet I had built. I wanted the experience to wash over me, to allow the instrument and the music notations to present their own demands of this process and to guide my body in developing the requisite coordination and stamina. I immersed myself in these specific pieces without appealing to any graded drills, etudes, or other pieces for trumpet, treating them like elements of Levine's *Bauerntheater* – as the soil in which my particular crop could grow. And as with Quesalid, I built up to a specific performance, hoping that the reality of that ordeal would help crystallize my relationship to this instrument and to these pieces, transforming my struggles with them from sheer stubbornness into genuine skill.

Practically speaking, this meant that my approach to the trumpet was to practise specifically these two pieces and nothing more. When I finished building the trumpet (about six months in advance of what I hoped would be the first performance), I could only play the first few bars of each piece

once or twice a day, and even that with only very limited success. But slowly I began to build the type of kinaesthetic relationship that I needed. For example, as *calyx* begins with very delicate, controlled gestures in the high register of the instrument, those notes and that control became my foundation on the instrument. In fact, I sound better playing those notes than trying to play the so-called easy pitches in the middle register, those with which a ten-year-old beginner would start their first trumpet lesson. It would be a stretch to call these notes comfortable, but nonetheless, they became a very clearly defined base camp for my musculature as they warmed up into the piece every day. Although building up the endurance to attempt progressively longer passages of the piece was still quite difficult (and probably quite unenjoyable for my neighbours), by laying the foundation of my kinaesthetic relationship to the instrument in the technical demands that saturated the piece, it allowed me to slowly and effectively expand the comfort and security of that foundation until I could actually perform *calyx*.

I underwent a similar transformation with *Sijo\_170213*. As previously described, the piece is soft, delicate, and short, but every tiny passage contains a uniquely difficult superposition of multiphonic effects. And so I began with the first elements in the piece. I never properly practised lip or sung multiphonics alone, but carefully worked every day a little bit more on the specific patterns and superpositions that appeared in *Sijo\_170213*. As with *calyx*, my initial attempts were distinctly disappointing, but slowly, day by day, these passages became more and more a part of my technical capacity with the instrument. They became playable and replicable, a part of my limited but carefully grounded trumpet praxis.

Performing these pieces allowed me to prove that this approach to learning could yield results. Although there is no way to compare this approach to what might have been possible with a more traditional method, the resulting performance can nonetheless demonstrate a few things unequivocally. In short, I was able to build a performative relationship to the instrument I constructed, and my reliance on this instrument and the notation did allow a highly specialized set of trumpet-playing skills to emerge. I successfully avoided graded trumpet skill, and can say with confidence that I am both incapable of walking into an orchestra and impersonating a professional classical music trumpeter, as well as capable of performing these two highly difficult and specialized trumpet pieces accurately and consistently. In this sense, I have been transformed into a trumpeter of sorts, and my body now retains a set of highly specific embodied skills that allow me to perform in this capacity in the future (as I have done with these pieces since this initial performance).

Unfortunately, the concert in question was scheduled shortly after the first broad lockdown for Covid-19. After months of work and preparation, I had to settle for recording the pieces in my apartment as part of a concert programme that was only ever disseminated online. In a way, though, that arbitrary limitation placed on the final documentation of this research project reflected one of its most important principles. Performing the pieces alone in a small room allowed them to come to fruition in the same nexus of bodies and agencies that had produced this performance practice: my own body alongside the notations and the instrument that had helped to (re)shape it. It was as though Quesalid's first cure were of himself, sucking the bloodied pulp of eagle feathers from his own flesh, birthing his shamanism in his own private ritual. As Walter Benjamin wrote, 'Method is a digression [...] Tirelessly the process of thinking makes new beginnings, returning in a roundabout way to its original object.'<sup>26</sup> In this case, so too does the performing body flow from the instruments and materials that surround it. The metamorphosis of the self is a metabolism, as the body digests and is digested by its environment. As we interact with the tools and instruments that find us, our selves are transported and, eventually, transformed.

- 1 This article follows the discourse that has arisen around the story of Quesalid over the last century, acknowledged in this case by adhering to both Levi-Strauss's spelling of Quesalid as well as to the versions of the story provided by Boas and referenced by Levi-Strauss (and commentators following his work). The actual history and identity of the shaman Quesalid is far more complicated, and there is strong evidence suggesting that Franz Boas's informant and translator, George Hunt, was in fact Quesalid. For a detailed account of the relationship between Franz Boas, George Hunt, and the group of Native Americans they introduced to the world as the Kwakiutl (including notable uncertainties, misrepresentations, and discrepancies), the reader is invited to consult the following:
- Whitehead, Harry. "The Hunt for Quesalid: Tracking Levi-Strauss's Shaman." *Anthropology and Medicine* 7, no. 2 (2000), pp. 149–168.
- Briggs, Charles and Richard Bauman. "The Foundation of All Future Researches": Franz Boas, George Hunt, Native American Texts, and the Construction of Modernity." *American Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (1999): pp. 479–528.
- Berman, Judith. 1996. "The Culture As It Appears to the Indian Himself: Boas, George Hunt and the Methods of Ethnography." In Stocking, G. W. eds., *Volkgeist as Method and Ethic: Essays on Boasian Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition*. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996.
- 2 Cannizzo, Jeanne. "George Hunt and the invention of Kwakiutl culture." *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 20, no. 1, 1983, pp. 44–58.
- 3 Boas, Franz. *The Religion of the Kwakiutl Indians: Part II – Translations*. New York: Columbia, 1930, p. 1.
- 4 Neu, Jerome. "Lévi-Strauss on Shamanism." *Man* 10, no. 2, 1975, p. 285.
- 5 Voss, Ehler. "Authentizität als Aktant: Schamanismus aus Sicht einer symmetrischen Anthropologie." *Paideuma: Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde* 59, 2013, p. 117.
- 6 Lévi-Strauss, Claude. "The Sorcerer and His Magic." In *Structural Anthropology*, 167–185. New York: Basic Books, 1963, p. 180. Schechner, Richard. *Performance Theory*. New York: Routledge, 1988.
- 7 Schechner, Richard. "Performers and Spectators Transported and Transformed." *The Kenyon Review* 3, no. 4, 1981, pp. 83–113. Schechner, Richard. *Performance Theory*. New York: Routledge, 1988.
- 8 Toksöz Fairbairn, Kevin. "Poiesis and the Performance Practice of Physically Polyphonic Notations." PhD diss., Leiden University, 2020.
- 9 Varela, Francisco J., Evan T. Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch. *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009, p. 173.
- 10 Wilson, Andrew and Sabrina Golonka. "Embodied Cognition Is Not What You Think It Is." *Frontiers in Psychology* 4, no. 58, 2013, pp. 1–13.
- 11 Haraway, Donna. *Symians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991, p. 198.
- 12 Barrett, Louise. "Why Brains Are Not Computers, Why Behaviorism Is Not Satanism, and Why Dolphins Are Not Aquatic Apes." *The Behavior Analyst* 39, no. 1, 2015, pp. 9–23.
- 13 Lévi-Strauss, p. 175.
- 14 Lévi-Strauss, p. 175–176.
- 15 Lévi-Strauss, p. 176.
- 16 Lévi-Strauss, p. 178.
- 17 Boas, p. 1.
- 18 Boas, p. 55.
- 19 Boas, p. 56.
- 19 This idea has informed an incredible amount of scholarship across disciplines such as cybernetics, embodied cognition, and artificial intelligence. For a basic understanding of the fundamental concepts that have provoked these developments, please see:
- Maturana, Humberto and Francisco J. Varela. *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1980.
- Minsky, Marvin. *The Society of Mind*. London: Pan Books, 1988.
- Brooks, Rodney. "Intelligence Without Representation." *Artificial Intelligence*, 47, 1991, pp. 139–159.
- 20 Carlson, Marvin. "David Levine's *Bauerntheater*: The Return of the Matrix." *The Drama Review* 52, no. 3, 2008, pp. 34–43.
- 21 Levine, David. "Artist's Journal: *Bauerntheater*." *Theater* 38, no. 1, 2008, p. 31.
- 22 Schechner 1988, p. 271.
- 23 Schechner 1981, p. 91.
- 24 Schechner 1981, p. 92.
- 25 Vanmaele, Joost. *The Informed Performer: Towards a bio-culturally informed performers' practice*. 2017. Leiden University, PhD dissertation.
- 26 Benjamin, Walter. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. New York: Verso, 2009, p. 28.

Kevin Toksöz Fairbairn is a sound artist and musician working around the edges of installation, improvisation, composition, and craftsmanship. He publishes about sound studies, artistic research, and musicology, and has given masterclasses and lectures throughout Europe, Asia, and North America. He is an accomplished instrument builder and performs on a variety of instruments of his own design and construction.

kbcfair@gmail.com