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A Phenomenological Approach to Contemporary Music Performance

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Musical Arts

in

Contemporary Music Performance

by

Robert Wadhams Esler

Committee in charge:

Professor Steven Schick, Chair

Professor Charles Curtis

Professor Miller Puckette

Professor David Kirsh

Professor Amy Alexander

2007

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2007

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, George and Anne, in recognition of their love and support through all my years and to Lisa for her inspiration and compassion.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature page .....	iii
Dedication .....	iv
Table of Contents .....	v
List of Figures .....	vii
Acknowledgments .....	viii
Vita .....	ix
Abstract .....	x
Introduction .....	1
1 The Phenomenology .....	6
1.1 Explanation of Terms .....	6
1.2 Implications of the Model .....	13
1.2.1 Athleticism and Ego = Performacism .....	13
1.2.2 Performer-Centric Ideology .....	16
1.2.3 The Composer and their Insignificance .....	18
1.2.4 Score Precision vs. Reality .....	20
1.2.5 Music is not just Sound .....	23
1.2.6 The Self as Essential .....	25
1.3 The Estranged Performer .....	27
2 Media .....	38
2.1 Performing aside technology .....	38
2.2 The Disconnections of Media : Anxiety .....	43
2.3 Anxiety, Estrangement and Performance .....	50
2.4 A Process of Change : Animation and Suspension .....	57
2.5 Speakers and how they lie: a dialogue in the representation of sound .....	64
2.6 The application of these concepts .....	70
3 Environment .....	77
3.1 Space and Place .....	77
3.2 Strange Noise, Sacred Noise .....	83

3.3 <i>Desert, Forest, Tundra</i> – Making environment special : poeticizing our surroundings .....	85
3.3.1 Making Special .....	88
3.3.2 Activism through non-activism .....	91
3.4 An Estranged Environment .....	94
3.4.1 Performance and Performers .....	100
4 Sustained Metal .....	104
4.1 A Synthesis of Performance, Media and Environment .....	104
Appendix .....	113
References .....	121

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 – Phenomenological Model .....	1
Figure 1.1 – a triangular model of music performance .....	2
Figure 2 – chart of animation and suspension, point of change .....	61
Figure 3 – vs. <i>Computer</i> .....	71
Figure 4 – Reproduction of Schechner’s diagram .....	80
Figure 5 – Phasing through estrangement .....	100
Figure 6 – cycle of energy .....	101
Figure 7 – The data used for <i>Sustained Metal</i> .....	105
Figure 8 – layout used for <i>Sustained Metal</i> .....	111



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## VITA

- 2000 Bachelor of Music, Cleveland Institute of Music
- 2002 Master of Music, Yale University
- 2002 Section Percussion, Sarasota Opera
- 2002 – 2005 Teaching Assistant, Department of Music  
University of California, San Diego
- 2005 – 2007 Associate in Music, Department of Music  
University of California, San Diego
- 2006 – 2007 Instructor, Extended Studies and Public Programs  
University of California, San Diego
- 2007 Doctor of Musical Arts  
University of California, San Diego

## PUBLICATIONS

### Recordings:

*Impositions and Consequences*, music of Derek Keller : Tzadik Records #8032

*Iannis Xenakis: Mode Records*, Mode Records, #B000HRMEKK

*Epilogue for a Dark Day: Music of Chris Adler* : Tzadik Records #8004

*So Percussion* : Canteloupe Records

*Space Within*, Music of Rodrigo Sigal: CIEM

### Articles:

“Digital Autonomy In Electroacoustic Music Performance: Re-Forging Stockhausen”  
*Proceedings of the International Computer Music Conference*. New Orleans, USA:  
2006.

"Performing Algorithmic Computer Music: Real Time Score Interpretation of David  
Birchfield's Community Art: Resonant Energy" *Proceedings of the International  
Computer Music Conference*. Barcelona, Spain: 2005.

"Performing Algorithmic Computer Music: Creating an Interpretive Context" *The  
Proceedings of the Australasian Computer Music Conference*. Brisbane, AUS, 2005.

"Re Realizing Philippe Boesmans' *Daydreams*: A Performative Approach to  
Realizing Live Electronic Music." *The Proceedings of the International Computer  
Music Conference*. Miami, USA, 2004.

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

A Phenomenological Approach to Contemporary Music Performance

by

Robert Wadhams Esler

Doctor of Musical Arts

University of California, San Diego, 2007

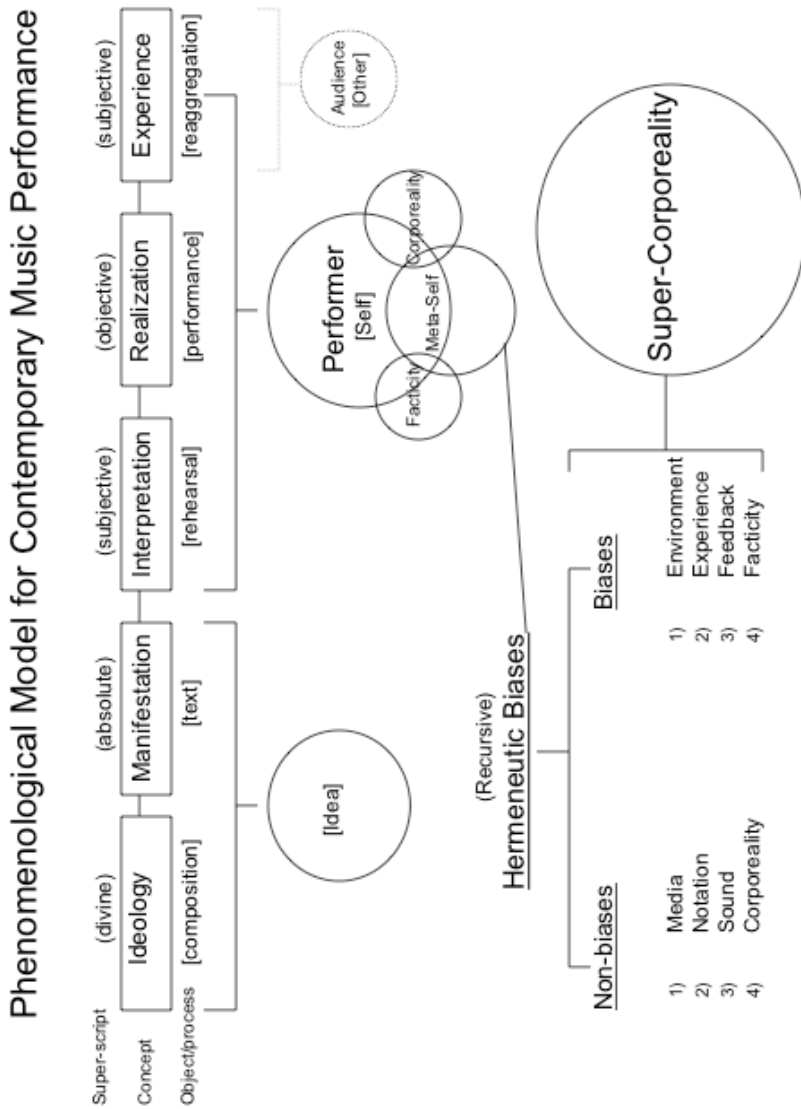
Professor Steven Schick, Chair

There exists a composer-centric model of contemporary music performance. Performers rarely discuss the concept of performance and their role within the composer-performer-audience paradigm. This paper deconstructs this paradigm and poses a performer-centric, phenomenological model. In this model the Self is the primary focus. Who are we when we perform? We are not ourselves, but a self beside our Self. Performance is an estranging phenomenon and a state of hyper-awareness. This document approaches the Self as essential in all aspects of musical interpretation and performance. It begins to unravel what happens to us as individuals within the phenomenon of performance.

The development of this model is stratified into two distinct areas: *Media* and *Environment*. *Media* presents the implications of technology on music performance.

Technology extends our desires but imposes an indelible force upon a performance. How do these forces relate to myself? *Environment* discusses the potential of our surroundings and the energy that exists between a place and the individual. What is the potency of place? -- And how does it manifest itself in performance? These discussions are wedded with personal experiences that challenge the current models of contemporary music performance.

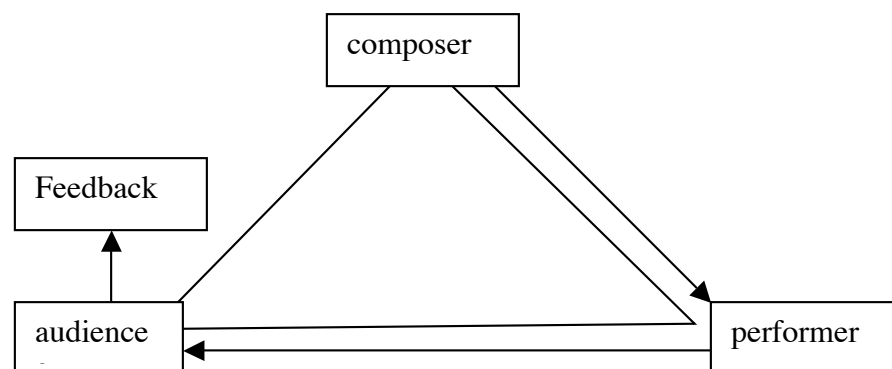
# INTRODUCTION



Robert Esler 2006

This model has been developed as a response to the lack of critical discussion on contemporary music performance. As a performer, this phenomenology serves as the initial impulse towards conceiving music performance as a unique constituent of performance studies. There have been many literary, philosophical and musical influences that contribute to the construction of this phenomenology. However, all of the terms and ideas derive from many personal performance experiences.

The idea for this model and its subsequent writings originates from my dissatisfaction with current models of contemporary music composition and performance.



**Figure 1.1 - a triangular model of music performance**

Figure 1.1 places the composer as the central individual of this relationship. In many instances, my own performances have been focused in such a manner. The composer is seen as the predominant figure, and my performance is simply an adjunct to the composition. In fact, often the composition becomes more important than the performance. Moreover, the rhetoric of composition is viewed as more substantial

than the actual physical realization of the composer's music. In many performances my work has been overlooked in favor of the composer so much so my name did not appear in the program. Such abuse is not the heated inspiration for this dissertation, however, I do feel that the model has to change. Contemporary music is too detailed of a performance idiom not to be seriously discussed away from the hegemony of the composer.

With this in mind, the model in Figure 1 is more focused on the individuality of the performer. In developing this model, my intention is not to extricate the composer from contemporary music performance, but instead view performance as a phenomenon. I want to know, 'Who am I when I perform?' Furthermore, I am interested in how the body manifests musical meaning, and how this meaning is connected with the Self. Additionally, I want to dissect the process of interpretation and understand the essential individual components. I am curious to see the core human qualities revealed through performance.

These thoughts led me to develop the idea of Super-Corporeality and phenomenologically model contemporary music performance. My initial influences came from Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger as they personally mapped the ontology of the Self, and the Other. Later, Performance Studies<sup>1</sup> scholars Richard Schechner's and Victor Turner's writings on theater, ritual and experience gave me a firm grounding for the social implications of performance and the constant influence of environment. As I explored different kinds of philosophy and theory, the better I

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<sup>1</sup> Performance Studies is a multi-disciplinary field that combines areas of critical theory, theater, anthropology, sociology and psychology. Performance theorists use performance to analyze human behavior.

was able to find the connections to what I mentioned earlier. Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's *Mille Plateaux* and Marshal McLuhan's *Understanding Media* provided me with an awareness of the implications media imposes on individuals and societies.

It is important to note these literary influences as deconstructions of their respective surroundings, as they greatly contributed to the construction and language of the model in Figure 1. Their philosophies allowed me to deconstruct the model that was originally so aggravating. (see Figure 1.1) I needed a language in which to approach performance as a phenomenon and not a dissemination. To facilitate this, I use words such as 'Hermeneutic', 'Corporeality', 'Facticity' and 'Reaggregation.' These are not directly borrowed from these texts; rather molded to fit the context of contemporary music performance.

My intentions with this model (Figure 1) are to expand on its applicability to other areas of music performance, and perhaps eventually to performance as a whole. It can be viewed from any angle as well as itself be deconstructed. The important uses of this model are its application to real experiences and the implications it imposes. I chose to extend my writing towards the areas of Environment and Media as they are prevalent to the already volatile fabric of contemporary music. Within this genre, there is a consistent notion to challenge our surroundings and expand upon the objects we use. I was interested to view these areas at the mercy of the model, and see if they could still function in relation to this phenomenology.

Finally, after many years of performing I wanted to understand if there was a



tangible reason that I became a performer. Though this model does not entirely answer that question, it does come closer to the more human aspects of this art. I can at least say that now I am more aware of my abilities as a performer, and perhaps can even critically distance myself from these traits. When applied to my colleagues, and friends I find myself looking at them differently. It seems as though I am experiencing a side of themselves that can only exist while in performance. From this I realize that performance is a higher state of existence, and is uniquely human. The model for me now is not trying to codify this state of being, but rather illuminate the intrinsic Self. I never thought I could begin to know *who* I am when I perform but now it seems as though my question is simply there to be questioned, a prompt for further exploration of ourselves within this phenomenon of performance.

# 1 THE PHENOMENOLOGY

## 1.1 Explanation of Terms:

This model is to be viewed as a micro-phenomenology, or rather a way of deconstructing performance in relation to the Self. It is not a chart, or a definition; it stands as a model from which implications can be drawn. The central spine, *Ideology*, *Manifestation*, *Interpretation*, *Realization* and *Experience*, constitutes the only real sequential portion of the model. Otherwise, the phenomenology is quite non-sequential: parts interact with other parts, there are webs of meaning that exist in a non-linear environment. A suggested reading of this model is to understand the language used on both a definitive standing (e.g read the following explanation of terms) but also consider the linguistics of the terms and how these words create their own system of meaning. (e.g Hermeneutics and its connection with the myth of Hermes<sup>2</sup>) This model is attempting to map, survey and theorize a state of being simultaneously. This is why the terms themselves often reveal more about their relation to other parts of this model, than their definitions. Finally, do not *use* this model; rather, extend its implications. Exposing a phenomenology often provokes the creation of universals. Since performance's development is based around not claiming universals, this particular model of a phenomenology observes instances in relation to itself. Essentially, pose a performance situation and then re-angle this situation

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<sup>2</sup> Hermeneutics is the study and interpretation of a text, most notably Biblical exegesis. The word originates from the Greek god Hermes whose role, among many, was that of a translator between gods and mortals. He was a liaison between the underworld and the overworld; the divine and the mundane. We gain the word 'hermeneutic' from this root and for me the word implies more than a study of interpretation but a transcendence. I use this term in relation to the divine. Hermes was a translator between the divine and the mundane, therefore, to use a word like hermeneutic in such instance implies this forthcoming.

through the phenomenology proposed.

**Super-Corporeality** – is the phenomenon of performance. It borrows the prefix ‘super’ as a way of separating it above *corporeality* (see this term below). When we perform we are not just using our bodies to accomplish a mundane task, our bodies perform the work as we have interpreted its content. Movement has meaning, application and purpose. Super-Corporeality positions itself as the ‘end’ point for this phenomenon; therefore, the Idea becomes the beginning. However, these two points should be seen more as edges of a frame and not absolute directional devices. In this way, more exists beyond these edges. Every aspect of the model is fundamental to Super-Corporeality, and subsequently these aspects exist because of this fact.

**Meta-Self** – The ‘Self beside one’s Self’. The Meta-Self helps begin to explain ‘who we are when we perform.’ I know I am not myself, but I am also not not-myself. The Meta-Self is the first mode of estrangement, the distancing of oneself during any given performance situation. As part of the phenomenon of performance, there is a compositing between the Self, the Meta-Self and the Body; they exist together as a state of being. Performers can observe their Meta-Self while in performance, as they are aware of their existence within this state.

**Hermeneutic Biases** – As a whole, the biases and non-biases exist as filters, or devices that influence how the Idea is parsed by the individual. Biases are these

devices that originate from the uniqueness of the Self. They can only exist through the individual. For example, one person's experiences are unique only to themselves. This means an individual will view certain abstract things (notation as one example) in a way that is particular to them. Non-biases are devices that influence how the Idea is represented but have no intimate connection to the Self. The 'non' of non-bias, still indicates the biasing of the device but separates it from the notion of the Self. An example includes the non-biasing of the body. One's physical structure, mechanics and strength will ultimately influence his or her performance and appearance. An individual cannot control the shape of his or her body. The biases come in-between the Idea and the Realization. This implies that the Idea cannot exist purely on its own, but instead must pass through the body and intellect of the performer. The Hermeneutic Biases are recursive, part of a continuous circular system of constant influence and change. A Bias may change the meaning of a subsequent Bias. One example could be feedback from the composer, which will ultimately change one's concepts of sound, notation, media, and experience.

**The Central Spine** – Ideology, Manifestation, Interpretation, Realization, and Experience. The spine of this model presents the passage of the Idea from composer to performer. The final block, Experience, indicates the presence of the Audience; this is implied based on our own conception of a performance. Without an audience, we may not consider a Realization as 'real'. This depends on individual interpretations. Each node of this spine is made of three layers: Super-script, Concept, and

Object/Process.

The Super-script detaches the modality of the concept. To view the spine in this manner we see the passage as a transference, which can be applied outside of the scope of music performance. For example, the Super-script positions the Concept as a concrete device. The Idea is divine, the text is absolute, and the performance is objective. The language used is meant to provoke alternate meanings and applications to the central spine.

The Concept provides the theoretical basis for the Object/Process. The Concept is behaving similarly to the Super-script in that alternate meanings and applications can be made from within these boundaries. They also place the Object/Process within the concept. This places composition as an Ideology, performance as a Realization, and text as a Manifestation.

The Object/Process relates the spine to music performance specifically. This model supposes the applicability across genres and cultural practices. Without the Objects or Processes, this model is non-specific and could apply to other areas of performance if desired.

The spine creates a lineage, however, it is not implying an assembly line from composer, to performer, to audience. What the spine remits is five core elements from the impulse of an Idea towards the experience of this Idea. The more interesting aspects of the spine are how it relates to the phenomenon of performance and to the performer as an individual. Parts of this model consume multiple nodes of the spine. An example is the Hermeneutic Biases, which exist within Manifestation,

Interpretation, Performance and Experience. The spine is the central component to this model and serves as a fundamental basis for the remaining parts.

This model is concerned with the Idea, and its transcendence to the Self. The spine elicits the domain of the Idea, and the Self shown by the brackets in Figure 1. For example, the Idea exists within the Concepts of Ideology and Manifestation. When concerning music, the Idea is most notably the composition but only with nominal distinction. Composition and its text are not always the only relevant constituents of the Idea. An idea can be manifested using any form of text and may even include 'oral texts' which exist outside of written media. This is common among composer/performer relationships, where the two exchange information and ideas. Furthermore, the notion of composition and its subsequent manifestation may also vary. Often ideas are shaped, reformed and reshaped again.

The Self exists within the Concepts of Interpretation, Performance and half of Experience. The reason the Self intrudes upon Experience, which is mostly the domain of the Other, is that the Self is aware of its own performance and experiences it within the same environment as the audience. The Self is the central figure of this model. It is concerned with how the individual interprets the Idea and realizes its performance. In its most germane interpretation, the model begins to assay the distinguishing characteristics of the individual within the phenomenon of performance; it does not question why the Idea exists (this is why the term divine is used). Instead, it positions the Idea in tandem with the Self as an object.

The Other in this model is not a concern rather than acknowledging the Other

as outside this phenomenology. To focus on the Other as the audience, composer, teacher, etc., would require another document of research. In this case, the Other is a subjective being, one that the Self can never fully understand. Despite the exclusion of the Other, it is clear that the model itself is framed by the presences of other individuals. Without this the entire phenomenology would be irrelevant. Therefore, to completely disregard the Other's importance is futile, but to regard the Other's opinions, thoughts or conclusions is not of any consequence to this model. The Other can find itself as intrinsic to certain parts of this model, the biases being one area of focus. Feedback, Experience, Media and Environment inevitably concern the inclusion of other people, and this could work as part of the recursive system as mentioned earlier. If the performer receives poor reviews this could change the interpretation and later performances of a piece.

### **Non-Biases –**

Notation - the means in which the Idea is manifested. In music, this refers to a tradition of musical notation or an original creation by the composer. Notation also includes text or any other media in which the Idea is presented. Individuals interpret notation in many different ways; though the notation remains the same, it inspires a host of meanings.

Sound - anything we hear. Sound is absolute and cannot be changed. Though individuals can learn to manipulate their voices, instruments or other sound-making devices; sound is independent of the individual. Sound must exist through a medium,

which is disconnected from the individual. As a Bias, sound functions the same as notation remaining the same but observing changes in meaning. Admittedly, sound plays an important role in music performance; however, its importance is not placed above that of the performer's presence.

Media - anything that comes between the Self and the Other. The body is a medium, a computer is a medium and an instrument is a medium. Media affects change and creates anxiety. Everything must exist through a medium. What is important is how the *thing* has changed once it eventually arrives at the intellect. Additionally, media creates anxiety in ourselves as we realize the disconnect between it and us.

Corporeality - The living body as it exists in time. Every instance of our Self (see facticity) is animated through our bodies, and subsequently every experience we have is suspended by our senses. We cannot change our bodies; the way our bodies are made affects all the things we do. Our bodies in performance realize the Idea as we have interpreted it. We accept our physical limitations, and abilities and understand that our body does not represent our intellect but is the only means for expression.

### **Biases –**

Experience - all that has happened of which we are aware. This encompasses entities like knowledge, and practice. Experience can also provide connections to emotions or create pathways to such feelings, though emotions and feelings emanate



from the Self.

*Feedback* - implements a system of direct knowledge or criticism. Like in most systems, feedback expands upon what already exists. Feedback is then contingent on other experiences.

*Environment* - our surroundings in time, place and situation. Our experiences are dependent on our environment. Similar to media, environment is ever-present, as we can only exist in an environment. Ultimately, this influences the peculiarities of the Self.

*Facticity* - the uniqueness of the Self. Borrowed from Sartrean phenomenology, facticity is concerned with the Self as essential, the most fundamental aspect of a human being. Facticity is the core of personality, or character. It remains the same despite experience, feedback and environment.

## **1.2 Implications of the Model**

### *1.2.1 Athleticism and Ego = Performacism*

Within the ventures of music performance there exists both presently and in the past a large emphasis on the technical minutiae of an instrument. The exemplary nature of musicians like Paganini, Kreisler, Chopin and many others show that technique is not something that is forgotten. In my own experiences, much of contemporary practice (in New and Classical music genres) focuses on the athletic and

challenging physicality of performance -- most specifically music that is considered difficult. Like Frith comments upon in his *Performing Rites*, we are often infatuated with watching people do things that we cannot do ourselves. (Frith, 1998) We enjoy the 'difficult.' This is why professional sports and the Olympics are so highly televised; they consist of elite individuals.

It is natural for this to migrate to music performance as musicians tend to compete both with themselves and others. Our schooling promotes this, as well as the industry, and it still serves as a very useful survival tool. In the Academy, we are encouraged to play the hardest, fastest, and at times, most extreme repertoire in order to perpetuate our physical prowess and our mental capabilities. Performers feel satisfaction in accomplishing the near impossible; we have climbed musical Everest. Is this what our model of performance should be?

There are both positive and negative arguments for Athleticism in performance, though the model (Figure 1) proposed in this document does not validate either argument. At no point is the phenomenon of performance concerned with athletic physicality. This model relinquishes technique as a musical prerequisite. The caveat: a performer may need certain techniques (in some case quite advanced technique) in order to comfortably interpret and perform a specific piece, BUT technique is not required to perform *music*.

Please note that I did not say that technique was not *desired*, but this model reduces technique and poses the body in a state, over an action. Here is one conflict that exists: as athleticism is viewed as a superior act of body (e.g man running 100

yards under 10 seconds), musical athleticism is seen as a superior act of body and mind. This is where the Ego enters quickly. Performances centered on superiority in this nature do not necessarily act as the model proposes; the embodiment of the Idea. If the Idea is not Athleticism, then what place does it have in a performance? Moreover, if the Idea is not *your* athleticism (Ego), then why is it present in *your* performance?

The answer does not lie in the ‘accuracy’ of the score, or being ‘faithful’ to the composer. (see Score Precision vs. Reality) It exists in the fact that *you* have nothing to do with the Idea. Even if the score calls for you to jump on a trampoline, slam dunk or lift heavy weights, it is not about *you*, but about the performance of this Idea. Performing music is not about the individual, but the individual objectifying a musical idea. This means that Ego is suppressed, and at a minimum and that the essential *you* exists only in performance.

Such an implication can seem contradictory, especially if used within the mode of popular music. However, this model is not meant to encompass entertainment value, or aesthetics. The question remains: how does the model explain Athleticism and Ego’s presence within musical performance? This is Performacism. To reiterate, the Idea is not Bob (a hypothetical performer); it is not about him as a human being, or his superior technical and interpretive abilities. Though, Bob’s performance may contain incredible technical facility and interpretation, this is not his personal Athleticism and Ego on display. Rather it is his Performacism, the presence one creates while performing. This is often what distinguishes the level of a performance,

more so than technique.

If Bob decides to play Brian Ferneyhough's *Bone Alphabet* and uses the piece as a display of his superior technical ability to execute super-human rhythms, then the performance stands as a 'performance of *Bone Alphabet* by Bob, which purposely displays his technical ability to execute super-human rhythms', -- NOT as a 'performance of *Bone Alphabet*, by Bob'. (Ferneyhough, 1995) The model protects against exploitation.

Performacism, is one way of describing the means in which we use our Ego and Athleticism in music performance. I can list many performances that I interpreted as egregious displays of these two entities. Most often the work itself pervades. The model is not fond of the idea of bravura; this is mostly reserved for other types of performance. What the model does imply is that our own superior qualities are not liabilities to our performance, but instead, they remain as intrinsic entities of ourselves.

### *1.2.2 Performer-Centric Ideology*

If one were to leisurely examine the history of Western music over the past 500 years, one would see that music as an art form is presented as a creator-centric discipline. This translates quite well into the genres of visual art as the art form itself is the object. However, this model contradicts a composer-centric ideology, and may perhaps even diminish the presence of the composer. The performer becomes the

central figure of a delineated system of composition and performance. It suggests, ‘Bob performs *Bone Alphabet*’ -- not ‘Ferneyhough’s *Bone Alphabet* performed’.

One fundamental philosophical question tackled by music theorists and musicologists has been: is a composer’s work the idea, the score or the performance? Arnold Schoenberg has even been guilty of posing reference to there being no need for performers if only lay people could understand the language of written music. (Cook, 2003) Guilty he is, as this model poses the performance as the composition. This makes complete sense when compared to popular music. No one would say that Elvis is a great interpreter of Carl Perkins’ *Blue Suede Shoes*, nor would marquees read, “Perkins’ *Blue Suede Shoes* performed tonight!” This model is a performer-centric ideology.

The score, the idea and even feedback from the composer, though essential, are not a form. Scores are not displayed at concerts in lieu of music being heard. The performance is the idea. Art needs an object in order to be art. Whether these are more intangible things like concepts, even performance art, all art is objectified through form. Paintings, sculptures, dances, music performances, installations, etc., these forms encompass the objectivity of art. As performers, we are part of that objectivity. The sound (music), our bodies, the performance space (environment), and lights/sound system (media) composite the object of music.

An even more pervasive contemporary question is raised in the context of music: how are recordings of music considered in relation to the composer’s work? This model provides a clear instance and caveat for two interpretations of this idea.

First, a recording of a composition is a simulation of a performance. Like a photograph of Rothko's *1957 # 20*, simulations are objects but not original objects. Therefore, recordings are not a composer's work based on this model because the model is based around the phenomenon of performance as the objectification of the work, or idea. A recording of a performance does not function in this way as it is disembodied, and only reproduces one aspect (sound) of the performance. Second, there is the caveat: assuming a composer's work is intended to be a simulation, or a performer interprets the work in this way, then a recording can function as an object. Photography is a simple comparison where the objects photographed are not the idea itself but instead the idea is the objects as they appear in the photograph. If the idea were the objects, then this would become performance.

### *1.2.3 Composers and their Insignificance*

One very important ideology amongst performers that this model contradicts is the significance of the composer, as a person, to his or her composition. What would the composer want? vs. What is the Idea? Often upon interpreting a score we think, "What was the composer intending?" This may result in research about the composer's work and life, even multiple listenings of other recordings of the work chosen. Furthermore, a performer may know or strive to meet the composer, asking them exactly what they want, intend or desire a performance to be. The model assumes the contrary position. These types of research exist as the Hermeneutic Bias

*feedback*, as feedback works as a system of knowledge that affects the individual.

This model poses the composer as insignificant, but the composer's Idea as divine.

This means that the text, or score, is your only means to the Idea -- not the composer and score, not other texts about the composer/score and score, etc. The score is absolute. Therefore, if the composer happens to experience a performance of his or her own work and says, "You are playing the second movement wrong." This does not mean that the composer is *right*. Instead, the composer has taken the position of a critic, an Other. The composer does not have final word about how his or her piece is performed. This is the role of the performer.

Is this not a fallacy? Is not the composer the creator of the Idea, therefore making what they say the Idea? Not necessarily. Composer feedback is one way of enhancing the performer's interpretation. However, the composer has the task of manifesting his or her idea in very concrete terms because the performer may not have the luxury of actually interacting with them as individuals. This is why performers are artists and not pilots. We are not vessels for the composer but interpreters who must perform based on our own individuality. (See *the Self as Essential*, for more on this.)

These statements do not devalue the composer/performer relationship. Nor does it negate research about a composer, familiarity of their works and philosophies, etc. Instead, the performer is given an equal power. A composer's feedback may change the way a performer interprets something, like a word (*dolce*) or a rhythm (dotted eighth + a sixteenth). Hearing how the composer interprets the Idea can be beneficial, but it is not necessary. People still perform Bach despite him being dead

for 250 years. His scores are often void of any meaningful interpretive information, like dynamics, phrasing, etc. However, people place it upon themselves to add these items based on traditional practices of that period.

Does this mean performers can ignore composers as individuals? In the non-philosophic world there are some very demonstrative, verbose and at times bumptious composers that feel that what they say is *right*. Does this model then assert the performer's significance? Can performers waive this model in the composer's face and say, "I have the authority!?" The only answer is perhaps. This is because the model does not self-indicate the social aspects of music. It is a model about the phenomenon of performance through a musician's eyes. If someone of dominance tells us to do something, we often submit. However, performers should not be afraid to assert their interpretations when appropriate. Many people can contribute to an interpretation, but the reality of the situation is that the performance *is* the performance and nothing will change that fact.

Often people tend to want 'easy' answers to complex questions. Is this right? Is it wrong? In music there are no answers, only questions. The most interesting part is how people attempt to deal with these questions.

#### *1.2.4 Score Precision vs. Reality*

A major issue within the Academies, the Institutions, the Streets and beyond regarding performance is whether precise execution of a score, or one striving for this



utopia, is a merited intention for superior performance. Plainly put: score accuracy equals a greater representation of the composer's idea. The model itself at no point places a contingency on the written score (manifestation) being the actual idea of the composer. The score is an abstraction, and abstract things must be interpreted. Moreover, there is a thick, embedded tradition of how one interprets these abstract objects. The model fights all of these assumptions, but within reason.

In reality, accuracy is a relative concept. If one were to compare the accuracy of a British citizen's pronunciation of the word *methane* to an American citizen's they would find that though different, both are *right* but more importantly the meaning of the word still exists. Essentially, score precision as a concept is unnecessary within this model because it is a concept that relies on others to validate. The Other in this model is not consequential to the performance phenomenon. To put it bluntly, the audience has no bearing on the creation, or performance of a piece. They are implicitly passive beings.

What about the missed note? When a performer misses a note or notes, does this misrepresent the composer's idea? The simple answer is, NO! This model does not contract a performer to note accuracy, pitch accuracy, or any other codification of accuracy. These expectations of accuracy are remnants of our desires for athleticism, and ego. We collectively enjoy watching feats of strength and dexterity. However, the model is not concerned with what others enjoy. A more complicated answer to the earlier question could be: if the performer intends to misrepresent a composer's work by performing notes outside of his or her original interpretation, then this *could*

misrepresent the composer's idea. It is subjunctive, *could*, because a performance is a very nebulous object.

Interpretation is a remarkable force within this model. It is a very individualized and personal endeavor. Almost like a musical fingerprint, the interpretation of a work renders a complex web of influence and experience (see the Hermeneutic Biases). Accuracy as a measurement of quality diminishes the substance of interpretation. Music critics and music journalists often write vitriolic statements about performers who do not exemplify Olympic instrumental dexterity and athleticism. Personally, this is absolutely insipid as they are producing a quality statement based on a model borrowed from gymnastics or figure skating. My model, the operative model, makes no quality judgments, but instead treats performance as a unique phenomenon. It is a non-qualitative model. Rather, the modes of interest and intrigue are centered on multiplicities interposed by the performer. When I watch our hypothetical performer, Bob, perform *Bone Alphabet*, I do not think of his performance in concrete terms like, this is *Bone Alphabet*. Contrastingly, this model encourages putting Bob in front, this is Bob's performance of *Bone Alphabet*. Bob is unique and has an original voice within the paradigm of music. I become more interested in experiencing the music as filtered through Bob instead of trying to overlay my own predetermined template.

Within this frame of mind, accuracy or precision are negligible features. Those who care about these things can sweat their fears on-stage. They have missed the point and entered the ring of athletic performance. What remains is that within the

model, accuracy is erased by the fuzzy line between Interpretation and Realization. In the end there is no such thing as a bad performance. It is the Other, the audience, the viewer, the critic and even tradition that indict quality judgments. The model promotes connecting the performance to the Self as a human phenomenon, and not a contest.

### *1.2.5 Music is not just Sound*

As the title of this section suggests, music is not simply a category of sound. Music as a form uses sound, sculpts sound, arranges sound, etc. but must have a body. Music is corporeal. The model poses sound at first as a ‘non-bias’ because ultimately sound affects interpretation, but has nothing to do with the performer’s Self, or being. Of course the body can dramatically change how sound is produced, or even perceived, but sound exists independently. You are at the mercy of the material with which you are producing sound.

This model places the performer, as a body and a spirit, before the actual sound. Conservative thought places sound as the music itself; what you hear is the object. This is why performance is, through the model, positioned within a unique phenomenon. One cannot discern the bifurcation between the performance gesture and the sound it produces. Even the more localized minutiae, termed as estrangement, interact within this phenomenon. (see *The Estranged Performer*) Super-Corporeality is a state of being, not an action of sound. It is the higher-level actions that derive from the interpretation in performance. Super-Corporeality is the state in which the

piece exists. Sound is a part of this state, but not the only component.

Part of this argument is supported in the earlier discussions of recordings, as well as in the chapter on Media. (See *Speakers and How they Lie*) One compelling behavior of listening and watching live performances is when people close their eyes. This would imply, partially, that the human performer's presence is secondary. They deliver sound, which is the music. The spectator is removing the performer's physicality through this gesture. Though, this model never assumes any responsibility for the audience, this gesture is not transgressive. The phenomenon of performance umbrellas all modalities, which include the singularity of the sound. Closing ones eyes does not erase the corporeality of the performer; it still exists and is encoded on the particularity of the sound.

Sound is not abstract, therefore the context in which it is provided is. Music is abstract. It needs an object in which to exist. In most instances this object is the performer. For music meant to be played through speakers, e.g acousmatic or electroacoustic music, the object becomes the speaker. In whatever form we experience music, it is not just about the sound. When the audience closes their eyes to 'listen' to the music, this does not invalidate the objectivity of the performer but only certifies that his or her existence is a necessary part of the piece's realization.

If music is not just sound, how can one quantify what music really is? This model does not directly propose what music is supposed to be but implies that it exists as part of a very complex phenomenon. Is music the Idea? - the score? - the interpretation? - the performance? - or the audiences' aggregation of all these items?

The best answer is yes to all. It is all these things and their existence in a phenomenological sphere. There are no straight lines in life. Cartesian thinking within music is most often a losing battle.

### 1.2.6 *The Self as Essential*

What is a good performance? One thing this model does not do is prescribe a recipe for quality. As a phenomenological approach to performance, it actually is saying there are no such qualitative devices. As briefly approached earlier, there are no good or bad performances, just performances. However, this does not resonate with the logic of reality. Everyone judges performers and their performances, so how does this model support these claims?

In its most theoretical interpretation the model expresses performance in a phenomenological state and how this state is connected with the Self. The Self as essential to this phenomenon is the only link to judgments of quality. When we experience a performance we see the individual performers within a very unique frame. They are themselves, as they still have feelings, values, emotions, etc., but they are also estranged from themselves (see *The Estranged Performer*). The performer behaves differently; they are 'someone else' or the 'Self-beside-themselves' (Meta-self). However, despite this thick overlay there is an apparent residue that remains: we are experiencing the individual within a unique state of being, Bob is still Bob but in performance a separate part of Bob is on display. This 'separate part' is inspired by the

piece Bob chooses to play, the manner in which Bob interprets it, and ultimately Bob's performance of this interpretation. Even if we do not know Bob personally, we see further into Bob as a human being.

The Self as essential equates that our interests are vested in what the performance reveals about Bob and how does the piece itself connect to Bob. Perhaps even more so, we are curious to see what Bob reveals of ourselves. This explains why experienced performers are often more palpable than student performers. The expert has had many more years of connecting the Ideas with the Self and the Body. As well, we are also weary of contrived performances, where the performer appears to be 'acting' a performance instead of revealing his or her true character. 'Acting' in this sense would mask the Self and portray an awkward template of the Meta-self. We would instead see Bob playing a performer, and not Bob as a performer.

With this view, performance serves a catalyst for self-exploration. Indeed the arts promote this facility. In art we desire both exploration of our selves as well as the exploration of others. As part of this model the Hermeneutic Biases serve as a gateway to this exploration. The Biases are filters; some are connected to the performer, and some are independent. However, all are connected to the overall performance phenomenon. Basically speaking, in performance we experience the residue of these biases. As we move from Idea to Realization, we (the audience) see the Idea as it has passed through the performer.

Why is the Self essential? The Self and Body are the ultimate interface. Human-to-human communication, in my opinion, is the most effective form to

communicate. Since music is already an abstraction of an abstract Idea, manifested abstractly using abstract symbols that are abstracted by the performer, a human being can reduce these abstractions into a meaningful pursuit. We embody music. Perhaps then a more productive way of interpreting a performance is to examine what the performer is telling you. What does the performer reveal about himself and what is interesting about the performance? For me I examine the physical gestures (both large and small), the sound that is attached to these gestures, the manner in which the performer chooses to dress, how the performer arranges the music or stands, which instruments are chosen (if applicable) or how he or she behaves while not performing (e.g bowing, between movements, silences...). I find that I understand more about the performer as an individual as well I have experienced the work chosen in a completely unique way. It is this extraordinary part of ourselves that is entirely special and only exists when we perform.

### **1.3 The Estranged Performer**

One aspect of performing I find provocative is the multiplicity of myself. For actors or others within Theater there exists a concrete guise in between themselves and their audience. I do not see the actor, but I see his or her character. It is understood that the character and the actor may not have any relation to each other. According to Stanislavsky's model, the character consumes or surrounds the actor. (Stanislavsky, 1956) In performance we accept actors as a human being with values, necessities, and

desires, however, we detach those from the values, necessities and desires of their characters. Stanislavsky's model works quite well for this setting, but never assumes that the actor themselves are telegraphing his or her own intrinsic characteristics, modifying them, amplifying them and absorbing them into the character. This fact is known but not cultivated with Stanislavsky. Though, it is a well accepted model of codified performance.

Bertolt Brecht introduces a way of accepting our knowledge of our performance. We understand there are only three walls, and that we are not really in another world. Stanislavsky interposed four walls, and related the character as real and alive within the context of the drama. For Brecht, the compartment of our selves inside and outside our characters is the essential grain of this perspective. Brecht calls this the 'Verfremdungseffekt' which is poorly translated as 'the effect of alienation, or estrangement'. (Brecht, 1948) For Brecht this 'effect' is a way of deconstructing the means in which theater is portrayed. Spectators see and experience the modalities of theater aside from the illusory two-dimensional narrative. Essentially, the fantasy is revealed as fictive. The audience is aware of both the real and the unreal.

Does this apply to musical performances? Popular music is of course no more distant from theater than theater itself. There are numerous examples of performers assuming characters that are not themselves, such as David Bowie as Ziggy Stardust, and Myra Ellen Amos as Tori Amos. Both examples display personas that only exist when the artists are performing. However, these personas are the only exposure to the artists that we have normally. We are seeing both Stanislavsky's and Brecht's models



in practice. Music is an arena where both the real and the fantasy collide. Mostly because we accept that music cannot portray a precise narrative like a theatrical production. Music is an abstraction.

Who am I when I perform? As mentioned previously, this is the first question to understand. I am not the everyday person I have come to know. I am a different person. I am still me, but I have become estranged from that version of me. The Meta-Self is one description of who I am at this moment, a Self beside one's Self. I behave differently, as well I am still aware of my Self, my own character and values. While performing I presume the Meta-Self as a part of myself and the phenomenon of performance. This is estrangement; the distancing of my personality, my persona and my own awareness of myself performing. Estrangement is a way of posing our state of consciousness while we perform. It encompasses thoughts like: Am I playing this passage correctly? - Is my shirt making noise? - Is this the tenth measure of rest or the eleventh? - Where do I place my hands? - Is there a siren outside? Feelings and emotions also may persist like ecstasy, attachment, and even trance-like states. Estrangement is a perspective of everything the performer is going through within this phenomenon. It may have many different manifestations, but to me estrangement is one of the most interesting facets of performance. Perhaps to take the initial question, Who am I when I perform? - and ask, What happens to me when I perform?

As I have become aware of this estrangement, I poise a greater critical understanding of both myself and myself performing. Initially, this imposes three beings of estrangement: self, meta-self and critical-self. Moreover, when I perform,

these beings are in constant conflict and cultivation. This is not a sign of derangement, as I do not see these beings as separate personalities, but rather a compositing of estrangement. Conflict occurs as a natural adjunct to the process of interpretation. To interpret and perform, respectively, allows no voice for the individual. Unlike in Brecht's ideology, I cannot explain to an audience certain aspects of my performance. Performance exists in time. This temporality is the conflict for the performer; there are rules that if broken do not fulfill the performance. My conflict as I view my performance critically is that I have no way of communicating my intentions apart from the comportment of my body. I have no voice except the objectification of my interpretation. I cannot say, "Listen to the left hand voice of the fugue." I am estranged from my own volition, though this is the contract of performance. I accept this, yet I am still estranged.

Cultivation includes the ability to assess the importance of the critical-self in relation to interpretation. If I view performance as an object there is no capacity for change in that object; the object would not exist. A performance is an object through time; therefore the critical-self is manipulative. The phenomenon of Super-Corporeality is extended; there is an interpretation of the performance as a temporal object. Each event within a performance is subject to the critical-self for a re-interpretation. During a performance, I listen and react and may change what I do next. Therefore as a critic, I have the right to apply my criticism in whichever way I choose at the time I see fit. There is a volatility to interpretation which implies a mercuriality to its realization. I perceive this phenomenon to be unpredictable. While

I can never quite identify my current mode of estrangement, I am always invigorated by such a persistent state of being.

Two poignant examples that amplify these concepts are performances of Ferneyhough's *Bone Alphabet* and Iannis Xenakis' *Persephassa*. (Ferneyhough, 1992 and Xenakis 1970; see appendix) As a performer, whether or not I am aware of the concepts expressed previously, I am always aware of my presence both physically and conceptually within the performance space. This space is both visual and acoustic. The majority of my performance is derived from the many hours of rehearsal that take place before the actual performance event. My personal interpretation, to be realized in performance, is in part developed during this time frame, as well as apart from the process of rehearsal. Despite the many hours involved to develop an interpretation, none of this is revealed in performance. There may be assumptions based on experience and outside knowledge, but the past is absent and remains hidden from the audience. In essence, the amount of time and effort spent in development for a performance can never be part of the interpretation that is to be performed.

In relation to Ferneyhough's *Bone Alphabet*, the initial obstacle for the performer is rhythm. The trenchancy of Ferneyhough's rhythmic language elicits a high level of skill, effort and concentration for its decoding. Rhythm itself is manifested in the body, and *Bone Alphabet* initially handicaps the performer; the body is stilted. Through time this discomfort is relieved as the language of Ferneyhough becomes fluent and the performer can speak comfortably. Such a process is rigorous, and rewarding, but inevitably it is absorbed into the body and the intellect. The

performer has accomplished the extreme.

In my own interpretation of "Bone Alphabet", this apogee was never reprised in performance. I did not choose to exemplify the pathos of learning and performing this piece. The exemplary component I chose to curate was the fecundity of the language. For me the piece was not imposing complex rhythm as a summit to be conquered. A performance of this piece, to me, is similar to hearing Finnish poetry. The language to an English speaker is extremely foreign, yet there still remains a sense of lyricism and delicacy.

When performing this piece I am in constant critique of these details. My interpretation to me is objective, though as a critic I am in conflict with the elements of complexity and simplicity. If I dwell on the complexity of the score, and my ability to execute this complexity, then I myself am lost in a permeated state of Super-Corporeality. Super-Corporeality encompasses the Self and one can look subjectively upon themselves in this state. Therefore, during performance I must see the simplicity of this music. Otherwise, my performance is centered on a novelty, which for me is unsubstantial. Freud may have characterized this as a conflict between the Id and the Super-Ego, as there is tension between the conscious and unconscious during performance. (Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 1923) I prefer to call this critical estrangement. Performance satisfies the conflict present between the meta-self and the critical-self. When I perform *Bone Alphabet* I seek pleasure in the accomplishment of the extreme while simultaneously combating the urge to reveal this pleasure. Through its entirety I strive to become my interpretation.

For *Bone Alphabet* this mode of estrangement is pervasive and unique. The conflict of my estrangement is to me visceral, yet to others undetected. I was critical of the self (my technical abilities, diligence, intelligence), the meta-self (my interpretation, musicality, and my body) and the critical-self (my analysis of my performance, my critique of myself, and my critique of my critique). Yet I still cultivate this constant recursive critical state. This is the use of estrangement. I have every opportunity to listen to my criticism, and apply its message. This is not just limited in *Bone Alphabet* to an adjustment of volume, reposition of an instrument or mallet, but more preferably to a repositioning of my attitude of the piece. Again my interpretation is objective, yet in the state of Super-Corporeality I see my interpretation as an ionized vessel. It is different than before, it is real, charged and in constant change.

I believe that this is the genesis of the idiosyncratic minutia of performance. The cultivation of the critical-self becomes a system of checks and balances, but also the emergence of quotidian anomalies. In performances of *Bone Alphabet* I find that often the adrenaline-invoked pleasure causes me to behave erratically. I may want to play something much louder and more violent than I have in previous rehearsal. This would cultivate my internal conflict. One could glimpse briefly into my estrangement. I may also refocus my attention to how my body is poised, or the choreography of the movements, which could even press me to observe the sound or sway of my clothing, ultimately becoming a present constituent to my performance. Cultivation is the awareness of your estrangement, and the cleverness of its manifestation. *Bone*

*Alphabet* in the past has seemed to magnify these moments, a phenomenon I find vastly compelling.

Xenakis' *Persephassa* provides a different flavor of estrangement. (Xenakis, 1970) There are many of the above situations present, yet there exists an emotional estrangement. As a sextet, *Persephassa* is in itself alienating based simply on its staging. Six players separated as far as possible in a circle around their audience. Throughout the performance there are episodes of soloistic virtuosity contrasted by passages of intense group reliance. In *Persephassa* I am only as good as the person next to me, while at other instances I am completely independent and can rely only on myself.

As a critic, I am constantly criticizing my colleagues and myself, not to pass judgment but as a way of analyzing myself as part of this group. Presumably, my colleagues are criticizing me for the same reason. In *Persephassa* there are many instances of musical material that move circularly from player to player, ultimately panning from node to node. The space itself disconnects me from my colleagues, as the closer I am to them the better I can understand what they are doing. Conflict arises between my conception of my surroundings and my relation to the music. I ask myself who or what is most important, and how do I function within this group? The seed of this conflict is trust. I trust my colleagues will behave in the way that is consistent, yet I am never certain simply because I have no imminent control over their behavior. They are foreign to me as such that I can only observe them from the outside.

When I perform this piece I am part of a collective. There is a specific way I perform the music, and I have a unique interpretation. However, this is all modulated by the collective uniformity of the group. Each node of the circle has an individuality that is noticeably original. My critical-self perceives both my Meta-Self as I perform my individual part, as well as the performance of those around me. I am then estranging myself one level further. I have removed my critique to the other, and I am aware that is the only choice I have in order to produce Xenakis' idea. My criticism is expressed outwardly, but remains internal.

Additionally, Xenakis includes material that contains no apparent relation to the collective. I am intensively a soloist within a group, yet I gain no status or signification. I am alone within a texture, however, each of my colleagues experience the same loneliness. At this point I am no longer concerned with the performance of the collective. This becomes the source of emotional estrangement. When I am left independent of the collective I lose my attachment. I am no longer a critic of the others but of myself. Together we form an organism; apart we create a texture. Individually we are left alone. It is the critical-self that produces this emotional estrangement as it toggles between the critique of myself and my colleagues. This results in a polarization of my performance. When I am independent, I may wish to express my unique voice apart from the collective. If my role is focused back into the collective I relinquish my independence and blend within the organism. The emotional conflict exists due to the outward and inward criticism I experience.

My relationship to this organism is remarkably ecstatic. *Persephassa* uses

circular motion between the six performers, the longest section of this material occurs in the last six minutes of the piece. Each performer is a single cell part of a greater body. The passage moves simple musical figures in sequence (one through six) that accelerate perpetually. There is one line that moves circularly, accompanied by five other lines that cross within the circle. It is a mechanic process given to performers. As a singular constituent, the individual can only perform his or her part, but inline with the process of the collective. Each part invigorates the collective body, illuminating the process. As I perform this process I am aware of my various modes of estrangement (meta-, critical, critical-other), but feel a sensation of ecstasy within the collective energy. I am outside myself, within the organism and there is a feeling of unity. I am critically estranged, however, within this organism I can become detached from these modes. I must critique my colleagues and myself, though I am aware of the existence of the greater body and its governance. As an organism myself, I am not solely a heart, lungs, brain, and skin but an entity. The function of the heart is not complete without the brain, and I do not exist without either. Yet without the ideology of me, my being, as an entity, the heart and brain are nonexistent. In *Persephassa* this relation is sustained. While performing I am aware of the entity, or the body, its constituent parts and myself. Though I can never critique the parent entity, I can experience it in relation to myself. This is my cultivation, and it is intrinsically alienating and emotional.

Paired together *Bone Alphabet* and *Persephassa* are interesting examples for understanding the variegation of estrangement. Every piece may provide a unique



perspective of conflict and cultivation. For me each performance is introspective. I feel it is a state where I can explore a different manifestation of my being.

Performance is a liminoid experience, a chance to be in between you and your otherness. (Turner, 1988)

If Bertolt Brecht were a composer he may have breached the accessibility of estrangement. His works may have allowed performers to comment on or criticize their performance more actively. However, this did not happen and for now when I perform I am estranged. I enjoy this detachment and find that I perform better the more I cultivate each different mode of estrangement.

## 2 MEDIA

### 2.1 Performing aside technology

This particular section is derived from many different personal experiences with media in performance. Media in most instances refers to technology. Though our own bodies are also a medium, we usually refer to them as a fundamental media and not a technology. However, bodies, computers, instruments, and others are all part of this discussion. As I speak of performance as a distinct phenomenon, I include all the things that constitute this phenomenon. My body comes first, noted in the model as corporeality; my instrument(s) second and everything else also becomes necessary, but transparent. Lights, clothes, and space are usually in adjunct to myself and my instrument. Yet they are all parts of the performance. Computers, and electronic devices are ‘attached’ to instruments; video, speakers, and sets. Summed together this is media, all that comes in-between me and the Other. More so, media are the things that make performances possible. A performance exists within the media present.

In my own performances, the computer has become a dominant medium, one that extends, expands and develops ideas. This has made a computer an instrument, which is more complex to me than the instruments I am trained on and most familiar. Despite this, the computer has offered a diverse array of problems and solutions, feelings of estrangement, lack of control, helplessness, wonder, awe, confusion, and

even ecstasy. There are many reasons for this, as the following ideas of Anxiety, Animation and Suspension are based around this very notion. However, media are always going to provide some sort of intervention. Anything, from a stick to a computer renders a new territory that we must understand. As McLuhan poignantly remarks, media extends ourselves. (McLuhan, 1994) As part of this extension we are aware of the difficulty certain media contain, as well as the direct change that a medium applies. Hence, media certainly extend our body, and our intellect but there are inevitably consequences.

Performing *Daydreams* (see appendix, Philippe Boesmans, for marimba and live electronics) is one of my more salient experiences with media, technology and performance. (Boesmans, 1991) In performing this piece, I discovered that I am not performing *with* technology but rather I am performing *aside* technology. This preposition places the role of a technology at one level independent and therefore unpredictable and perhaps even irrational. We perform *with* people as we can communicate complex meaning, we perform *on* our instruments as they are closely associated with our bodies, but we perform *aside* technology. If a performer can understand this relationship, then much of his or her understanding of how technology can be used is more natural.

In *Daydreams*, the computer and other technology collectively form one instrument. There are large sections of ten-voiced chorales, moments of pitch bending (like on a violin or a guitar), echoes, reverb, and many other instances where technology extends the instrument. To implement these behaviors, I chose to program

the computer myself. The reason for this choice was because as the programmer I have intimate control over this part of my overall instrument. It reduces the amount of complexity within the system. This is a concept I call 'Digital Autonomy', where the performer treats technology as an instrument, and manages this hybridized instrument (computer, electronics, marimba, etc.) to realize his or her interpretation. (Esler, 2006) 'Digital Autonomy' as a concept, cultivates the versatility of digital technology. It is an attempt to bring a medium closer to the Self, and evoke the individuality of an interpretation. For example, interpreting Stockhausen's score of *Solo for Melody Instrument and Feedback Loop* (see appendix) calls for three to four people to run the technology (analog recording and feedback system). (Stockhausen, 1966) Two assistants run the microphone input and the feedback loop, one monitors the playback and one to cue each section. Though, using digital technology forty years later, in 2006, one can eliminate this portion of the piece. It is unnecessary; the performer can program these tasks in the computer. The technology has changed the interpretation, as well, my 'autonomous' viewpoint allows for this flexibility.

This is not a new concept, as orchestral instruments have changed quite dramatically since the repertoire that was written. Contemporary interpretations of Beethoven are most likely much more dynamic, perhaps even colored slightly different (timbrally), from their first performances 180 years ago. Similarly, Stravinsky wrote the timpani part to *Rite of Spring* for two timpanists, accompanied by one to two assistants to change the pitches of the drums. (Stravinsky, 1913) Since the technology of the drums used hand-cranks, as opposed to foot pedals, Stravinsky

wrote a part that was impossible to perform without such help.<sup>3</sup> The ‘autonomy’ implemented in *Daydreams* was to consolidate the older technology (samplers, K&K pickup system, reverb, matrix, etc.) into one computer application. The idea is closer to the performer as an instrument maker, as the maker usually has a more intimate understanding of the instrument. Therefore, if the performer is also the maker, then the connection the performer has with the media will be further bonded. Ultimately, the performance will be better.

I found this to be mostly true, the technology and myself seemed to be tightly connected when I took the role of performer/instrument-maker. However, despite this being the most ideal situation for a performance of this kind, it did not relieve the added stress involved with the technology. Furthermore, I realized quite early in the process of programming the piece that many of the elements I wanted to be in my control (e.g sound, control algorithms, reverb, etc.) were largely out of my control. As I chose to learn about the computer and its architecture, I discovered that, despite my efforts, my ideas would always be subjective to the architecture of the media. This means that inevitably the computer applies its own marking on my performance. The reverb patch can only do so much, the control patches have their limitations, and the sound has a certain quality. I cannot change these elements. In reality, programming the computer amplified my anxiety and revealed the little control I have over this system. In the past, I placed computers within a musical utopia, a final solution for musical development. Through this experience I was much more aware of the

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<sup>3</sup> Contemporary performances of *Rite of Spring* use two timpanists, but no assistants as foot-pedal timpani reduce the difficulty of tuning.

computer's faults and misgivings. I could hear more clearly how different the sound from the computer was when combined with the marimba. Suddenly, the allure of this technology became a burden, and my previous conceptions of grandeur were lost. The computer was no longer the perfect tool; it no longer produced the most interesting music. Instead, the computer became a useful tool, but still not a universal tool. It has limitations, and in performance these are even more present.

Though, I am not posing a negative view of the computer, it still produces fascinating music and compelling performance situations. What I learned is that I have a very clear relationship with technology as a performer. This relationship will always exist, and may pose obstacles as well as solutions. More importantly, this relationship helped me understand how to use technology in performance, and really perform aside technology and not against it. These experiences allowed me to realize two concepts of media in performance. First, there will always be anxiety that exists between the individual and the medium. Whether it is a computer, a toaster, or an automobile, we are disconnected from the medium as we do not have intimate control over its behavior. It is not a part of us. This was clear in *Daydreams*; as I understood the architecture of the computer system better, the more I was placed at the mercy of the system, despite my knowledge of its behavior. Second, all media impose an implicit change upon my desires. I had a distinct image of how the marimba would sound as a composite of the computer modification. However, this image could never be truly realized as the system ultimately changes the reality of my thinking. I desire

the computer to behave one way, yet it really behaves in its own way. It is still representing my desire, but slightly different.

These concepts allow me to begin to assay the implications of technology within the scope of the phenomenology presented in this document. Technology willingly applies a force when concerned with the Self. We behave differently, our ideas change, and our connection with the Idea is altered. Sometimes this force is entirely compelling; as well there are situations where a performer prefers the changes that occur due to this force. My question is, “What are these forces in relation to performance?” And even more, “How do these forces relate to myself?”

## **2.1 The Disconnections of Media : Anxiety**

Our anxiety with computer media stems from our conscious inability to control the system with the same integrity as our own bodies. It is similar to working with another person, as we can never really grasp the intricacy of ones thoughts and actions. However, with people their interface is the same and we can relate using many different modes of communication. There is no such interfacing with computer technology, and we absolutely accept this fact.

Awareness of this as a mode of estrangement, reveals the ‘I know that a computer is not me, and is not human’ factor, and elicits a second mode, the ‘but I need it to behave based on my desires’ substrate. A stratification of these two mentalities is the genesis of anxiety. To clarify, this is not anxiety when we

experience the deficiency (or improper use) of the computer -- better called frustration. It is anxiety that occurs with the separation between each mode of estrangement. In this state the performer's mental concentration drifts between the desired behavior of the Other (though technologically biased) and the desires of the Self. The computer to our senses is the *other*, but it is blind, deaf, and emotionless. We tell it what to see, hear and feel. In its greatest derivation, it is a digitally (as well as logically, technologically, or meta-logically) franchised extension of the desires of the self. It does what we tell it, when we want it, a non-autonomous tool that autonomously remits a desired behavior.

The computer exists within a system that is both physical and theoretical (hardware and software). Ironically, people as well mirror this model as we all have a physical and theoretical system (body and intellect), which at times seems to draw us towards interpersonal ways of relating to computer systems. However, to extend ourselves through this system courts us away from our own codified behavior, and propels us towards embracing the possibilities embedded within the architecture of the technology. This resonates the 'It can do what I cannot' belief. As this is a very ideal perspective for technology, we are usually prejudiced by the architecture we are embracing. Many times we let the computer make our own decisions.

The computer is a well-established entity of contemporary musical performances; anxiety exists via the interaction that is implied in the situation. This is often called 'live-electronics', 'real-time computer processing', or 'interactive electronics' to name a simple few. However, none of these terms reveal the actual



relation between the two interfaces, computer and human. Since the computer is serving as an extension of our self, the expectations are behaviorally based.

Therefore, what we are really implying is behavioral computing (this term is being arbitrarily used by some, see Louis Savain, 2004-2006). This elicits the 'it does what I tell it to do' model, and satisfies the previous notion of behavior based on desires.

Since it is a machine, it is subordinate to my Self.

However, as a system, a computer is like an organ detached from our bodies. It renders certain desirable qualities, e.g just as the liver filters our system, the spleen protects our system and the nerves send information. The computer extends our intellect in a way that is entirely unnatural to us, but still utterly desirable. Though, there is a caveat, like any organ we have a degree of ignorance as to its systemic function. We understand that eating certain foods will make our bodies react in particular manners, yet we cannot grasp the implicit details of this interaction. The notion of anxiety exists here, within this morsel of unknowing-ness. If a system does not behave consistently then we are less likely to trust its next action. Whether we are referring to the computer, or the stomach, the results are the same. Anxiety depends on how well we know the system, and our ability to control the behavior of this system.

Controlling computers and organs are of course two different ventures. In reference to our bodies, we can only control organs that have an interface, and the information received is often intangible, or subject to the senses. Computers are similar as they each need an interface but they must produce tangible media. This is

only because they are detached from our own systems. This aspect is the computer's greatest asset and liability. It can both realize and destroy our own desires. This duplicity is our own attitude and based purely on experiences with the technology. Mostly, the success of behavioral computing relies on the expectations of the human user. The computer does not have intentions, nor can it recognize the intentions of the user.

In order to subvert the anxiety of control, we create assemblages of logic that work within hierarchies. These are pathways, conduits, assembly lines, etc. that synthetically reconstruct our own modalities of thinking. More so, they reduce our anxiety, as systems to remit our desired behavior. One simple example is file organization, any file can be located within a system by its path (`usr/local/bin/knife.txt`). People mirror this logic at times, 'the knife is in the top drawer, of the third cabinet from the kitchen refrigerator.' Semiotic pathways work differently from systemic pathways, as semiotics also deals with symbols and perhaps other latent meanings. The kitchen refrigerator is a symbolic object, the third cabinet is a hierarchical object, though, it may be located on a corner, or be the place one always puts knives. The computer also uses objects that have meaning. Pictures, or icons, create symbolic pathways in our understanding of the system. It reduces the need for explanation and allows better interfacing. The most universal computer icon is the folder, which is symbolic within a business-oriented system of organization. Business symbols tend to imply certain behavior. This way we know where the 'knife' is located based on this system of organization. In this case we accept and understand

that the system -- separate from ourselves -- is using commodified symbols to encourage particular modes of thinking.

One point to notice is how computer systems do not overuse such semiotic patterns by creating the 'kitchen' itself. We do not put computer files in drawers, which are part of cabinets in the kitchen on the first floor of the house. Such a system, with this particular interface would repel the instinct for total organization, but would streamline our methods of searching on a more intuitive based concept. For example, the computer system finds the 'knife' by looking at everything in a given area. The person finds the 'knife' by reducing the number of logical places one puts knives, e.g drawers, counters and dishwashers as one example. Moreover, we know what a 'knife' looks like and probably remember where we put it last.

There is also a system of feedback within computer systems that produce meaningful media within the course of user intent. This is the construct of user interface design, which ultimately is tied to our bodies, intellect, culture and experience. History and tradition (the handing down of something) take a great part in our interaction with computers. Word processors and keyboards reflect the former typewriter, which was designed based on our hands, arms and eyes. Audio recording software uses the previous tape recording icons (i.e >, >>, <<, O, and []) as control buttons, which stem from our semiotic intellect based on the behavior of the previous system. However, it reverts to the text-oriented 'left-to-right', 'click-and-drag', and 'cut-and-paste' methods of editing, not the razor blade cutting techniques of the previous generation. Graphic design software often disconnects the user from the

former convention of 'pen-and-paper' by recreating the convention through the Wacom tablet, which through my experience is at times more fulfilling and at other times extremely alienating. These simple methods of interface design make logical sense within the computer system. The intent of the system is to create more efficient extensions of our desires. We then have expectations like, 'when I press the > button it will play audio I have recorded', or 'what I draw on the tablet will appear on the screen.'

Design through symbols reduces anxiety within the parent system, in this case the computer, by referring to particular cultural meanings. Only industrial societies would understand the tape recording icons as only literate cultures understand the Wacom tablet. Computers in general are not designed for cultures outside of these examples and to my knowledge there is little effort to universalize computer systems for such demographics like the handicapped, blind or indigenous cultures adapting to digital society. The reasons for this are economic, exemplifying the amount of a priori knowledge one needs to control these machines.

Anxiety is amplified by the passage of high to low decision-making. High-end decisions are made by the user, such as 'play' or 'find the file knife.txt'. Low-end decisions are made based on the architecture of the system. Anxiety occurs when the architecture does not fit the desire. One problem like this could be 'I want the computer to find all files with the word 'knife' in the body text that are more than 250 words long'. Finding files with 'knife' may be simple, but reducing the search by file size may be more difficult. The architecture may not be designed for such desires.

Reliability produces similar results. If the low-end architecture of the system is unreliable then the anxiety between the two systems is increased. The most common example is 'crashing', when the computer fails to execute a given task and responds by freezing all actions of the system. 'Crashing' is a remnant of unreliability. The computer system is imperfect, and is liable to malfunction. However, the user, or the rational human, does not understand such error. The computer is constructed, marketed, and depicted as the 'It does what I tell it to do' machine. However, we really experience it as something a bit more complex and at times irrational.

Rational human beings working with irrational systems produces a 'compromise-effect' where we realize the ability and inability of both the technology and the system. We settle or compromise based on whatever desires we have for a given process. If we are searching for all files with the word 'knife' that are more than 250 words long, but can only search files with 'knife' then we may compromise by hand-searching the results for the particular file size. Another example is when a computer crashes consistently. Suppose you run a process and the system crashes but will run the process on reboot, then this becomes part of the compromise. We say, 'if that is how I can get my results then I will compromise with this system.' However, compromise usually implies that the second party also has desires, think of children as they trade baseball cards. There exists formal communication. With a computer system this is only one sided, and the compromise is an effect. We (human beings) must compromise with irrational systems. Otherwise the technology or tool is useless.

A flow of interaction for the user takes place:

***Desire - Interface - Architecture - Expectation - Media - Reaction***

Desire/Expectation/Reaction are elements of the Self; Interface/Architecture/Media are elements of the system. Interface is part of the system of design, Architecture is based on logic, and Media is centered on the intellect of the user. Desire is the purpose of this interaction and emanates from the Self, where the Reaction is how the user aggregates the Media. This flow reveals several modes of anxiety.

1) *Desire vs. Interface* - the user must translate his or her desire through a foreign (non-corporeal) device.

2) *Architecture vs. Expectation* - the user does not fully understand the complexity of the system's architecture. Therefore, the user's expectations are based on previous experiences.

3) *Media vs. Reaction* - all forms of media (sound, visual, text, motion, color, etc.) are subject to interpretation, which may remit another desire or changed expectations.

### **2.3 Anxiety, Estrangement and Performance**

Ontologically, the problem with discussing media in the context of the Self, is that in this case the computer is not the Other. In a pure Sartrean approach, a

computer lacks facticity and is not an individual. Moreover, we cannot communicate with a computer through our senses. We instead need an interface. However, this problem reveals a more interesting situation. By this lack of ontic displacement the computer engages unique modes of estrangement through performance. As we perform aside technology, the interface, architecture and media distance us from our selves.

The anxiety we experience through this interaction provokes modes of estrangement within the phenomenon of performance. Performing Boesmans' *Daydreams* for marimba and live electronics is a cogent example. The interface includes microphones and a foot pedal. The microphones behave like ears, where they selectively listen and based on the architecture of the responding system (in this case a software patch), the computer responds by creating sound. The pedal is a binary operator; it allows the performer to execute large-scale system commands, for instance changing the parameters of the software patch. Together these constitute the only way I can communicate my performance to this system. Already I feel anxiety based on the limitations of my interface compared to my own capabilities as a human being. This is the Desire vs. Interface mode of anxiety.

My own thoughts and intentions are overlooked and I can only react based on my knowledge of the interface. I may desire the microphones, my interfaced 'ears', to hear a particular part of a phrase I have played, but this does not guarantee it will happen the way I intend. With this situation I am outside of myself performing and my awareness is focused around the incongruity of the interface with my body and the

elements around me. I must perform, as well as tend to my anxiety. A similar sensation can be talking on a phone while driving. You can at times drive for many miles and not remember one single detail of the road or surroundings. The concentration is focused towards the conversation. Performing *Daydreams*, there are many lengthy passages that would disappear from my memory, yet I was aware that I had played them. The anxiety of my interaction with the machine supersedes the realization of my interpretation. I am still performing but estranged through the incorporeal interface.

As a part of performing *Daydreams*, I am responsible for the behavior of the system. The interface allows me to connect with the system, however, I still must construct how the computer will behave and ultimately what media will be experienced.<sup>4</sup> Programming a computer to execute a task is based around abstractions. Since we have no direct connection from the interface to the physical architecture of a computer (unless we can understand machine code<sup>5</sup>), then we must use higher layers of abstraction. One language is converted into another lower-level language, a process that can occur several times, until the user can see the result of the program. The stratification of this abstract process works well for human beings, as we often do not communicate using low-level descriptions (e.g we use 'milk' instead of nutritious liquid formed in the udders of domesticated mammalian creatures approximately 1,000 lbs with four legs...). When programming a realization like *Daydreams* I am

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<sup>4</sup> As mentioned earlier, for *Daydreams* I programmed the architecture myself, whereas, in many other instances an engineer or computer music specialist would create the computer realization and the performer would have little input into this architecture.

<sup>5</sup> Machine code is the lowest level language of a computer. It talks directly to the central processing unit (CPU).



working within a high level architecture that is designed to remit particular media, and allow specific functions based on expected usability. (This realization implements Max/Msp designed specifically for applications in sound) For example, if I desire to do execute something outside of this particular architecture, like print a PDF document, I am left with no support for this function. My usage must fit the framework of the system. When I tell the computer to play a recorded sample and bend its pitch 20 percent upwards, it does this rather well. I am creating assemblages within a system of abstractions, which exist in relation to different strata of usage (see Deleuze, p 502 *Strata*).

These assemblages are designed based on my own desire, but embed a certain amount of expectation depending on the system. (see *Animation and Suspension*, for more on assemblages and desire) I expect that when I press the pedal and play an A4, that the computer will play a recorded sample and bend its pitch 20 percent upwards. This is Architecture vs. Expectation. Though given the previously mentioned stratification of abstraction between user languages and machine languages, I have very little understanding of the architecture beneath my parent layer, in this case the software Max/Msp. If I experience a pocket of unreliability, then anxiety is present between my expectations and the architecture of the system. I am inherently estranged from the system. Despite my own knowledge of the architecture, and mastery of the interface, there exists a fundamental disconnection between my body/intellect and the system in place. It is the 'I know the computer is not me and not human' but 'I need it to behave based on my desires' issue once again. Since I am using the computer as a

tool in performance, I render the basic desire for the machine to behave based on the assemblages I put forth within the system. The assemblages abstractly represent my interpretation, and my interpretation abstractly represents my performance (or realization see Figure 1). These representations allow conflict based on four dualities: human and interface, user and machine, software and hardware, assemblages and architecture. They disrupt the most basic level of estrangement, the meta-self, and create the self-aside-technology, an anxious existence.

As the architecture allows the system to behave based on my desires, once this behavior is realized, we are left with various media. The media we receive become part of the performance phenomenon. Once media are produced it becomes an objective part of the realization. If the medium is sound, as in the case of *Daydreams*, then it functions the same as my instrument or it becomes a meta-instrument where both marimba and computer function one in the same. However, the combination of the instrument (an object that is more intimately connected to my body/intellect) and the machine (an object distanced from my Self) is an almost impossible task, theoretically. Both the instrument and the computer are systems, but they are built based on completely different architectures. An instrument provides a one-to-one connection between the body and media, while the computer offers stratified layers of abstraction. The commonality between the two is the remitted media and what makes the combination possible. Sound is sound, and sight is sight despite how they are produced. What exists in contrast is the remnant of the machine in 'Daydreams'; it is sound from the speaker. This is Media vs. Reaction.

A persistent entity of this confrontation (Media vs. Reaction) is how the two are aggregated. For *Daydreams* the media (sound) is interposed through a speaker, an electro-mechanical device that contains a foreign identity, or a clear origination from outside of the body. One hears the presence of the speaker and is aware of its distance from the performer. The performer is disconnected from the speaker, and has no control over its actions. Instead, my control is vested within the computer. Despite its eminent dislocation from myself, I trust (and hope) that it will behave based on my desires.

Performing *Daydreams* poses the media in tangent with the reaction. In this case their aggregate suggests an illusion, that is, the fusion of real and unreal. I play a note and it appears to bend in pitch, even though cogent thought would contrast that behavior. A marimba note cannot bend in reality. My reaction is based on the media. If the bend comes slightly late (a typical behavior of the architecture and assemblages I created) the illusion is lost and my anxiety is elevated. I begin to question whether the next bend will be the same. This estranges me from my initial performance where I am already estranged from myself, now I am estranged from this performance. Instead I move in and out of these modes without hesitation or organization. The reaction often is unnoticed by the Other, in that my anxiety may not manifest itself physically. Rather, my anxiety is simply an independent remnant of the situation, a by-product.

Performing aside media is many times a helpless situation. Despite my efforts to create assemblages that most accurately represent my interpretation and the Idea as

divine, the media in the end is absolute. The media that comes through the speaker and from the instrument is the only remaining vestige aside from the body itself. The reaction could even be presented as useless in many instances. Like before, if the pitch does not bend immediately after I play a note, my reaction does not ameliorate that situation. Yet, the reaction is still part of the performance and Super-Corporeality.

Anxiety itself alters the state of the performer from within, as well as the state of performance (as perceived by the Self); however, anxiety behaves more like a shadow than a distraction. Estrangement is not rooted in distractions, nor is anxiety. Estrangement does not evolve from anxiety, nor does anxiety evolve from estrangement. They are both components of the Self. Anxiety derives from a desire's passage through media. Performance is the awareness of the Other, and the passage of the Idea. Estrangement is the multiplicity of the Self. Therefore, anxiety seeds itself at the base of the Idea. If the Idea includes bending a marimba note, then a medium is needed for this realization. The performance or realization of the Idea through interpretation creates desire. It is, 'I desire to play this piece in a particular manner.' Media, when used in realization, produces anxiety. This anxiety is absorbed and expelled by the intellect, and can even be corporealized, or embodied.

Ultimately, anxiety's role within the sphere of Super-Corporeality is entirely personal. It is clear though that it exists within the presence of media, and most specifically media that are cotangent or adjunct to our own desires. However, we must not forget that media is any group of objects that come between the Self and the

Idea. A body can serve as a medium, or an instrument. Anxiety can exist through these media as well, not just the computer. The computer serves as a very facile example of a device that satisfies our desires. If I desire to bend marimba notes, I use a computer. If I desire to light the area around my marimba, I use the lighting grid. If I desire to appear 'fashionable' I wear stylish clothing. Anxiety prompts the limitations of desire and perhaps this is the most compelling faction of performing aside media.

#### **2.4 A Process of Change : Animation and Suspension**

Where anxiety is composed of the disconnect between the Self and the machine, animation and suspension cultivate the reciprocity of this relationship. Animation deals with non-linear associations made between Interpretation, Realization and Super-Corporeality through the vessel of a medium. It is the life we give to an idea. Suspension is the conduit for change, independent from the individual. Suspension is time independent, whereas animation is real-time or some other near-time configuration. Each concerns the Self and is subjected to the Hermeneutic Biases. In some ways animation and suspension work together, forming a protean contingency. Like anxiety, animation and suspension are more adumbrations than modes of distraction -- or even estrangement. Together they may prompt a multiplicity-of-self, or estrangement, though individually they do very little. Animation tends to render an innate corporeality, while suspension seems to lack real

embodiment, and by this nature it depends on animation. This is why they exist as a pair, and are rarely separated. In order to express the saliency of these concepts I will pose exemplary situations that reveal the ‘when’ of animation and suspension as opposed to the more formal ‘how’, as these orders tend to lack clear delineation and concrete manifestations.

A computer serves as an appropriate medium for this discussion in part because it is a device that has the capability of controlling multiple forms of other media (through a subsequent medium, printer, screen, speaker, etc.), but the computer also provides a stratified system of control within its architecture (as previously mentioned). The layering of territory within the computer system (hardware, interface, user-end software, network, code, etc.) constructs a dynamic palpability suitable to sustain multiple forms of information. As the user, we are able to navigate these territories based on our physical and intellectual connections with the system. A simple example is email. Words are assembled that have meaning, and suspended through the architecture of the computer system. When the email is read by the receiver, there exists an animation of the sender’s thoughts. Different from a performance, the animation is outside the presence of the ‘animated’. The message is created and read in ‘real-time’ and the suspension of the message takes place out-of-time. This passage of information, or passage of meaning, exists through animation and suspension. The message is a part of the Self; it is a product of the individual. As it is written this part of the Self is ‘animated’ through the territories of the computer

system. When it is sent, the Self (via the message) is suspended and awaits animation by the Other.

A consistent problematic area of this concept (in this case, email) is the meaning that is derived by the Other. Interpretation by the Self, ontologically, is in most instances objective based on the model proposed in Figure 1. Despite the subjectivity of the actual object of Interpretation (Realization/Performance), the meaning implied by the individual must be re-aggregated and may change based on the active medium. For email, the medium is text, which is already an abstraction from the original idea. The suspension of this text through the computer system facilitates faster communication and faster writing (usually if the sender is skilled with the alphanumeric keyboard). Email replaces slower and cumbersome letter writing due to these criteria. A cogent example includes:

“Hey!!

I’m totally freaked abot the midterm!!! Do you have like review sheet, or something Ic an study. Anything!!?? My suitemat told me that the midterm was gonna be hard, or you said something like it’s based on the readings...? Where aret he readings!! Can you help ASAP!!!??”

This is a typical email by a college student (based on many similar personal examples) to either a professor or teaching assistant. It shows a considerable lack of respect, and clear misunderstanding of the written word. The student is most likely writing the email as if they were speaking. It appears that they can type rather fast, and they care very little about proper language and proofreading. The number of exclamation points indicates the stress the student is experiencing. Although I understand exactly what the student is saying, the way in which it is said is unsettling and in my interpretation

rude. This is an example of the bias that exists between the medium and the animation. I may assume that the student thought hard and responsibly about how they were speaking to me and the manner in which his or her language would be interpreted. The student may be oblivious to this viewpoint and believe they are being very clear in what they are saying. The entire operation of email can produce this problem.

A different media could change our results. A hand written letter could read:

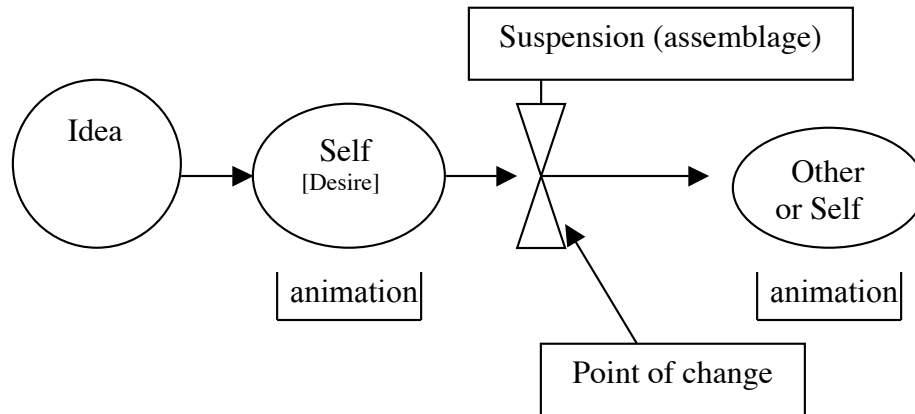
“Dear Mr. -----

I am writing you because I am concerned about my preparation for the upcoming exam. Would you perhaps have a review sheet for studying, or any other readings that may help with my studying? I appreciate your help and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Jessica -----“

In this case, the student would have more time to think about what they were writing. The idiom of letter writing traditionally contains more formal language and construction (something that tends not to be inherited in email). These two proposed examples (based on real experiences) are meant to show the effect a medium imposes upon the concept of animation and suspension. We begin with an idea (help with the midterm), its animation (text, typing/handwriting), suspension (computer systems - instantaneous, or mail system - undetermined), and a second animation (reading the text). The computer’s territorial stratification (interface - software - hardware -media) affects the way in which the idea is presented and interpreted.





**Figure 2 - a chart showing the relation of animation and suspension to the point of change.**

As we relate these concepts to performance we find that the lines between the individual and the media blur more readily and lack a clear one-to-one relationship. Animate as a term refers to ‘giving life to’ or ‘filled with breath.’ (“animate.” from Dictionary.com) For any idea to be animated it must exist through a medium, whether this is a body, an instrument, or a computer. This is why animation is corporeal. Suspension is concerned with ‘how’ the idea moves between media. From body, to instrument, to computer, to speaker, to air, the idea can exist in multiple forms. Referring back to *Daydreams* and pitch bending, the animation lives in the sound from the instrument (marimba) and the speaker. Suspension is a product of the assemblage created within the computer system. In this case the assemblage is the patch as created through software which creates a real-time (near-time) suspension of the Idea (pitch-bend). (see Deleuze, p. 502, *Assemblages*) The sound passes through the

microphone, converted into digital data, processed through the architecture of the system, rendered through the patch (assemblage), re-processed, re-converted, and heard once again through the speaker. Despite the speed of the described process, it shows at least six instances of suspension.

One important question arises by framing performance and media in this particular manner - what are the implications of this proposal? Based on the provided basis, we can conclude that media both suspend and animate the desires of the individual. The Idea is the seed of these desires. The Interpretation of the Idea can only be realized via a medium, which ultimately is subject to the biases of that medium. This is the reason Media rests as a non-bias. We are aware of the intricacies of such biases, but they are unchangeable. A marimba sounds a particular way due to the nature of its wood, and the vibration of the bar above its resonator and we accept this fact. The computer behaves with certain manners, and this is preserved as fundamental, unable to be changed. Therefore, a large portion of our performance is subjected to the biases of the medium on which we choose to perform. Moreover, a substantial portion of our Selves is suspended through these media, and subsequently animated. The self is stratified and combined. For a moment our desires are deconstructed and then reified, unreal and real.

This is perhaps one explanation for the popularity of provocative illusions that computer media can create. Outside of performance we see this happening in film, where digital graphics are blended with regular film to appear as 'real'. In performance this occurs with a compositing, or a plural animation, where the real and

the unreal are layered together. We hear the bent marimba note just after the real marimba note where they sound as one. Illusions are combined with extending expectations. Most people readily know that a marimba cannot bend in pitch. This is why we can become so fascinated with media that suspends illusions.

As animation and suspension supports a mode of thinking about media, it prompts us to realize the force that media has when used to convey meaning to other people. Mostly, it is the suspension that exerts this force. This means the processes, actions and behaviors that are embedded into the subsequent animation undergo a change. This relation between individuals and media, and mostly computer media, ignites the urge for creativity. We desire these changes, illusions, extension, pluralities, and animations. Without them the medium would have no place in art. Computers, as a dominant media, are able to connect closer with us as human beings. We have more media in which to engage our senses, our bodies and our intellect. In the end, the computer is no different than oil-based paint; it may make things look better, but it is still just a conduit for one person's idea.<sup>6</sup>

What the concept of animation and suspension really is saying is that we must understand what a medium does to our messages. As McLuhan says, "The message is in the medium." (McLuhan, 1994) As performers we can have so many different devices that come in between our performances and ourselves, that without understanding this as a process, and a process of change, the overall idea can be

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<sup>6</sup> During the Renaissance tempura paint was replaced by oil-based paint, which not only made the colors brighter and more attractive, but paintings also lasted longer and were less susceptible to damage. It was a major technological shift in art. This reference is making use of this shift by comparing it to the computer, but also making light of the fact that the computer is not as substantial (in subject) as we may make it to be.

obfuscated. Animation and suspension shows us that we lose control of our ideas, even if for a split second. In those micro-seconds our idea has transformed into something new, and independent from ourselves. This can pose dramatic results, but we really see that a large portion of our performance is outside our own personal jurisdictions. Essentially, we are left at the mercy of the medium.

## **2.5 Speakers and how they lie : A dialogue in the representation of sound<sup>7</sup>**

The speaker as a device is simple, and by design, perfect. Yet it is a compulsive liar and we accept it. Recorded sound, similar to photography, is a representation of something that is, or was, real. We hear a recording of a dog; to our ears it is recognized as a dog, though, it is not a dog. The speaker deceives the mind. In the field of music, a large majority of it is experienced through speakers. There is a representation of a performance, but no performance is taking place. Like film, the audio recording represents what is perceived as real, but never could be real. Film lies, and speakers lie.

This is not a discussion about recorded media, but a dialogue that reverses our perceptions of speakers. It is about the speaker as a machine, a device, a tool, a portal, and any other relevant association. The reason the speaker lies is not because it

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<sup>7</sup> This dialogue is a provocation towards my own personal problems with speaker technology. I am not trying to deconstruct the function of the speaker in society, more so I am examining the perception of recorded sound, or sound through speakers. View this section as a way of discerning my own anxiety with this media, perhaps a practical dialogue based on the first part of this section: Media. Moreover, it sustains the idea of Suspension as a point of change and validates the previous idea of performance as the composition. (see the section *Implications of the model : Music is not just sound.*)

represents sounds that do not exist, but because it tries to be real. Unfortunately the speaker cannot make a corporeal transformation, (it can never be 'real') yet we apply the expectations that it will, or already does. The speaker is the only device that we use currently, to supplant what is real. When one sees a photograph of a relative, we know the person is not there. When one sees a projection of an image, we understand it does not exist tangibly. Moreover, when one tastes synthetic flavors we are aware that they do not replace, nor represent, the original. Sound does not do this so bluntly. When we hear a sound through a speaker it is obvious we understand that it is not real. However, there is a contingency, we must either see the speaker, or hear the remnants of its presence (e.g low quality, hiss, unusual reflections, directionality, etc.) Without this, in our minds a dog barking through a speaker is no different than a dog barking.

Sound through speakers is the only non-organic media that exists in four dimensions<sup>8</sup>. Yet, often it is meant to be perceived flattened almost two dimensionally. This is most obvious in music, as recordings are reduced to stereo objects. Surround sound simulates 'reality' three dimensionally, however, the flattened perception from stereo remains, but exists in multiple pairs. Surround imposes a z-axis for sound. We still tend towards Cartesian listening.

Digital theory, as applied in contemporary technology, further complicates our listening biases. Sound is dissected into samples and bits. We hear numbers but they are meaningless. Sample rate, bit depth, window size -- these represent the molecularization of sound. Like a picture expressed in pixels, we experience an illusion. Media tends to exploit our own sensual limitations. Digitization granulizes

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<sup>8</sup> Non-organic contrasts organic media, things like clothes, natural light, people, nature, etc.

the intrinsicity of life. The speaker mollifies the granularity of this process. When we hear sound through speakers our ears are unaware of this granularization. Edison's mechanization of sound was not a lie; it was the closest thing to the photograph. It did not deconstruct the object it was representing; it also did not claim to 'be' the object. Common semantics apply 'speaker sound' (or recorded media) as the object; it occurs when we say, "Is that Brian Eno on the radio?" or "Here is Beethoven's Piano Sonata."

If we were to apply Derrida's word *différance* to sound then we can begin to see even clearer how the speaker lies. (See Derrida, Speech and Phenomena, Margins of Philosophy) As Derrida points out by the duality of *différance*, words carry meaning based on the differences of other words. Words like 'house' objectively obtain significance when one is deferred from other words like 'shack', 'hut', or 'fox-hole', and how collectively these words differ. Then if we understand the polylexical tendency of a word, the actuality of a word becomes represented by experience and time. Hence, a 'house' carries meaning based on how many things one has experienced as a 'house' and the homogeneity of that as an image, as well as this image in time (e.g a house may be quite different, and may not exist in alternate time periods). Like text, sound renders a similar treatment. Sounds assume identities, like when the dog barks we know it is a dog and not a predator. This is because the sound in our minds is categorized, cataloged, and annotated. When dog A barks, we recognize it as collectively the same as dog B, despite the obvious differences between the two. House A may look completely different than house B, like the dogs, so in

these instances we modify them further; Tudor House, Victorian House, Miniature Poodle, Great Dane. This is Derrida's deferment.<sup>9</sup>

As we listen to sound from a speaker, our minds begin to associate meaning with these sounds. Sound lives at the cusp of speech. We tend to separate the two, but the difference between saying "dog bark" and hearing a dog bark are negligible. Both render the same meaning, and image. When we hear a dog bark or a person speak through a speaker, everything remains the same. However, the recorded sound is *like* the object it represents, as it follows the annotation of a previous cataloguing. The recorded sound *is not* the object it claims. This is common knowledge, but the subtle difference between *like* and *is*, is the line between truth and lies. The speaker claims to be the object it represents; there are no warning labels. Such a claim diminishes the value of experience. The speaker lies because it exists within the same medium as the object itself. The medium of photography is paper, the medium of film is light, and the medium of sound is air. A picture of a house is not trying to be the house because it does not exist within the same medium. These media represents the objects in the abstract, and what the speaker does not tell you is that the sounds it produces are as well abstractions.<sup>10</sup> We are led to believe the lie. We often say, "Words cannot describe...", as a caveat to the limitations of language. In a certain manner this validates Derrida's "other of language", (the difference and the deference) or at least a presence of the idea. (Kearney, 1984) Such rhetoric is applied to sound or more

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<sup>9</sup> Derrida is combing the words 'differ' and 'defer' as *différance* to implicate the ambiguity of language.

<sup>10</sup> This is different than from earlier where I mention sound as not being abstract. Recorded sound is abstract, if the sound is meant to represent the real. This is the basis for this dialogue, as sound demands experience. Subsequently, music demands performance, and cannot exist on recordings alone.

poignantly music. To experience reality, as opposed to hearing a simulation, is ultimately more fulfilling. Hearing a dog bark is more interesting than someone telling you what it sounds like. Perhaps, sound is but one entity of this very fluid ether of abstractions and experiences that we collect in our consciousness.

Speakers, for amplification, further complicate matters. They allow one to remove themselves further from the experience of the performance. In this case, speakers can invoke a sense of power. A person can reach more people. Assumingly, a thousand years ago when a king would speak to his people, only a small fraction could actually hear what they were saying. That same speech delivered in 1936 with the help of a microphone and speaker ultimately has an extreme power. Adolf Hitler may not have been so widely successful in his political movement without amplification. More so, we saw how sound systems can be abused in the 2004 US presidential campaign. Candidate Howard Dean was seen on television screaming, red-faced, and almost hysterical. ( see video here, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OB5MgtSUTlc>) However, no one really knows how loud the crowd was in that small room. Perhaps Dean could not hear himself. Moreover, Dean may not have realized how amplified his behavior appeared. Suddenly, Dean is out of the race. Speakers cheat in this fashion, making us seem bigger than we are. Though, cheating is still lying.

This can also have the reverse effect and closely engage the sound with the performance to provide a more intimate experience. In a way, we can get smaller when we need to be bigger. A person can show vulnerability. Without speakers Joan



Baez's performances at Woodstock in 1969 would have been out of place, and impossible to hear even if one was within 100 feet of the stage. (see Wadleigh, 1997; Woodstock Documentary) Folk musicians, like Baez, mostly avoided this technology. In general, Folk musicians and Folk lovers strived for a natural, acoustic sound; they want to experience the truth. This changed with Bob Dylan at Newport in 1965 as he was hissed off the stage simply because he used an electric guitar.<sup>11</sup> (see, Scorsese, 2005; *No direction home* documentary)

Speakers, as illusionists, can provoke fantastical meaning and expectation. Furthermore, the illusion can be more interesting than the sound itself. At the movies these illusions have taken over so much that they no longer are interesting. We know that film lies. Speakers do this too. Psycho-acousticians have specialized in making sure these illusions exist. Maryanne Amacher's music shows us that our ears not only listen to sounds but can also produce them.<sup>12</sup> We often prefer illusions as they remind us of fantastic places. Illusions suspend our reality, making us feel happy and content. When we see David Copperfield, we know that he is not really walking through the Great Wall of China. Though, it looks like he is, therefore we are more concerned with how he did it. Once the secret is revealed, we lose interest. Speakers are no different, they lure us in to thinking we are experiencing a mystery. The military uses wave cancellation to sonically hide their helicopters. It is extremely odd to see a helicopter but not hear it. Speakers have no shame.

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<sup>11</sup> There are many debates about this performance, as well as Folk musicians and amplification. Let us not delve into this at this time.

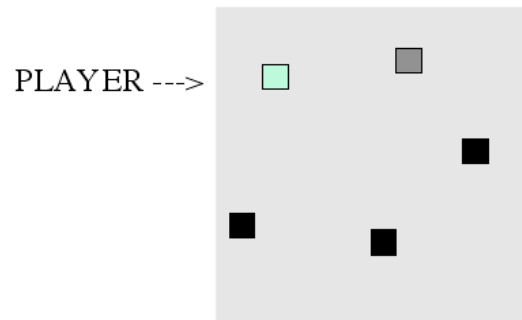
<sup>12</sup> Amacher developed the phenomenon of oto-acoustic emissions in her music. When one listens to these recordings through speakers, there is a sensation that sounds are coming directly from ones ears. (see Amacher, 1999; *Sound characters : (making of the third ear)* )

So perhaps experience is really the core of this dialogue. Speakers are a simple end to a complex means. We need speakers, but we do not need to fall into their trap. They can be used, but not universally. Music should be experienced, not simulated. We should be weary of the lies and deceit. We should look at speakers with skepticism – what is it they are not telling us? They are our servants and should be obsequious. Speakers lie, that we now know, but what we should really concentrate on is how to find the truth? I think that relies on what we want the truth to be.

## **2.6 The application of these concepts**

Thinking about media as applying anxiety to my performance, or animating and suspending my desires has allowed me to view my performance as a state of introspection. Similar to my observations in *The Estranged Performer*, I enjoy the multiplicity of myself and many modes of thinking that exist in performance. This discussion of media only adds to this enjoyment. I generally find technology interesting when it poses challenging and meaningful modes of interaction that show me (and others) the prismatic varieties of my personality and being. Cristyn Magnus' work, *vs. Computer*, is one such instance where media has revealed an interesting reflection of myself. (Magnus, 2006) As a general concept the piece is simple, play the game. The game is not complex, but my interface is quite complex. Instead of using a game controller, which maximizes the efficiency of my hand-eye coordination, I must use the sound of my instruments. I am immediately disabled, a sensation with

which I have little experience. My mind knows there is an easier means to accomplish the task (eat the blinking black dots), but my physical environment does not allow such ease.



**Figure 3 - a representation of the game space of vs. *Computer***

As I learn to adapt to this control mechanism, I begin to gain a rather efficient facility of the interface. However, difficulty still remains. My ‘moves’ are dictated by a written score, which is generated when I press a foot pedal. The task of playing the game, reading the score, while making music is extremely complex, but invigorating. Even though the piece is constructed around me playing the game, I have many different layers that I must balance. As I lose points to the computer the signal processing of my microphones increases. This confronts me with many choices. Should I concentrate on gaining points, interpreting the score, or creating music within this system? My presence within the space becomes obscured by the reverberation, pitch alteration, etc. The computer is trying to blur my performance. If I focus on making music, then I have a better chance at molding the game as a piece. The signal processing makes interesting sounds and shows the computer’s modification. If I gain points the signal processing becomes less. Suddenly I become more present within the

texture. This tends to lead more towards interpreting the score. Whichever situation, I realize that playing the game, interpreting the score and making music is impossible for me to do simultaneously. In that case, the computer has won.

Performing this piece provides a different perspective of myself. As this system disables my natural facilities, I learn to cultivate this disability. I discover I have repose and ingenuity. The frustration of the interface forces me to devise alternative strategies. For example, to move up or down uses less transition time than moving laterally. This is because the computer needs time between two notes to determine what is 'slow'. (see appendix for more on these moves) Therefore, one strategy to quickly maneuver within the game space is to approach the black dots from the side, and attack from underneath. Sonically, this gesture moves across the physical space (as the performer's sound is moved through a circular speaker array matching the game space), with short, loud phrases, followed by fast, loud phrases. The opposite move (left and down) produces the same results, except quieter. These types of approaches can yield more points than up-down to left-right motion, and also create dynamic musical gestures. Additionally, I must learn which instruments in my set-up are acknowledged by the computer best. Certain traits emerge, like fast-soft, are more successful on drier instruments, and slow-loud are easier to manage on metals like cymbals or almglocken. As these traits of the game and the system become clearer to me, I am better able to approach the game and its inherent structure as a musical object.

In this piece, I fight the suspension the media imposes as well as the anxiety the interface causes me. I must understand the behavior of the media as well as accept my failure to fully execute my intentions. While interacting with the game, I experience a split in my attention. One part of me focuses on the competitive nature of the game, the other on the musicality. I desire to win and make music. If I am losing, then I ebb towards cultivating the musical possibilities of the situation. In performance, I battle my critical-self with my competitive-self. I cannot monitor both types of estrangement simultaneously, so I scan between each. I listen to myself as a musician, and I approach the game like a competitor. At times one overrides the other. I may focus too long on playing the game, which could inspire monotonous music. Contrastingly, I could also focus quite hard on developing the music, which ultimately could lose me points.

These two ‘Selves’ easily become corrupted; my competitive-self may thwart my critical-self in favor of my own satisfaction for defeating a machine. It is quite similar to the cliché devil/angel characterization of our consciousness. However, in performance this ‘corruption’ is not un-welcomed as the piece prompts the clash of such duality. At times the computer can even infiltrate my own game space, essentially moving me in extraneous directions. This occurs when a loud sound from a speaker is heard by the computer (mostly due to black dots disappearing, or my player eating one of the dots.) However, other things like noises coming from the audience, from outside the hall and even from myself have affected the positioning of my player within the game. During one performance, a baby yelled quite loudly,

moving my player in the completely wrong direction, losing me one, if not several, points. Other instances have happened where I may hit the microphone, step on a noisy floorboard or unknowingly grunted, moving my player far from my intended position. These types of experiences reveal to me the pregnancy of my environment, and the contingency of my comprehension of the system in which I am involved. Realizing the intervention of these unexpected events on the game and piece itself, I can enjoy these performance anomalies and my reactions to them.

In relation to this piece, my anxiety with the interface and even the complexity of the system is quite satisfying. As I begin to deconstruct the strategies of the game, and connect them with musical gestures and structures, I find many points of interest within my performance. Such interest may be from the physical gestures I use, the sounds I choose to move my player, or the multiple modes of interaction between my performance and the computer's. Here, anxiety provokes positive and invigorating experiences in performance. The disconnect between me and the medium is a large part of the Idea for *vs. Computer* and it subsequently becomes an essential part of my interpretation and performance.

The change imposed by this system of media (animation and suspension) is the removal of my performance as the essential element. The computer is a performer, but it is also the only means for understanding the piece. It applies thick reverb when I am losing, making me appear blurry. It makes loud sounds when black dots disappear, causing me to lose my position within the game. It changes how I perform the music as represented in the score by distracting my attention. As well, it creates a

sonic landscape of the actual game within the physical performance space. All of these elements change my own rendering and at times are completely independent of my interpretation and myself. I am pushed aside by a machine, and I fight to regain my status. This relationship shows me the force of a medium, especially when my entire performance and energy must pass through this medium in order for the piece to exist. The computer can overpower me, defeat me, and belittle my musical intelligence.

My multiple modes of interaction throughout this piece reveal to me the potential of computer technology. In this piece, I am not confronted with a score that I later interpret and perform, but everything exists immediately and must rely on my intuition, experience and environment to proliferate. A similar situation is David Birchfield's *Community Art: Resonant Energy*, where the score itself is revealed every 30 seconds. (Birchfield, 2002-2005) I know beforehand a general behavior pattern, but I am never certain of the trajectory of the composition. Furthermore, these pieces (Magnus' and Birchfield's) convey a very simplified idea at first: play a game and interpret an evolving system. However, these ideas unfold to become much greater than their inception. The performer must make very precise decisions. They must intimately understand the system and its parts. *Community Art*, like *vs. Computer* positions me within a concept, where my performance and interpretation exist within the same time period. The computer provokes a different interpretive process, where I do not calculate each moment, but rather blend within the concept. These concepts develop as I understand the components of the system. *Community Art* uses a genetic

algorithm from which I can begin to comprehend the implications of this feature. *Vs. Computer* incorporates a game which illuminates certain pattern-like behavior from myself. These types of structures can only exist through computer technology and subsequently continue to provide challenging situations for performers. As I portray the ideas of anxiety, animation and suspension to performing aside media, the thread that becomes consistent is re-context. Media has power over context and ones ability to change, alter or expanded upon that context. In performance the subjectivity of that context is on display. Computer media provides a significant elasticity to the salient context of musical ideas.



### 3 ENVIRONMENT

#### 3.1 Space and Place

Emerson and Thoreau's descriptions and experiences with landscape, environment and situation are among the most profoundly recorded. Both individuals saw nature and its elements as vestiges of knowledge, wisdom and experience. Nature in its purest form (away from human development) renders a visceral interpretation and potency that is desired and transcendent.

Art often takes influence from nature in both subject and form. Artists like Christo and Goldsworthy, theater directors like Schechner and Grotowski, and performance artists like Allen Kaprow use nature as a partial subject. Nature is a form of space. Space and place are the essentials to any performance. Though to sustain the spirit of the transcendentalists nature remits a palpable energy, one of which can provoke a "kindred impression, when the mind is open to [its] influence." (Emerson, p. 9) For performers, space provides the necessary construct in which performance can exist, collaborate and become amplified. Place is an adjunct to space, as place informs a space. The Santa Fe Opera House (an example of a space) is largely a more organic space due to its open-air location in the New Mexico desert (a formidable place) compared to the Metropolitan Opera House (space), which exhibits a classical indoor proscenium theater in the urban complex of New York City's Lincoln Center (place). Both the Santa Fe and Metropolitan Opera houses are 'fixed' spaces in unique places. Each are 'fixed' given they are used for the same function, to produce

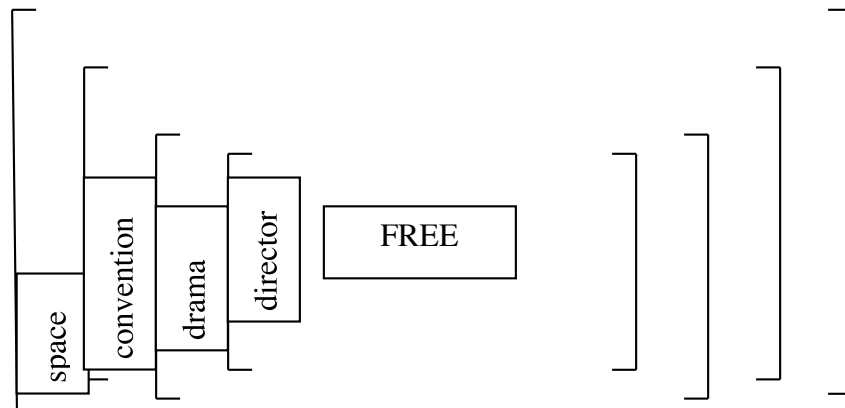
theatrical opera. Space is a system of place, as opera cannot be produced anywhere, place becomes negligible as a system itself. A space is designed to fit its function, as it otherwise serves no other purpose.

Place however holds a bit more integrity when used outside of codified practice. The fixity of a space is usually its greatest liability; there is nothing to redeem apart from its function. Andy Goldsworthy's art placed within a gallery somewhere in La Jolla, California greatly misplaces the fundamentality of his art. The gallery will soon have a new artist on its walls and floors and Goldsworthy's work will no longer exist in that space. This is the ephemerality of art's presentation. However, Goldsworthy's art is meant to be temporal and ephemeral -- not within the ebbing tides of an art gallery but rather those of nature. Art presented in this manner, nature as part subject and part place, exerts potency upon the object itself. As in 'Rivers and Tides', place assumes the same function as a space. (Goldsworthy, *River and Tides*, 2004) The only difference is the same place is not committed to the same function. Goldsworthy's river is at that time his gallery, though at another time it is simply nature.

As a system, space is not affected by its location, unless this is the intent. A theater in Biloxi, Mississippi will serve the same function as a theater in Whitefish, Montana. The system is that of theater. Theater is a process both theoretically and physically. Depending on theater's social situation (i.e Athenian Theater, proscenium theater, environmental theater...etc.) the space is designed to accommodate the people involved in a particular way. (Schechner, *Performance Theory* p. 180-181) Euripedes

*The Bacchae* in Whitefish will be relatively similar to the same play in Biloxi on a purely technical comparison. This would be consistent for other comparative art forms such as a symphony orchestra, or a ballet and of course this is the point. The suspension of a system like theater allows for reproduction. To include the place as part of this system would be useless because the opera, play, symphony or ballet would not be affected, it would not change. There is an inherent infrastructure to support this system.

However, to produce Euripedes' *The Bacchae* throughout different locations of Athens, Greece would provide the potency of place to speak. Referring back to Schechner's diagram, space is the encompassing 'convention' of theater. The looser the idiom of a theatrical space the more stringent the inner dimensions of theater become. The same is true for the reverse. (Schechner, PT, p. 18)



**Figure 4 - Reproduction of Schechner's diagram**

If *The Bacchae* were to take place at different locations throughout Athens, each place (being also a unique space) would function as a theatrical system. The actors would still perform the Euripedes' tragedy though within the veil of each place. Schechner's diagram provides a flexible means to understand the function of space in performance, but of course, it does not include place as a separate variable because place is not necessary within the system of theater.

Space has a function, whereas place needs no function or purpose. Spaces are designed and places are found. There is a 'space' within a place but it only exists in light of the imposed function. The proposed Athenian production of Euripedes' *The Bacchae* would create a space in whichever place the story unfolded. Mount Olympus would become a theatrical space, atop a particular place. This difference imposes a

dialectic for performers. Arguably a space's unique characteristics will affect the mode of performance, as is so with a unique place. The drama of the hypothetical *The Bacchae* would ultimately be affected by the transposition of place and space. Patrons would be forced to displace themselves from the flattened proscenium stage, while actors would not have the luxury of a backstage. The drama would be closer to achieving a real existence than when placed within a codified theatrical infrastructure.

There are two things that remain constant in this example: drama and expectation. The drama of *The Bacchae* is still the same (essentially referring to the objectivity of the text), and the expectations of the drama in both time and situation. However, the magnitude of these constants would significantly change due to place. The subjectivity of the performance would be affected based on the selection of place. Place then has meaning in this situation. Producing *The Bacchae* in the urban landscapes of New York City or Tokyo would alter the subjectivity of the drama.

Nature encompasses all places, and place in performance becomes a framing of nature within some sort of theatrical system. The transcendentalists asserted nature's divine influence upon humanity as a performer would then transcend this influence. Therefore, performing *The Bacchae* in the rural or urban areas of Athens, New York or Tokyo would influence all aspects of the performance.<sup>13</sup> The actors would perform differently, the drama would unfold differently, although slight it may be, nature's intervention would be consistent.

Within such a performance, the spectator may make associations between

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<sup>13</sup> Nature does not exclude places with human intervention, e.g cities, parks, etc.

natural elements and theatrical elements. Things like wind, water, trees, rocks and wildlife could potentially influence the understanding of the performance. In an urban environment the traffic, people, construction or sirens could act in the same way. These associations would be unique to every individual. A performer could be distracted, or inspired by each instance. The performance's unfolding would be significantly unique. In controlled spaces, like theaters, these 'distractions' or 'influences' are reduced as much as possible.

### **3.2 Strange Noise, Sacred Noise**

John Luther Adams' music up until at least the percussion quartet *Strange and Sacred Noise* was considered a sonic geography, "place as music and music as place." (Adams, 2004, p. 130) There is an image of this music being extracted from the landscapes of the North. Gorges of ice, calving glaciers, dark frozen water, and giant mountains are captured and remade into sounds. Though this is not an imitation of nature, it is instead a new vocabulary of noises, tones, rhythms and other musical forces that generate energy. They are kinetic relatives of nature. This music evokes a power only shadowed by nature itself. It is music that ignites the air, penetrates the wind, colors the sky and bites the bitter cold, as it is nature experienced through sound.

Cage's musical aphorism in *4'33"*, paraphrased as 'music is all sound heard',

illuminates the canvas in which music is created.<sup>14</sup> With this respect, music relinquishes its tradition. Music is a concept rather than an art, a philosophy over a cultural idiom. Our minds are our only audience, and we hear what is there to be heard.

Cage also said, the majority of what we hear is noise or more poignantly aperiodic sound. (Cage, 1961, p. 3) To a computer noise is a random generation of periodic sounds and pitches, placed in time. However, no naturally occurring noise is completely random. Chaos in nature is extremely organized. Sound is carved from noise, we hear the elemental forces of nature. Minding Cage's thoughts, music is an awareness of noise, cultivated, and grown. Adams hears his environment and experiences his landscape. This music is no less natural than the Earth itself.

To perform noise is to manipulate nature. All noise contains its own harmony, a togetherness that can never be experienced twice. If noise is music, then nature is the divine performer. As a human I cannot claim such sanctity. Mastering the creation of noise, through objects torn from nature, is a delicate mystery. Much of percussion harvests sounds in this way. As performers of percussion we cultivate, shape and exploit noise. While performing I experience the grandeur of noise and can hear the infinite variations of color. It is during this state that I feel connected to the sounds I am creating.

Performing Adams' *Noise* is a ritual without a culture. Each movement is exhaustive, and saturates the aural boundaries of our ears and the kinetic limitations of

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<sup>14</sup> 4'33" is a piece where the performer stands silently for the duration of the title. The music is provoked by the noises made within the performance space, and outside of this space. (see Cage, 1952)

the instruments. As one learns and rehearses *Noise* they understand that this is not a piece of perfection, execution, or the display of difficulty. The performer is summoned, and transcends the energy that Adams' has extracted from the Earth onto metal, skin, wood and air. Interpretation is not centralized in performance of this work; the performers lose a sense of themselves. This is because there is a paucity of musical material. Yet within the dearth exists a complexity that is organic and phenomenal. Quite similarly, when I walk through a forest it is to my perception simple. I see nothing but trees, moss, rocks and leaves. Though each tree has an ecology, as is so with *Noise*, each movement, each note, exists within an ecology of noise. Realizing this I understand Cage's wisdom. Nature provokes simplifications. We see water, we hear wind, but these simplifications are comprised of intricate stochastic detail. There are no equations for wind but wind is extremely simple to hear and feel. What we experience is a friction between simplicity and complexity. Performing this music is to cultivate the dual relationship between each polarity.

Performing James Tenney's *Having Never Written a Note for Percussion* is an adequate example of this phenomenon. The piece is simple to understand; it is monolithic in its inception. Because of this simple structure, the sonorous complexity of the instrument breaches the horizon. We hear the intricate granularity of noise and apprehend its musical qualities. The performer may suspend moments of inspiration, perhaps a brief glimmer of a single tone or even an episode of silence. There is no regard for narrative or the next moment. The performer is free from the constraints of time, and expectation. In conception, this is the only way to really break apart noise



and let it speak. The innate process is to frame, or umbrella, an object as a means to resonate its intrinsicity. Fundamentally, nature reveals the same phenomena. Once again, I understand the forest, but I have no way to understand its parts, separate from absorbing their beauty.

### **3.3 *Desert, Forest, Tundra* - Making environment special: poeticizing our surroundings**

As interpreters, performers embark on a unique task that is inherent to the self. Throughout all facets of art, the self or the individual is a constant. Art does not create itself. Theorists like Ellen Dissanyanke, and Roderyk Lange have attempted to delineate the event horizon between art and the mundane. For Dissanyanke art is the act of making special. (Dissanyanke, 2000) Lange makes the point that art is something poeticized; dance is poeticized movement, song is poeticized speech. (Lange, 1977) These are both salient viewpoints, as each elevate art above the everyday. Under this rubric, which art is the performer propagating? -- Poeticized interpretation? -- Making *thought* special, *doing* special? I think the artistic engendering of performers of any art is the poeticization of the self within a special context.

‘Poeticization’ and ‘making special’ are very important concepts to my own performances. When I perform John Luther Adams' *Strange and Sacred Noise* or *Mathematics of Resonant Bodies*, I am confronted with the decision of how to present

this music, all of which is comprised of decisions like: which instruments to use, dynamic levels, sound color, staging, amplification, etc. Many of these decisions rely on logical conclusions with a rather straight-lined, Euclidean trajectory. Music, in practice, is more natural and contingent on poetic notions. In both *Noise* and *Mathematics* Adams' neutralizes compositional presence by using codified symmetries (i.e fractals) that are not privy to narrative speculation from both listener and performer. Adams admits, "I hope to move beyond self-expression and the limits of my own imagination, to a deeper awareness of the sound itself." (Adams, 2004, p. 134) Such a thought would essentially relinquish any poeticism towards making this music. As stated before, performance is 'the poeticization of the self within a special context,' and context is what activates palpability in art. The music invites a sonorous context, a poetic landscape and an individualized performance but without a particular magnification of any self-contrived objective.

My role, or my individuality, is not centralized in this music. When I prepare *Noise* and *Mathematics* for performance, I do not pose myself as the context and yet I am still there and essential. Performance of any art is not focused on the individual's facticity (the significance of being), as a human singularity. (see *the Self as Essential*, 1.2) *Mathematics* is not a venue for my own agendas, ego or showmanship, even though my presence cannot be erased. Agreeably the previous statement is NOT, 'the poeticization of the self as a special context.' Despite performance art's ability to iterate the self as subject, like the performances of Carolee Schneeman (e.g *Meat Joy*, *Interior Scroll*, *Vulva School*) or Adrian Piper (e.g *Cornered*, *Angry Art.*), the self is

the subject not the context.

For me, the poeticism of both *Noise* and *Mathematics* is the fracturing of an environment with my own presence within the context of place. In this situation, place informs performance and performance reveals place. Sound becomes a secondary component; though necessary and compelling, the overwhelming attribute remains the physicality of place and the viscerality of the performance. My presentation of these pieces relies on the power and vulnerability of a landscape to ignite the potency of a performance. The project, *Desert, Forest, Tundra*,<sup>15</sup> resonates Adams' statement "place as music and music as place." -- but continues past this compositional dogma and reifies the notion of place as a formal interpretive tool. Environment, in this case, is natural landscapes (but does not disregard urban landscapes), most specifically landscapes that reflect the aridity, enormity and fragility of nature in relation to Adams' original musical inspirations in Alaska.

As a response I chose three environments, each unique exhibiting contrasting characteristics. *Desert, Forest, Tundra*, both the name of the project and the particular environments, explored the contingency of place and performance. The idea initially removed the artistic cultivation of sound, one aspect that seems fundamental to Adams' music. However, sound was more a supplement to the experience; the environment surrounded all aspects of the performance. Experience is the subject in this instance. Sound is everywhere; it is part of how we evaluate space and texture. Adams' music uniquely captures the nakedness of sound. I used this music, as sound,

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<sup>15</sup> See the appendix for background information of this project. Briefly, this project placed performances of Adams' percussion music in natural environments as suggested by the title of the project, *Desert, Forest, Tundra*.

to unfurl an experience in nature. The importance rests in time, place, matter and thought. Nature becomes an existential resonator.

*Noise* and *Mathematics* express a palpable energy that is void of self and meaning. There is very little, if any, semblance of personality or ego. It remains as sound, organized, but vast. There is a logical connection between the characteristics of this music, and the intrinsic qualities of an environment. The performance of Adams' music awakens a place. Moreover, the human intervention fractures the landscape, and the sound fractures the air. Yet, everything around us remains the same; we are swallowed and unnoticed. There is a distinct image that I appreciate during these experiences: a frozen plain accented by distant mountains and in the center of the white shelf walks a single person, trailing small footsteps behind. This image represents the fragility and immensity of nature that is so important to this concept.

### 3.3.1 *Making Special*

As part of this concept is about awareness and experience, the selection of place was both a very meaningful process and decision but simultaneously almost impossible to quantify. The rationalization of one place over another, within certain restrictions, is almost useless. This is one reason why the environments chosen are so general. They maintain a certain level of constants but they do not implicate one specific place in particular. For example, the desert can be described as dry, vast,

unfertile and raw. It was these traits that were so important. They amplified ones awareness of nature's presence. To place a musical performance within this environment, an activity that is most often void of this presence, procures this aspect even further. I am never more vulnerable than when I am in nature.

Specificity of place is not a centralized concern. Aside from a few practical issues (e.g accessibility, and safety), there are many locations that would satisfy the criteria for the performances. *Desert* could take place in Africa, Australia, Asia, South America or Europe. The constants would remain the same. However, every place chosen would retain an individual 'specialness'. The various hills and valleys, rocks, streams, mountains, clouds and sun coalesce into a spirit. The process of performance, whether it is the set-up, performing or striking, releases the spirit within a unique place. This was an unexpected realization.

For many, specific places have meaning. For Adams the Artic Refuge as a place seems to have deep significance. For others, the place they were married or the grave of a loved one carry emotional attachment. Place has power and intimacy. For myself, the locations of *Desert*, *Forest*, *Tundra* are now special. I have made a connection with these places.

The selection of each location, along with the arrival, the performance and the departure, was liminal. Anthropologist Victor Turner uses this term to describe the process of change invoked by cultural rituals and dramas. (Turner, 1982) Though Turner's usage implies strictly social implications, there is no doubt that these performances behaved similarly. The alternate word, liminoid, does not satisfy these

experience as liminoid experiences apply most often to the mundane.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, in many ways this experience is liminal, however, the change that takes place is not solely within the individual, but in the place itself. The place has changed; a new energy has anointed its surroundings. There is ritual, drama, conflict and culture.

To think about these two important words - special and liminal - I realize that they collaborate in provoking awareness. There is a sense of passage when making something special. Dissanayke uses this term as means to explain how art came to existence. Her idea is clear; special things deserve special treatment. There is a passageway between these two states, a limen. A temporality exists between state A and state B. In this instance, the place is not yet special. The performance must take place and the location must return to its original condition. Moreover, it is not the environment that becomes special; the desert and its attributes are only constants. The place and all its detail in time, and matter have become eternally framed in this conception.

Seemingly, to make any place special requires some sort of ceremony, ritual, process or performance. However, this is usually associated with notions of civilization: buildings, statues, reservations, communities or parks. These experiences were meant to abandon this association. Infrastructure was meant to be absent from the experience itself. Despite the apparent aberrations to this idea, (e.g instruments, cars, clothing, etc.) the focus was on place, especially place without infrastructure.

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<sup>16</sup> Turner is quite explicit about the term liminal applying towards cultural rituals. A wedding is a liminal experience, the bride and groom are not yet married, but are not single. Liminoid is a way of turning this application towards mundane experiences, such as a concert. Though, my use of this term liminal is to stress the ritualistic nature of these performance, and challenge the specificity of the term towards cultural rituals.

One counter-example is Michael Heizer's *Double Negative* in Nevada, two enormous incisions in the Earth at the Virgin River mesa. (Heizer, 1969) This artistic gesture only sustains the presence of infrastructure and negates the ‘specialness’ of these places.<sup>17</sup> By destroying the land Heizer, for me at least, has imprinted the destructive energy of humans upon a natural landscape. In this case the environment does not speak and there is nothing to gain from nature. This is the fundamental difference: place in nature reveals more than place via infrastructure. Place via infrastructure tells us about man and his power. Place in nature tells us about our being and reveals the specialness of the energy that surrounds us.

### 3.3.2 *Activism through non-activism*

In the political media, environmental activism is often portrayed as pejorative. Rhetoric like 'tree-huggers' and 'hippies' are used to demoralize more altruistic gestures. Activists can be seen as impeding progress. Though it is an undisputable fact that the environments of the world are being physically destroyed. The reason behind this is not the point of this section. I am not arguing for or against either viewpoint; I am acknowledging the facts. Humans are developing land, some for better and some for worse.

The point of this section is to contrast activism with non-activism through the experiences of *Desert, Forest, Tundra*. The term non-activism is meant to remove the

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<sup>17</sup> In general, I dislike this piece of Heizer as he has destroyed a part of the environment to make a very unsubstantial point.

political connotations involved with activism. I am not an activist; I am a non-activist. I choose to respect nature, while embracing society. My decision to perform Adams' music in natural landscapes was not a political choice, but rather a conscious notion of respect.

In most societies, if something is special it is respected. A building can become a historical site, a park can become a national refuge and an animal can become a symbol of freedom. The previous section poises the specialness of place within the liminality of performance. I have iterated that these experiences are intended for natural environments void of infrastructure. However, this project could have been produced in urban landscapes just as successfully. Environment is the medium, not the cause. Through these experiences one idea became clear. Despite my withdrawal from the label of activist, I was still making a very lucid political statement; environment is special. At no point was my intention partisan, yet it could still be interpreted as such. Art is independent from the artist.

As an activist fights, lobbies, or complains, the non-activist lives by example. Admittedly, I have always intended for these experiences to ameliorate ones respect for nature. I show no shame in this notion. What I avoid is the act of protest. My goals were not focused on exemplifying pity but revealing what already exists. I do not want to *use* nature. I want to experience it.

The performance of Adams' music poses an intended friction between these two mentalities. Adams', a well-known environmental supporter, cultivates his respect and enjoyment of nature through composition. I do the same with performance.



Neither of us confronts our artistic expressions with an agenda, rather we invite a new awareness.

It is evident that this entire project is rooted in the palpability of experience. The subject is not music, John Luther Adams, activism or myself. It is the ground on which we stand, the time in which we are there and the place in which we perform. What remains is the pregnancy of the gesture. Those who come across this foreground are more likely to sustain a reverence for place and a greater respect for nature.

This is perhaps a frame for non-activist art, to repose oneself in his or her surroundings. I am often inspired by the works of Andy Goldsworthy as he arranges the elements of a place (the sticks, leaves, ice, branches) then allows the forces of time and the Earth to carry them away. The ephemerality is compelling; it indicates nature as an artistic accomplice. One experiences time, place and energy.

Eco-artists are part of a similar establishment, however, there are many who admit the politics of their art. One particular definition of eco-art reads, "Ecological art work can help engender an intuitive appreciation of the environment, address core values, advocate political action, and broaden intellectual understanding." (Wallen, 2007) Artist Ruth Wallen quotes this as one of the very first descriptions of eco-art based on an eco-artists' community dialogue. This is where there is a clear delineation between activism and non-activism in art. The works of Wallen and all the other eco-artists are provocative, original and commendable. Wallen writes, "I hope that my projects will provoke a similar investigation for the viewer, encouraging them to develop a relationship to place and/or contemplate an issue, examine their

preconceptions, and envision new possibilities." (Wallen, 2007) I feel almost exactly the same way about this project, for the artist or musician, the gallery, concert hall, or museum are not *real* places. They are infrastructure and do not provide intimate connections with place. There may be pictures of landscapes, interesting ecological exhibits, or benefit concerts but it is place that I feel is the most powerful substance for this type of non-activism.

Common themes among all these examples are preservation, respect, awareness and perception. In my own project there were many reasons other than non-activism for its production. Though I believe the most lasting quality of such a happening will be the specialness of place through experience. The act of performance and musical kinesis venerates each place. As the memories fade, we still embody the potent beauty and trenchant omneity rendered through nature.

### **3.4 An Estranged Environment**

To connect this section with an earlier section of this document, the substantiation of estrangement in musical performance, (see, *The Estranged Performer*) I will begin by explaining environment as: *our surroundings in place, time and situation*. There is an implication of wholeness, and the aggregation of all that is not the Self. The Self cannot control environment, but can incorporate it into interpretation and performance.

In the more traditional music performance venues, environment is quantized

reducing its intervention. Concerts take place in spaces designed to illuminate the performer(s). The only environmental variables that remain independent are the acoustics and perhaps chance occurrences in and around the performance space. In any event, it is the lack of control that compels a unique mode of estrangement.

Sound is a Non-Bias as it remains a separate entity from the Self. The acoustics of a space magnify the performance, which poses an explicit contingency. In this instance, environment vivifies the state of performance. Space as an agent is pervasive. For any performer, the space functions at the highest level of surrounding influences. If a space is too resonant, too small or distracting then the performer(s) may struggle to objectify the idea of the composition. Referring back to Schechner's diagram, (see Fig. 3) space remains as the outer frame within an "axiom of frames" that determines the stringency of the subsequent frames (e.g convention, drama, director, and FREE respectively). (Schechner, PT, p. 17-18) It is clear that space is independent of performance but the reverse relationship is not true.

The earlier examples of estrangement are centralized around the idiom of the Self. Estrangement is based on this principle, a differentiation of awareness among the state of performance. The Self is the central constituent of this modality. Most often we perform within a sphere. We are aware of the audience and our surroundings but these elements are dormant when concerned with the phenomenon of performance. The audience, the lights, the sound system and all other components of production or space rarely, if ever, penetrate the process of interpretation or the state of performance. This is accepted and quite logical.

However, there is a higher level of estrangement that occurs when an environment permeates interpretation and performance. It is more than just an awareness of ones surroundings and it exists more centrally around the performer transcending the particularities of environment. *Desert, Forest, Tundra* perpetuates this estrangement. The environment of this performance is fundamental towards the experience. The estrangement is rooted in the inclusion of environment as an entity altering, affecting or changing the elements of interpretation and performance. As David Abram illuminates that phenomenologically perception is “inherently participatory...[and] the experience of an active interplay, or coupling, between the perceiving body and that which it perceives.” (Abram, 1996, p. 57) Performance is an act of perception.

As elements of perception, distractions do not function in this way. These sort of anomalies are unplanned purportedly and do not become transcended unless it functions within the original intent of the idea. An example of this is John Cage's *4'33"*. Where most discuss *4'33"* as philosophical statement, an idea, or reification of musical listening, I am interested in its performance in accordance with the complete estrangement of ones Self through environment.

The intent of Cage is admirable and sustained in this discussion. However, the realization of this as a piece is an intriguing example of performance. To perform *4'33"* one is instructed to sit in front of a piano while monitoring a stopwatch. As each movement passes, the performer opens and closes the lid for the piano keys to signify these delineations. (Cage, 1952) The listeners are cued to listen to everything around

them and under their own volition music will be formed. A question arises, if the performer in this case is not making the music, then are they still performing? In the instance of walking on stage within the guise of concert, one can be considered 'in performance'. However, in regards to Cage, the performer is acting as a frame or a cue. Without the performer the piece may exist but it is never realized. The performer's presence is the corporeality of the piece. This is the absolute interposition of environment as a source of estrangement.

In any environment there is a potentiality. Cage releases the expectations of performance within the concert paradigm. Despite the numerous manifestations of *4'33"* and its philosophical applicability, as a piece it relies on the potential of the immediate surroundings. Essentially, *4'33"* depends on place over space. With the performer as a frame, one instantly relies on the environment to satisfy the expectations of a concert performance. To realize this piece in New York City's Carnegie Hall could perhaps be extremely relenting. The hall is a superior artifact of concert infrastructure, and is designed to eliminate the very potentiality that Cage is magnifying. In comparison, *4'33"* in Marrakesh at high noon could pose a more invigorating listening experience. Cage mentions in his writings that he performed this piece often, usually alone and in a secluded place. (Silence, Cage, p. 276) In many ways this is more an act of listening than performance and validates the many interpretations of *4'33"* as a philosophy. Regardless, Cage is implicating an agency towards environment.

The opacity of this agency, and the precise nature in which it involves

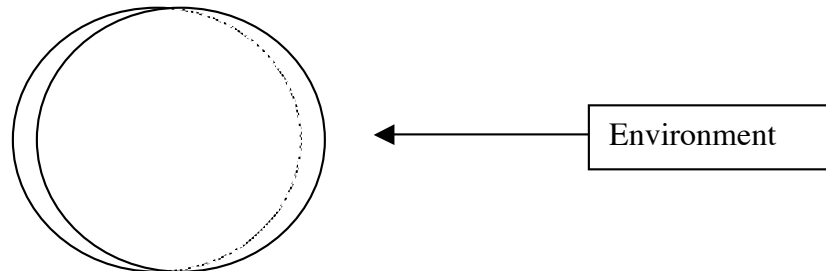
performance, is a basis for estrangement. Initially in this document, estrangement occurs at a very intimate level. It is personalized and often manifests itself as an adjunct to the Meta-Self. In this particular instance, when the environment is treated as an agent of performance the environment or place itself is estranged as well as the performer and the performance. There are connections, associations, and poetic notions taking shape. Place is no longer a passive entity but rather quite active. The focus of the experience is the experience; there is no one entity that supercedes another.

*Desert, Forest, Tundra*, for me, discovered this mode of estrangement. It proposes a context and designs an experience. The potentiality of place is visceral and the performance is liminal. However, without the performance this estrangement is not present. People can travel to the desert, hike and explore, but will not experience their surroundings in the same manner. Performance amplifies the potentiality of place.

Much like in Cage, the performance behaves like a frame. Its presence engages the experience. To use *Desert* as an example, the first location, Box Canyon, is a specific place in the California desert that has a history and is appreciated by many. It may not always be called Box Canyon and in fact the name has no bearing on the place whatsoever. Box Canyon has most likely been around, unchanged, for many thousands of years. However, on February 26th, 2006 the canyon hosted a performance that removed the place from its history, geography, geology and ecology. The performance estranged the environment.

As in the section *The Estranged Performer*, the estranged *Self* is at one level the 'Self beside ones Self'. With a place, or environment, we are not dealing with a person; therefore estrangement exists within those who become part of the experience. This can occur directly or indirectly. There is a link with the previous labels of 'specialness' and 'poeticism'. The performance and all its facets anoint the *place*, of which has not physically changed but whose perception is in constant resonance. As sound resonates, it informs one of his or her surroundings; the same is true of place.

Similar types of treatment occur quite often, mostly in spiritual circumstances. Place is integral in religion. Place can serve as a reminder of events such as death, marriage, even birth. Environments render certain existential properties that have meaning. We see connections between experience and environment through a variety of sources: the *Bible*, the *Torah*, and the *Koran* and their allusion to the desert, Thoreau's *Walden* and water, Mahler and the forest, Langston Hughes and the urban landscape, or J.R.R. Tolkien and mountains. Moreover, these environments render sanctity that conveys emotion. Thus, there is a precedent, *Desert, Forest, Tundra* is not necessarily unique in its action but rather follows a very similar practice with very different intentions. Estrangement implies a removal from an association but similar to a phasing rather than a distancing. There is still a compositing that takes place. One layer is askew from the other layer, but forms a whole, an aggregate.



**Figure 5 - phasing through estrangement - the circle is one unit, but conveys two clear distinctions.**

The concept is similar to the merging of two bodies of water. At the tip of Denmark the North Sea blends with the Skaegen Sea. There is a clear divide between the waters, and two sets of waves come together inline towards the beach. One can stand at the cusp of each body simultaneously. However, it is still intrinsically one body with two separate sources of energy acting upon it. To apply this analogy to estrangement is appropriate. The performances of *Desert, Forest, Tundra* act as performances; the environments are solely environments, but when merged they produce one body, or one experience. The perception of both merge.

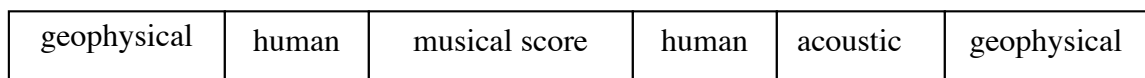
### *3.4.1 Performance and Performers*

Within this experience, the performance is also estranged. It is the discordant layer that askew the surroundings. Like Cage, the performance acts as a frame, without the performance the environment, or its perception, does not change. Simultaneously, the environment frames the performance. In *4'33"* the performer is a



symbol of a performance that is embodied by the surroundings, which exists outside of the actual performance. *Desert, Forest, Tundra* is similar in its instantiation. An interaction between performance and environment still takes place. During *Forest*, there were many noted instances of the sounds and actions of the surrounding trees, water and animal life connecting to elements in the performance. Though like the environment, the concept of performance is phased. There is the initial intention of a performance as a performance, and the performance as estranged by its environment.

The seed of this entire aggregation is energy. What John Luther Adams has achieved are instructions, through music and time, derived from geophysical energy experienced in his own life. These instructions are converted into acoustic energy through human energy. Concomitantly, these energies exist and are released into a void comprised of geophysical energy. A cycle is produced and exemplified through a designed experience. The music is given back to nature.



**Figure 6 - cycle of energy**

This conveys the saliency of choosing *Strange and Sacred Noise*, *Mathematics of Resonant Bodies*, and *Having Never Written a Note for Percussion* as sources of energy. These works are derived from the same intrinsic qualities of the environments in which they are performed. The music is in itself energy.

As these are staged as both experiences and performances, the performers themselves still sustain the same modes of estrangement mentioned in the section, *The*

*Estranged Performer*, in this document. We see that estrangement becomes more removed from the self as we expand from the central figure of this axiom.

{Experience [ environment [ performance [ performers ] performance ] environment ] Experience}

The performers are estranged within the phenomenon of performance, the performance is estranged within the phenomenon of the environment and the environment is estranged within the experience. The modality of estrangement in relation to the Meta-Self is sustained. Only the intensity has changed. The performer is still aware of himself in performance, his body and his surroundings. However, to perform in natural landscapes intensifies the intervention of ones surrounding influences. One becomes hyperaware of ones environment and the energy that can and will intervene. Examples of this may be wind blowing music away, spiders crawling across instruments and performers, branches and leaves falling, the sun hiding behind a cloud or even the suns imminent setting. The performer is ultimately aware that his or her natural surroundings diminish all aspects of the performance. There exists an amount of resistance between these forces. One still tries to absolutely perform at ones given best but this is realized as impossible within the elements of nature. In fact, the entire experience is not structured on such perfection but on the inevitable vulnerability of ourselves within nature.

For me the modality of estrangement employs the in-between state of art and the mundane. *Desert, Forest, Tundra* at its widest conception is art. Estrangement connects the essentials of each paradigm and vivifies our reality. In many ways it is a

passage towards creating meta-realities that circumvent the banality of our consciousness. Art allows us to experience life.

## 4 SUSTAINED METAL

### 4.1 A Synthesis of Performance, Media and Environment

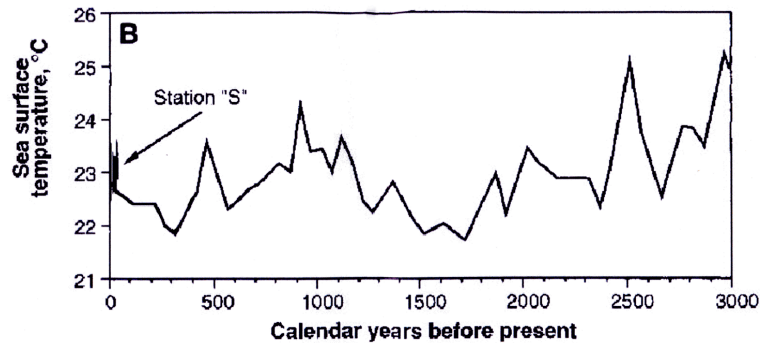
The initial concept for *Sustained Metal* began with John Luther Adam's idea of sonifying meteorological data in his work *The Place You Go to Listen*. As a performer I did not want to relinquish my presence to the modality of an installation. Installations generally are installed and tend to sway outside of performance-time. However, to perform data, as opposed to sonify data, was to me a more palpable means of representing meaning. I was intrigued by the implicit connections the data chosen could convey, though I did not want to present it in a way that was void of human intervention.

The performance, as an installation, does not follow the traditional concert structure. There is no stage, no entrance for the performer, no exit for the performer and no cue for what to listen to or where to listen. This was in part the intent of the project; I was an installed performer. Like any installation, the listener explores and makes a decision as to how they are going to interpret the performance, the space and the media involved.

Applied to the model (Figure 1), this type of performance challenges concepts like Ideology and Manifestation. *Sustained Metal* has no composer in the traditional sense. There is no person with an Idea. In fact the Idea in this instance is within me, despite the fact that I submit the role of 'composer' to the data. It is my Idea to

transpose this data, and create a sound installation. Where then is the substance of the Idea? The Idea here is still divine in that my task always yields to representing the data. The data is divine as it is intrinsic to the Earth and cannot change. Therefore the first node of the central spine, Ideology, implies composition, and represents divinity, though it does not assume that this concept emanates from another person. *Sustained Metal* is my Idea, as the performer and producer, but it remains a part of the Earth. It is an opportunity to experience a part of this environment through sound and performance.

Who then is responsible for the Manifestation? The text in this installation is the data as portrayed in a graphic, essentially an abstraction that shows shape, contour, and trajectory. If we place the Earth as the divine, then the scientist(s), or team, is an equal part of the composition. They are the ones searching for this data and they are the only conduit for this data to get to me. I cannot transcend into my intellect 3000 years of temperature mean, nor can I do the same with another person's Idea. However, the scientist(s) do(es) not assume their data will be used creatively. The nature of meteorological data is not intended as musical composition. Note that the data is still absolute in my point of view, as I have no way of verifying the data, nor is that really my concern.



**Figure 7 - The data used for *Sustained Metal***

A conflict still remains, my Idea is centered on hearing the past geological processes of the Earth which implies that the data I use is a true representation of these processes. Moreover, the means in which I chose to sonically transpose the data should coincide with the behavior of the process. How then can I confirm the absoluteness of this data?

This conflict is very similar to the issues of interpretation in contemporary music. Performers can question the validity of a score, just as I question the reality of this data. As performers we often ask whether the composer ‘really’ meant what is written.<sup>18</sup> I initially ask -- do I intend for this installation to represent something that is intangible? The temperature data exists empirically, as scientists have worked many years to uncover these ‘facts’. Though it is really a theory, or on its own an idea, that

<sup>18</sup> This could be anything from a suspicious note, to a gesture that is technically impossible, or any other remnant of the Idea that may seem suspect. I initially think of Xenakis in this instance as in his final section of *Persephassa* he writes too many instrumental voices, more than can be physically performed. Therefore, as a performer one must question whether this is valid, or find a way to compromise. Often the composer is ambivalent and concedes that the Idea is above them, meaning that this ‘mistake’ perhaps was the initial point.

to another human (whether they are a scientist or not) it is abstract and therefore subjective. Like a musical score, it is absolute by its presence within this phenomenon. It is absolute because that is the role of a text, though its interpretation is far from being absolute. The data is no different than a score; it is the score despite the implied intentions. The absoluteness of the data is not necessary; more substantially it is the way in which the data is interpreted and in this case performed.

In this installation the focal point is how I interpret and perform the data chosen. As I have already decided that it is impossible for me to ‘accurately’ represent the Earth’s past 3000 years of temperature mean as a one-to-one realization, then my next task is to convey meaning to this data. This is no different than if I was to perform *Bone Alphabet*, as when I chose to perform a piece (or data) it becomes objective through me. As mentioned earlier, the audience (or patron, participant, etc.) is not prone to reading a score as a part of any meaningful experience. Schoenberg was quite mistaken to take this point of view. (see Cook, *Music as Performance*) My role is to design this experience, realize the data in a way that is original and provokes thought and introspection.

Using this temperature data, I decided to relate the commonality of ‘hot and cold’ with sound. Hot is analogous to sound being hot, or bright; it contains a large concentration of high frequencies. The same is true for cold, or dark, sound; it would comprise of lower frequencies. The transposition of the data is concerned with timbral change through time. The tam-tam as an instrument is quite good at executing these small gradations. The temperature variegation in the data is only approximately 4° C,

which is a seemingly small bandwidth. Though, acoustically the tam-tam can provide a large bandwidth of frequency, played quietly and with specific mallets, one can control this range to approximately 40 – 2750Hz. My interpretation then is to transpose each degree of temperature with an approximate range of brightness and darkness.

Subsequently, I must also transpose the 3000 years into a more reasonable time period. This could range from three hours to eight hours, which is the limit that a person can most likely sustain a performance. This length of time becomes a central issue for the performer. It is extremely difficult to mentally concentrate on such an intricately detailed process for a long period of time. To gradually change a timbre a few degrees over fifteen to twenty minutes takes a tremendous amount of poise. Physically this process is quite extensive. As this installation unfolded, it became a real exercise in mental and physical sustain. Performing such subtleties is a task that must be practiced and mastered. I realized that this was a technique. As the performer, time became my resistance, the same as rhythm functions in *Bone Alphabet*.

During the performance, I am experiencing different modalities of estrangement, though these modes become suspended. I experience estrangement in longer periods of time. My awareness of time distances me from my body and my performance. The pain I feel in my back, arms and neck removes my attention. I become concerned with reducing this pain, rather than performing the data. As I ignore my body I lose all awareness of my surroundings and only hear the sound I am



producing from the tam-tam. There are long periods of time where I do not recall anything but sound. It is though my vision had been switched off. I am less aware of myself in performance, though as people walk towards my area and observe me I move towards a more focused awareness of my Self on display. The Meta-Self is always present but there is an opacity applied to this feeling. I am not myself, I am performing, but do not feel the intensity as I would on a stage. The focus of the performance is not just me, but the environment I have created. Within this phenomenon, I sway between comfort and imposition. I must sustain this state of performance as an allegiance to the data, the installation and the Idea. Even if there is no one present, I still must perform. I perform for myself.

My physical and performative presence in this installation is fundamental. The performance itself challenges my own notions of body and interpretation. Moreover, it suggests the human intervention associated with the charged political and social inquiry, of global warming and cooling. Though to amplify both the contour of the data and the topic of global warming I extended my performance through four other tam-tams<sup>19</sup>. These instruments became the atmosphere of my environment. They were independent of me, as my only control of their behavior was the shift in timbre (bright to dark) as I performed different areas of my instrument. The behavior of this system represented the data in two ways. The first was a simple one-to-one transposition that I performed, which controlled the excitation of the surrounding instruments. As the data of the Earth gets warmer or cooler, the sonic activity in the

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<sup>19</sup> The four tam-tams are excited by sine waves sent through speakers. These waves illuminate different natural frequencies of the tam-tam. As the tam-tam I performed on becomes bright this changes the natural frequencies of the surrounding tam-tams.

space brightens and darkens respectively. Second, the latency and unpredictable behavior of the surrounding tam-tams are analogous to a similar effect in our own environment. As different variables contribute to an increase in the average sea surface temperature, the effects of this increase are often seen many years later and may not be entirely predictable.

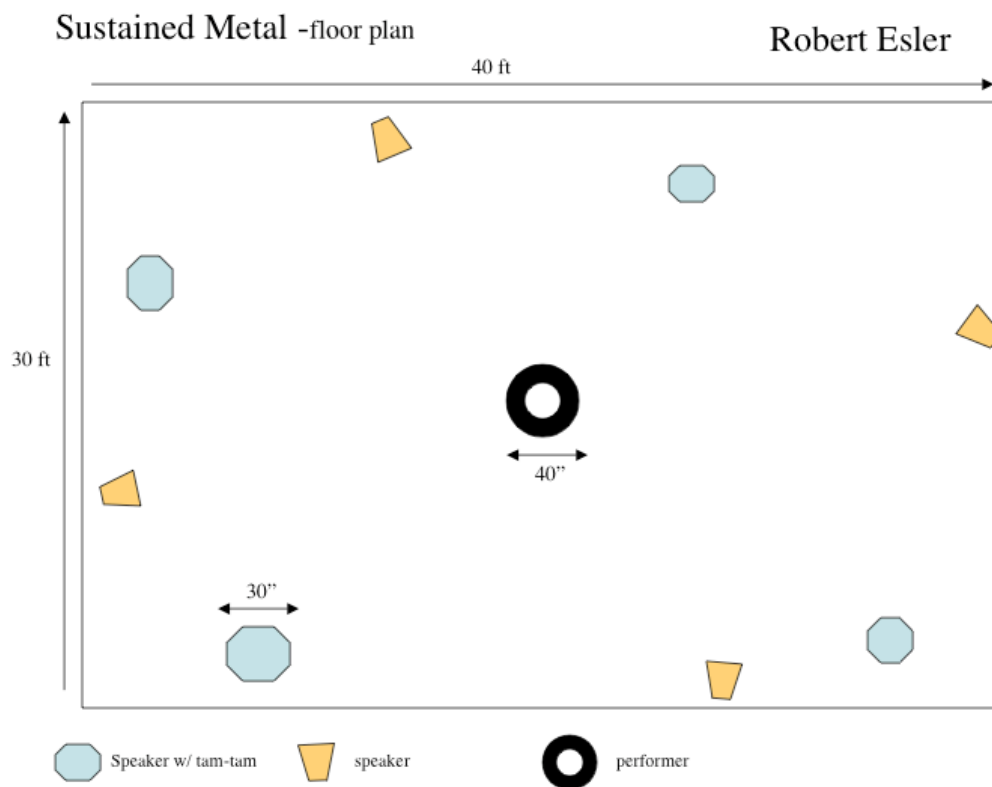
To apply a metaphor towards this performance, my role is that of the past Earth. I am the data, and my performance is absolute within this system. The media that controls the surrounding environment (computer and speakers) is the future Earth, reflecting how things will be if the data persists. As people entered the environment, this relationship became even more apparent. The small perturbations in the room changed the relative brightness, ultimately over exciting the surrounding instruments. To me this reaction reminded me of the presence we have within our own ecosystem. Current debates on the human intervention of global warming, are one cogent analogy to this effect.

Though, similar to *Desert, Forest, Tundra*, this installation was not intended to be activism. At no point was there political rhetoric exposed; global warming is a natural part of the Earth's meteorology, and everyone seemingly understands the urgency of our own role within this issue. *Sustained Metal*, was one way of approaching global warming and cooling. The data did not project what the average temperature of the Earth may be in the future; it was simply a statement of what has already happened. Any other result coincides with the simplicity of the Idea; perform data and extend that data outside of my Self.

While performing this installation I embraced the anxiety between the media incorporated and myself. My control of the system was designed to avoid extraneous influences, though this became impossible. The microphones heard the people, their footsteps, light talking, as well as the surrounding instruments themselves. Though this was not planned, as mentioned earlier, it was a welcomed variable as it only amplified the overall conception. This detail was exemplary of the change a medium applies to desire. I only really wanted the surrounding tam-tams to brighten and darken as per the data, though this did not happen as persuasively as I intended. Moreover, as part of this, the environment mediated this change. Together, the media and environment really controlled this installation. My performance was fundamental, just like ones own conception of themselves within this world. We are fundamental, though all that surrounds us situates this fundamentality.

*Sustained Metal* challenges, and confirms my interpretations of the model in Figure 1. The performance synthesizes many of the thoughts presented in this document, and leaves me thinking of more applications for this phenomenology. I have experienced the divinity of the Idea and the objectification of my own performance function as one entity. The concept of Super-Corporeality is even more mysterious as performance time becomes stretched and extremely brittle. Time itself reveals the complexity of estrangement and the body. Interpreting a text that has no musical source as music and as experience shows that the Idea is not concretely imbedded in the presence of the composer. Though, this model is an approach to contemporary music, it really is more like a first approach. Perhaps the best way to

view performance as a phenomenology is to pull apart the models we as performers encounter and then examine how they have changed when we splice them back together.



**Figure 8 - layout for *Sustained Metal***

## APPENDIX

### **Adams, John Luther - *Strange and Scared Noise* (1991-1997), *Mathematics of Resonant Bodies* (2002)**

*Strange and Sacred Noise* is scored for percussion quartet and *Mathematics of Resonant Bodies* is a percussion solo with tape accompaniment. The solo is modeled from the quartet with some of the material modified from different movements. The quartet consists of six movements for snare drums, tam-tams, drums, sirens, mallet instruments and snare drums respectively. The solo is eight movements long for snare drums, bass drum, triangles, tam-tam, drums, siren, cymbals and snare drums respectively. The character of each of these pieces and their individual movements is a developing structure based on fractal relationships. From this the movements tend to expand and contract revealing 'choirs of inner voices' and intricate sonic topographies. (Adams, 2003) These pieces are about noise and how noise reveals fields of tone and resonance as well as the visceral power of sound. The quartet is approximately 65 minutes and the solo is 70 minutes. John Luther Adams is a freelance composer based in Fairbanks, Alaska. Much of his music is based on geographic locations, and geological processes unique to Alaska.

*Desert, Forest, Tundra* is a performance project that places these pieces in vast and compelling environments. The first part of this project, *Desert*, took place February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2006 in the Anza-Borrego Desert, and the second *Forest*, was held September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2006 on private property in central New Hampshire. *Tundra* has yet

to take place as per the date of this document, but is planned for somewhere in Alaska. The project stages performances of Adams' percussion music (as well as Tenney's percussion piece in *Forest*) as a way of perceiving natural environments, and revealing the potency of place.

**Birchfield, David - Community Art : Resonant Energy (2002-2005)**

For solo percussion and computer. The computer generates all aspects of the piece via a genetic algorithm. This process creates an intrinsic behavior where the piece evolves from a state of apparent chaos towards a state of equilibrium. The genetic processes become apparent when traits of the piece begin to disappear or multiply depending on the fitness levels of the subsequent musical parts. The performer interprets a score generated every 30 seconds that provides a note's frequency range, volume and placement in time. The score is divided into sections, phrases and notes all of which go through the mating process of the genetic algorithm. This process is reflected on the next score generation. The results are a musical structure that evolves towards a consistent state. The performer amplifies this structure by connecting his or her assigned notes to the behavior of the system. As a section evolves the performer evolves and accentuates the salient characteristics. A note exists as any sound, and in the computer these sounds are drawn from a database and processed based on the algorithm. The computer's notes are processed in favor of pitch and frequency range, as the performer can select any instrument or sound. Additionally, the performer provides a dynamic and human-like shape to the texture of

the computer, which mollifies the genetic-like processes of the piece. The length of the piece is variable, but usually last around 8 minutes. There are two versions, one for metal instruments, and the other for shakers and other similar noises. See Birchfield's dissertation for more about the genetic algorithm's utilization. (Birchfield, 2003)

### **Boesmans, Philippe - Daydreams (1991)**

Written for marimba and live sound synthesis. In 1991 the technology available to realize the ideas of the piece was substantial. The piece calls for the marimba to bend in pitch (polyphonically), create ten-voiced chorales, apply echo, reverb, spatialize in 6-channels and record short sections of the performance. This first involved a MIDI pickup system for the marimba, which places a small piezo-ceramic microphone on the node of each bar. The acoustic information is then converted into MIDI and can be used however necessary. The array also included a sampler which at the time could only hold about 128 MB of information. The sampler played MIDI files that were written by the composer. These files acted at times as a second performer, but they also thicken the texture of the piece in certain sections. A reverb unit was also included, which is used sparingly throughout. These were the basic devices that implemented the above effects. Also included in the array is a MIDI merger, MIDI keyboard, foot pedal, Apple IIe computer (running a beta version of MAX), a separate screen for the performer, and a homemade 6-channel spatialization matrix. In 2003, I re-realized the piece to work for a computer, and

sound card reducing all the original technology in the software Max/Msp. The piece is approximately 30 minutes in length.

**Esler, Robert - Sustained Metal (2007)**

‘Sustained Metal’ is a performance installation based on the many provocations of energy on this Earth. Formally, the entire installation is derived from scientific data that exhibits 3000 years of sea-surface temperature variation. The data has been transposed into colorations of sound of which are performed on a tam-tam. Four additional tam-tams surround the space excited by speakers emitting resonant frequencies. As the sound gets brighter or darker, this represents the warming or cooling of the Earth.

In its original inception, Sustained Metal was meant to use technology as a conduit and not as an effect. My intention now is still the same, however, I have discovered that in this project technology acts as a resonator, essentially amplifying the shape of the chosen data. The tam-tam on which I perform is the fundamental catalyst, as the sound brightens the surrounding tam-tams become more active. The computer is tracking this brightness, or darkness, and subsequently changing the activity of the resonant frequencies of the other four instruments. Resonant frequencies are produced by simple oscillators and sent through speakers that rest adjacently to another tam-tam. If the center tam-tam produces a steady frequency that is close, or exact, in comparison to a resonant frequency, that frequency will be slightly magnified from the ambient texture. My performance is spatialized through



four additional speakers. As I pass through each cycle of data (as the Earth warms and cools) the high and low frequencies of the tam-tam are separated and move slowly around the space.

**Ferneyhough, Brian - Bone Alphabet (1992)**

For percussion solo, specifying seven undetermined instruments. The instruments are to be arranged from low to high, and resonant to non-resonant respectively. Adjacent instruments cannot be of the same material. Ferneyhough's musical language is composed like a rhythmic harmony, meaning the ratio between triplets creates rhythmic dissonance, consonance and cadence. The performer must negotiate the complexity of this material and relate to the larger structure that is presented. Ferneyhough reveals that there are thirteen areas of material that have been cut-up and arranged in a through-composed piece. The form of the piece is accented with distinct adjectives that prompt the mood or flavor of the proceeding section. Some of these include: *in modo analitico*, *piacevole*, *convulsivo*, *intransigente* and *danzando*. The piece lasts approximately twelve to fourteen minutes and is considered one of the more technically and interpretively challenge works of the repertoire.

**Magnus, Cristyn - vs. Computer (2005-2006)**

A piece for percussion and computer. The material of the piece begins with a simple score that is generated each time the performer presses a foot switch. This score shows instrument, relation in time and dynamic. The performer manipulates this

material to create 'moves' that correspond to a game space. The game exists as a two-dimensional 'eat-em-up' template, where the performer must 'eat' black dots that appear in the space before they disappear. Moving within the game space corresponds to: FAST-LOUD (up), FAST-SOFT (down), SLOW-LOUD (right), SLOW-SOFT (left). The performer manipulates the material from the score to fit these descriptions. The range between SLOW and FAST and LOUD and SOFT can vary and be modified. In general, the performer must learn these differentiations. If the performer eats a dot, they gain a point, if the dot disappears the computer gains a point. If the computer is winning then the performer is obscured by an increasing amount of processing. If the performer is winning then this processing is decreased and the performer plays a more dominant role in the performance. As points are gained there are sounds associated that resemble the classic 1980's video game language. The game space is design to be mapped to an array of surrounding speakers. This aurally locates the performer's player as well as the computer dots within the performance space. During performance the listener hears the game as opposed to watching it. The game is over when either the computer or performer is granted a solo. The piece is variable in length.

### **Stockhausen, Karlheinz - Solo (1966)**

Scored for any melody instrument and feedback loop. This loop originally was a tape loop with six playback heads. The feedback occurs from the performer's microphone and the tape playback. The performer plays a passage and it is record and

played back. Then the performer plays again, on top of the previous passage, and all of this (tape and performer) gets recorded together. This is the feedback. There are three to four assistants that control the input of each subsequent part: the feedback, the performer and the playback heads. One assistant can also be used to time the sections and cue the performer and other assistants. The piece is of variable length, and provides six different templates in which to construct a score. These templates, called Formschema, provide criteria for selecting phrases, sections and lines of a provided score. The performance is dictated by the stringent instructions of the Formschema. The assistants also follow these instructions as they are asked to create 'perforations' in the feedback, and performer loops, essentially layering holes in the texture to segment the feedback and allowing for more interesting textural balance. In 2005, I re-forged the analog realization into a digital realization. In my interpretation, this eliminated the need for the assistants. Subsequently this inspired the term 'digital autonomy' as a way of asserting the performer's role in electroacoustic music interpretation.

**Tenney, James – Having never written a note for percussion (1971)**

This piece is scored for any percussion instrument, and is not specified as a solo but is often performed in this way. The score calls for the performer(s) to crescendo from the instrument's quietest dynamic to the instrument's loudest dynamic and then decrescendo to almost nothing, creating a <> shape. The piece can be of any length, and is very often performed on a large tam-tam. For me this is a visceral piece to perform as it serves as an impulse for the kinetics of musical sound.

**Xenakis, Iannis - Persephassa (1969)**

*Persephassa* is a percussion sextet that is normally staged around the audience in a six-point circle. The instruments range from drums, metals, woods, gongs, tam-tams, cymbals, stones, affolantes (metal sheets) and whistles. The piece traverses many areas of material ranging from dense clouds to sparse single notes. All these areas utilize the surround aspect of the staging. There are sections where the performers act as individuals, playing the parts without close regard to their surrounding colleagues. Contrastingly there are sections where the entire group functions as one body. This occurs most saliently in the last section of the piece where each instrument creates a continuous pattern within the circle. For example, the drums move clockwise around the circle, and the other instruments move across the circle. Lasting approximately 25 minutes, the piece does not revisit material often, as each section poses a different situation both in sound and performance.

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