13. Reflections from Test Performances: Towards a Living Structure

The following section gathers feedback from two test performances alongside my own reflections. Rather than forming a continuous narrative, these notes are presented in a concise, notebook-like format—capturing observations, tensions, and questions that continue to shape the evolving structure of the project.

13.1 Participant Feedback

1. On Musical Agency and Composition

• Participants reported feeling they were actively composing/improvising, not merely participating.

• Some described a sense of synchronicity, where their internal experience aligned with the collective action—e.g., thinking of a song just as it was being sung, feeling a shared energy during performance.

2. On Inclusion and Group Dynamics

• Many participants felt the process was co-creative, rather than artist-led.

• Some noted difficulty in singing while handling new instruments, especially when expected to use specific techniques.

• Certain songs were self-filtered by participants who felt they didn't match the shared sonic environment.

• External spectators occasionally felt excluded, suggesting a need for broader access points.

• Some participants found the combination of improvised playing and singing to be a cognitively demanding multi-task, adding subtle pressure to the experience.

• One participant noted that the emphasis on making the performance happen quickly led to less time for instrument exploration, resulting in some sonic potentials being left unexplored.

13.2 Personal Reflections

1. On Emergent Structure and Leadership

• Despite initiating some parts (e.g., starting a song), I observed that leadership was not perceived as centralized.

• True initiation often arose organically, as others joined only when they felt ready or connected.

• I also observed that some participants were physically present but made very few outward gestures or sounds. This led me in two different directions of reflection:

> • On one hand, I strongly affirm that presence itself is a contribution. Someone fully present in stillness contributes more than someone fully skilled but not present.

> • On the other hand, I also began thinking about how to encourage more active forms of presence. For instance, a future practice might involve everyone clapping or vocalizing in a circle, with one person stopping mid-way—inviting awareness of how absence affects collective energy.

2. On Improvisational Constraints

• In the first test performance, I only gave one word as theme to trigger song-singing. One-word prompts limited imaginative range—considering layered or themed clusters in future sessions.

• My version of Crackle box's logic (touch = silence) led to surprising interactional strategies, subverting habitual performance norms.

• Participants with prior musical experience brought their own instincts to the instruments, revealing new sonic behaviors I hadn't anticipated.

• The act of improvising vocally while learning a new instrument presented a multilayered challenge—highlighting how ritual performance demands both immediacy and adaptability.

3. On Sound Filtering and Ritual Logic

• Moments where participants chose not to sing certain stylistically mismatched songs revealed an intuitive sense of sonic fit—a form of collective editing aligned with ritual containment.

• Inclusion should perhaps expand into somatic or non-verbal entry points (gesture, breath, presence) for those not holding instruments.

4. On Time and Depth

• The second test performance is significantly shorter than the first one. Short durations flattened the arc of the ritual; future iterations need a longer, gradual build to support transformation.

• Each section—warm-up, collective improvisation, and closing—requires its own unfolding time. Without that, key processes like trust or internal activation cannot emerge.

• Observed that professional musicians showed unexpected discomfort. This may reflect a personal response to ambiguity—but it may also relate to how the ritual setting temporarily strips away the privileges often granted by professional expertise. Whether this unease is individual or structural remains open for further exploration.

5. On Instruction, Ambiguity, and Trust

• Some participants described the instructions as mysterious, but they felt able to follow them because the facilitator was trustable and consistent.

• This ambiguity is not a flaw—it can be a generative space that invites personal response.

• However, to avoid disorientation, I may introduce meta-instructions such as:

> "If I'm not telling you what to do or how to do it in a given moment, and you feel drawn to a particular response, just trust your instinct and go with it."

• This frames ambiguity as intention, not absence.

6. On Responsiveness and the Role of Post-Practice Reflection

• In the second test performance, During the "ah" "oh" "oo" vocal modulation exercise, participants responded more slowly than in the first test.

• It's unclear whether this relates to group composition (e.g., more professional musicians) or individual variation.

• This makes the post-practice reflection moment even more important—not just to process, but to reveal the logic behind certain exercises, so participants can recalibrate their awareness.

7. On Ending Signals, Confusion, and the Ambiguity of Musical Cues

• In the second performance round, I experimented with using rhythmic signals to close the piece.

• Confusion arose because I failed to clearly distinguish between the "warning rhythm" and the "final rhythm."

• Some participants stopped early; others kept going.

• In future, I will clarify which signal means "prepare to end" and which one is the actual closure, especially when verbal explanation is not possible.

8. On Instrument Affordances, Bodily Limits, and the Origins of Rhythm

• I noticed that certain rhythms emerged from the physical constraints of the instruments—not conscious design.

• For example, with the cup instrument, when using the spring to strike the bottom, the natural return speed of the spring and limitations of arm motion made fast rhythms physically impossible.

• This led me to speculate that some "traditional" rhythm–instrument pairings may arise less from symbolic or cultural logic, and more from embodied affordances and material constraints.

9.On Rhythm, Unpredictability, and Action-Based Instruction

• One participant struggled to use the crackle box as a rhythm instrument due to its unpredictability.

• Instead of trying to "fix" this, I reframed the problem as an opportunity:

    If repetition doesn't yield sonic stability, focus on repeating the action, not the sound.

• Future instruction may explicitly state:

    "When the sound is unpredictable, treat the gesture itself as rhythm. Let the sound vary."

10. On Instrument Exploration, Urgency, and the Myth of Mastery

• A participant noted that limited time for instrument exploration meant more attention went toward "playing something" than discovering potential.

• While this is a valid regret, it also confirms one of the project's beliefs:

    "Musical creation does not require technical mastery."

• Participants still created meaningfully with instruments they had just encountered—affirming the power of presence and improvisation over perfection.

11. On Disclosure, Cultural Context, and the Role of Post-Performance Framing

• Many participants carried out actions without knowing their origin.

• I now believe it's important to reveal the structural and cultural logic of the performance—after it has happened.

• A Q&A session, or other reflective framing, could help situate the experience in a wider context —without interfering with its immediacy.

• This honors both embodied participation and cultural responsibility, while letting the ritual speak for itself first.

12. On Instrument Quantity and Spatial Distribution

• Due to the current limitations of production, the test performances were conducted with only one of each instrument type. The remaining roles were filled using other acoustic instruments.

• This setup has two implications. First, the final performance will likely produce a different soundscape, as it will rely entirely on custom instruments, without the tonal variety contributed by standard acoustic tools.

• Second, having multiple copies of each instrument type introduces a new spatial consideration: how should they be distributed within the circle? Options include interspersing different types, grouping by kind, or experimenting with asymmetry.

• These questions remain open and will inform future iterations, where instrument layout becomes part of the compositional logic of the performance.