

Going Visiting: Towards Sympoiesis in Human-Instrument Relationality

Audio Paper Text

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Investigating relations between instrument and human through entanglements of sound, movement, bodily affordances, sensorial reception and socio-musical postures.

How can such an entangled relationality inform shaping micro and macro structures in improvisation and composition?

How do I communicate and interact with my instrument in sympoiesis?

What could be known from our relation together?

“Sympoiesis is a word coined by Donna Haraway, she says: “Sympoiesis is a simple word; it means making-with Nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic or self-organizing” (Haraway, 2016, p. 58).

Sympoiesis (making-with) is interlinked with becoming-with expressed effectively through a term introduced by Karen Barad (2007): intra-action. Intra-action suggests that, entities emerge within their relationship through mutual entanglement. Agency is not something or someone has, it is about enactment. It is doing and being relationally, contingent on exchange.

Judith Butler states: "We don't act without being acted on. We don't generate ourselves. We're not self-created creatures. We're always moved by something and it's only because we're moved that we act." (McMullen, 2017, p. 31)

I work with grand pianos, objects placed within it, and electroacoustic processing. I am interested in exploring forms of collaboration with them, where they are active participants in our interactions, shaping my ideas, intentions, actions, and engagement with them.

I work with various approaches including non-fully predictable behaviors and indeterminate processes in my interactions with objects and electroacoustics.

The physical qualities of the objects, the risk, potential, and imprecision involved in their behavior, helps me break away from my habitual thinking-making patterns. I encounter unexpected, un-planned or un-anticipated sounds and relationships.

This fragile relational field opens a heightened mode of attention; reminding me to be gentle and attentive in listening, sensing, moving and responding.

Studies in sound, movement and sensorial entanglement are studies in listening. Listening to the minute details of sounds, listening to the sensations my body receives, listening through movement and gestures enacted in space, listening to myself listening, listening with empathy, with entrainment, with curiosity, with desire, with surprise, risk, offering, supporting,

What are the conditions to activate and cultivate a multi-layered listening-responding practice?

The objects I use in my current piano setup include different shapes and sizes of neodymium magnets, as well as wooden and bamboo sticks, various materials and thicknesses of strings & tapes, e-Bows, rubbers, balls made of wood, rubber, & stone, gaffer tape, rosin, a cloth to rest the objects on, string cleaner.

The specific materiality of each object, their shape, and weight invites and evokes actions, gestures, and sounds, suggesting musical ideas and structures.

Getting to the core of how I think and act in sympoietic musicking means engaging with the relationships that I develop with these objects, through experiences that they provide, and the responses that I receive from them.

Practice journal entry: November 9, 2024: During practice while the stone ball buzzes on the hitch-pins responding to a key pressed, I found my other hand rest on a string that receives this vibration through touch: Finding myself listening to tactile sensation as musical information.

Practice journal entry: November 30, 2024: Sometimes it starts with a sound, sometimes, a gesture, sometimes a sensorial decision, and my listening continues responding to one of the different listening modes each modality has to offer. While some processes and decisions are traceable—like identifying a sound event that influenced an action—many moments are complex and elusive. What condition is required for having access into those spaces? What are those spaces made of?

I explore sound-energy-movement continuums with motion and gesture models to further guide and shape my relation with instruments.

I work with Temporal Semiotic Units, developed as a tool for analyzing electroacoustic music in Music and Informatics Laboratory of Marseille (Rix, E., Formossa, M. (2008)); and Gesture Archetypes developed as an acousmatic composition tool by Annette Vande Gorne (2018).

I work with these two models that share common characteristics, to guide my listening and playing. At different levels, they express forms of temporal progression, and morphological qualities of sound, through factors such as sound matter, duration, energy trajectory, event and phrase structure, and semiotic meanings that unfold over time.

I explore the role of bodily activity and tactile-kinesthetic knowledge in shaping epistemology, inviting "bodily knowing" in the practice. I let sensorial information as well as affordances of movements of my body in relation with the instrument influence various structural, musical, and aesthetic decisions.

I am interested in understanding how each object, each sound, movement trajectory, sensorial information, shape my listening, thinking, relating, imagining, as well as aesthetic choices. These traces and stories reveal complex layers of the musicking process.

Working within a complex listening-responding practice, asks for understanding various factors at play, such as: the acoustic capacity and perception of sounds produced, the physiology and movements, as well as decoding my own perception in relation.

In order to trace and understand these relations, and the information they provide, I began to unpack various elements of the process, categorizing objects, playing methods, gesture, movement trajectories, sound types, sensorial responses, electroacoustic processes, creating maps and tracing their relation with each other.

I realize that this type of organization and categorization overly simplifies the complexity of practice, however it helps me understand and trace various decisions I make, allowing me to approach relations and the musical structures from different angles.

Hannah Arendt states: "To think with an enlarged mentality means that one trains one's imagination to go visiting" (Arendt, 1982, p.43)

I consider this practice a model for cultivating and training the mind and imagination to go visiting. It is a reflective practice for improvisation and composition, that is about attending, listening, caring, and negotiating.

I go visiting a variety of companions in my practice, the scholars whose theoretical postures I engage with, the Piano & Objects, Electroacoustics, Gesture and Motion trajectories, the Playing methods, and Sensorial information. These companions guide my listening, choices, and actions as I navigate what can be known and created from our relation together.

This process unfolds through an entangled socio-sonic system, from within the act of doing, and going visiting in pursuit of sympoiesis.

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