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EDITORIAL

# Bodily Instruments and Instrumental Bodies: Critical Views on the Relation of Body and Instrument in Technologically Informed Performance Environments

Franziska Schroeder

I am delighted to introduce this double issue for *Contemporary Music Review*. For this issue I invited writers from very diverse backgrounds to reflect on sound in the widest possible sense in relation to the technologically informed body. I was seeking stimulating ideas from writers who were prepared to define or critically examine the threshold conditions of instrument and performer, who wanted to challenge continuities or discontinuities of instrument and performer, and who were eager to question not merely the role of the instrument, but the nature of the instrument itself, as well as its relation to the performing body.

The need to call upon writers to engage in critical discussions on this subject arose out of the view that our technologically informed lives have immensely altered the ways in which ‘instrumental’ music is being performed, and indeed defined. I was particularly interested in views that would move beyond the idea of the instrument as bodily extension, as well as in works that would redefine the boundary of performer and instrument and push the discussion into unknown or under-examined territories.

In this double issue the reader will encounter a wide variety of papers that tackle the subject of performer/instrument from all sorts of angles. A rather similar concern voiced by many of the writers, however, is the blurring of definitions, not only of composer, performer, and instrument, but also of what constitutes the performer or the instrument, what or who is ‘man’ and what or who is ‘machine’, something that has been rendered fuzzy by the application of new technologies. I will provide a very

## 2 *Editorial*

concise overview of the individual works, and as all papers elaborate in one way or another on at least one of three particular concerns (body, instrument, and performance) I have chosen to place the works under subheadings that reflect those areas.

Having just demarcated these three areas I want to point out that they should not be understood as somewhat clear delineations. Evidently, these categories are rather fluid, and hardly any paper fits neatly into one of the categories. Indeed, a number of papers precisely address the in-between condition of these fields. These are papers that critically examine the gap between performer and instrument; that attempt to expand (and also contract) the performance concept, or that set out to provide an entirely different view on this somehow related ‘trio’ of concerns.

William Echard’s work ‘Sensible Virtual Selves: Bodies, Instruments, and the Becoming-concrete of Music’ turns to Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy of virtuality in order to provide a possible way of rethinking music, instrument, and body. In particular, Echard illuminates a disjunctive coupling of performer and instrument that also points towards the ‘erotics’ of the musical.

This erotic relationship of performer and instrument is hinted to in ‘Echo’s Body: Play and Representation in Interactive Music Software’ by Martin Dixon. Dixon examines interactive music technologies with a view to the concept of play as outlined in Gadamer’s work ‘Truth and Method’. For Dixon the instrument has its own being ‘that stands up to us and flees from us’. He sees the instrument not merely as receiving *from* us, but as having an equal role within a poly-directional structure, in which the instrument also gives us ‘the hand or the lip or the breath’. In the instrument, ‘[t]ouch is given back to us as sound’.

The erotic relationship of instrument and performer becomes elaborated in detail in Pedro Rebelo’s paper ‘Haptic Sensation and Instrumental Transgression’. Rebelo posits the relationship between a performer and an instrument as ‘a multimodal participatory space’, rather than one of control, in which the haptic relationship of performer/instrument can become an erotic one. Drawing on the writings on eroticism by Georges Bataille, Rebelo argues that in order for this relation to become an erotic one, there needs to be difference. And for this, the instrument, rather than as an extension to the body itself, must be placed in-between the performer and a desired state, in which hierarchies between subject and object, between the performer and instrument, are disposed of.

### **The Body**

The body is examined by a variety of writers as a central structure that holds a privileged position in a performance environment, as something that moves and listens. Nicholas Brown, in ‘The Flux between Sounding and Sound: Towards a Relational Understanding of Music as Embodied Action’, celebrates the body as such central being. For Brown the body in action must urge composition to (re)connect our ears to sounding movement.

Other authors preoccupy themselves more with the moving body. Julie Wilson-Bokowiec and Mark Alexander Bokowiec ('Kinaesonics: The Intertwining Relationship of Body and Sound'), in examining the relationship of the body with computer technology, open up an avenue of technology as reconfiguring the experiences and sensations of the body. The authors' Bodycoder performance system serves as a means for highlighting the adaptability and resourcefulness of the body as well as the body's capacity for change.

The body is celebrated as an adaptive device in 'Music Cognition and the Bodily Approach: Musical Instruments as Tools for Musical Semantics' by Mark Reybrouck.

In 'Embodied Sound: Aural Architectures and The Body', Gascia Ouzounian rejoices in the body's unique potential, or more precisely in the body as a 'set of possibilities', in particular when engaged in the act of listening, in which, for Ouzounian, the body stands in close relation to the environment. This she refers to as 'embodied reception'.

Miriama Young, in 'Latent Body – Plastic, Malleable, Inscribed: The Human Voice, the Body and the Sound of its Transformation through Technology', examines ways in which recording technology has contributed to the production of the disembodied voice, and how this technology has significantly altered our perception of the human body.

### **The Body/Instrument**

Martin Iddon's work 'On the Entropy Circuit – Brian Ferneyhough's *Time and Motion Study II*', examines the body/instrument relation by investigating the link of cellist and live electronics in Ferneyhough's work. Iddon examines the body and the instrument, where the body can be seen to be the body of the performer or the body of the instrument; but also, the cello may be the instrument in the same way that the electronics constitute the instrument. It is indeed this blurring of boundaries that Iddon brings into focus. He considers the body/instrument relationship not as standing in opposition to each other, but with a view to Donna Haraway's cyborg model, more as a relation akin to an 'integrated composite musical entity'. Iddon posits the organism and machine relation as a hybrid structure, in which the distinction of man and machine, of creator and created, of mind and body, or of natural and artificial becomes ambiguous.

A close relationship, indeed a rather fetishised bond, of performer and instrument is suggested by Stuart Favilla and Joanne Cannon in 'Fetish: Bent Leather's Palpable, Visceral Instruments and Grainger'. Here, Percy Grainger and his whips stand as a metaphor for the engagement of performer and instrument, which, in analogy to whipping oneself, can be seen as something obsessive and compulsive, in which the instrument occupies a similar fetishised position to the human body as the whip. The authors examine their own instrument-making processes and design strategies as explored in their Bent Leather Band, with particular focus on the idea of ensemble playing, which, they argue, is under-explored in the field of new instrument design.

#### 4 Editorial

In ‘The Blindness Paradigm: The Visibility and Invisibility of the Body’, Paulo C. Chagas looks at the relation of body and instrument, of man and machine, by considering issues of the body’s visibility and invisibility. Chagas’ argument derives from the novel *Blindness* by José Saramago, which also forms the basis to Chagas’ composition *Canções dos Olhos (Augenlieder)*. Taking as a basis the idea that vocal and instrumental gestures make visible the gesture of performance, whereas digital gestures render the gestures of performance invisible, Chagas addresses the issue of how a dialogue between different kinds of systems, i.e. man and machine, can occur. However, rather than conceiving of interactivity in terms of the connection of body and technology, Chagas extends the idea of interactivity into ‘embodiment of the collaborative experience that materializes the creation process in the form of the work itself’.

My own article ‘The Voice as Transcursive Inscraper: The Relation of Body and Instrument Understood through the Workings of a Machine’ examines the gap between instrument and performer by turning towards Gilles Deleuze’s concept of the machine, specifically a machine’s relation to flows and the possible breaks in the flows.

The body’s relation to various interfaces is examined in ‘Embodiment: The Body in Algorithmic Sound Generation’ by Jin Hyun Kim and Uwe Seifert. In particular, the authors consider the concept of ‘embodiment’ in the realms of philosophy, engineering, cognitive science and media theory. The authors argue for the development of an embodied cognitive science of music, in which embodiment and questions of the body’s integration form vital ingredients. Thus, embodiment in bodily based algorithmic sound generation needs to take into account the physical body and what the authors refer to as a ‘data’ or ‘semiotic’ body, terms derived from the German philosopher Sybille Krämer. This aspect of double mediation of the body should be, so they argue, at the centre of musical processing.

#### **The Instrument**

Yolande Harris in her work ‘Inside-out Instrument’ tackles the concept of the instrument itself. Harris argues for a shift of the instrument in relation to the body. For Harris, the instrument must now be understood as distributed and fragmented in space; the instrument is one that the body inhabits and navigates, rather than grasps.

#### **The Performance**

In redefining notions of the body and the instrument, the concepts of performance and performance space inevitably become reconsidered in the process.

Thus, the reader will find several papers that examine this particular space. For example, Tim Sayer, in ‘A Conceptual Tool for Improvisation’, proposes an expansion of the traditional performance parameter space. He suggests adding cognitive and psychological aspects of language as a stimulus for the development of new computer-based performance interfaces.

Adam Overton in 'Invisible Performance and the Virtuositic Body', on the other hand, does not consider notions of expansion, but approaches performance in its most contracted and minimal form. For Overton, even thinking constitutes a performance; he argues that we can discover a performance 'when we simply sit and pay attention'.

The idea of reducing, of the minimal, is recalled in Julio d'Escriván's 'To Sing the Body Electric: Instruments and Effort in the Performance of Electronic Music'. D'Escriván turns towards the idea of effort, or more precisely effortlessness, as encountered in electronic music. He persuasively argues that since our lives are marked by a detachment from physical effort, even the most minimal gesture must now be musically valid. By proposing a sentic approach to music, D'Escriván urges us to widen our appreciation of new performance skills that are continually emerging.

And finally, I am glad to include the showcase article 'The Networked Performance Blog' by Helen Thorington, who is one of the founders of Turbulence.org, a blog dedicated to networked-enabled performance that was launched in July 2004. Thorington discusses various intriguing examples that highlight the shifting relationship of artist, artwork and audience.

I am also indebted to a man who very much withstands a single descriptor, a man who has given permission to use his work for the cover of this issue. This man is not only an artist and musician, but also an interventionist (he has been arrested and imprisoned on various occasions for his spontaneous interventions in museums), a campaigner, a terrorist and demonstrator, as well as an actionist and rioter: Istvan Kantor. I think that Kantor's work is especially suited for this journal as his performances provocatively explore the combination of body and technology, while delving into the sonic world of the body itself as well as deriving sounds from objects, scrap-metal and machines. For more see: <http://home.interlog.com/~amen/>

I not only believe that this double issue constitutes an important contribution to the field of music and performance, but also that it highlights something very important about performers' and composers' working processes in particular: a move towards expressing views in a more critical and theoretically aware fashion. Something for which I think the discourse of music and performance now has an increasing demand.

