Interdisciplinary Performance Practices for Western Art Music and
The Reception of Interdisciplinary Performance

By

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B.A., Simon Fraser University, 2003

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

This study proposes new, interdisciplinary performance practices for music, and critiques reception strategies for existing inter-arts performance. The first section of the study examines the ways in which music performance practice intersects with questions of authorship and adaptation, and formulates methods of interdisciplinary performance practices by drawing on the literature of Critical Theory and post-structuralism. The second part of the study proposes methods of reception that critique the necessity for pure contemplation and conceptualizes how distracted reception offers an important alternative for interdisciplinary, and conceptually polysemic, performance work. The principal motivation behind both of these proposals for the re-contextualization of performance practice and reception is based upon a critique of transparent and monosemic communication. Thus, the study critiques structures of evaluation and presentation that have at their core an objectivist approach that strives for transparency at the cost of acknowledging polysemic complexity and difficulty. The study concludes that several alternatives to the objectivist traditions of criticism, in this study represented by the concepts of interpretive violence, distracted reception and conceptual polysemy, can indeed be used to promote heightened conceptual awareness.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The following writing addresses the under-theorized subject of inter-arts performance. More specifically, it proposes new, interdisciplinary performance practices for music, and critiques reception strategies for existing forms of inter-arts performance. The first of these proposals, contained in chapter three, examines the ways in which music performance practice intersects with questions of authorship and adaptation, and formulates methods of interdisciplinary performance practices that draw on the literature of Critical Theory and post-structuralism. Chapter four proposes methods of reception that correspond to these interdisciplinary performance practices. Firstly, it provides both a critique of the necessity for pure contemplation evidenced in modernist writings. Secondly, it conceptualizes how distracted reception offers an important alternative reception strategy for interdisciplinary, and conceptually polysemic, performance work.

Before moving into these proposals however, it will first be necessary to provide a background to the numerous discourses the study draws upon. This contextualization, in Chapter 2, will include introductions to reception studies in interdisciplinary performance; performance practices, particularly the differences between adapting musical scores and theatrical scripts; hermeneutics in relationship to notions of violent interpretation and adaptation; and finally, a contextualization of these within the larger framework of Critical Theory and Musicology.

The principal motivation behind both of these proposals for the re-contextualization of performance practice and reception (and the dérives they will at times deviate into) is based upon a critique of transparent and monosemic
communication. By this I am referring to a critique of structures of evaluation and presentation that have at their core an objectivist approach that strives for transparency at the cost of acknowledging polysemic complexity and difficulty. The study thus examines the assumption that alternatives to objectivist traditions of criticism, in this study represented by concepts of interpretive violence, distracted reception and conceptual polysemy, only numb discernment and exhaust the capacities of human thought through continual relativistic play. Influenced by the didactic orientation of Brechtian and conceptual art practices, my critique assumes a position that promotes explicit dialogic and critical interaction as part of the performance practice and reception processes.

The methodological framework employed throughout this research is, as the art works analyzed, interdisciplinary. Although widely varying methods are applied, drawing on discourses of authority and authorship to theories of polysemy, each is to be located within the framework of Critical Theory. My discussion on performance practices grafts rhetorical, theatrical, Post-critical and intertextual methodologies to generate interdisciplinary models for music performance. The examination of distracted reception takes a more historical approach, tracing the development of reception in both theory and practice from Descartes and Alberti through to Cage, R. Murray Schafer and Nicholas Bourriaud.

The concepts explored throughout the following chapters, including alternative and interdisciplinary performance practices for music, violent interpretation¹, distracted

¹ 'Violent interpretation', to be examined and critiqued in greater detail in chapter 2, refers to forms of criticism, interpretation, and direction, that radically alter the canonical understanding of a work's meaning. In particular, it has been linked to Critical Theory-oriented readings (deconstructive, feminist, queer, Psychoanalytic etc.) that revise what is commonly assumed to be authorial intent. Thus 'violent interpretation' is has historically been linked to ideas of slander, damage, and unethical practices of criticism.
reception, and the difficulty of conceptual polysemy, may, to the reader, seem to perpetuate the Situationist ideals of nihilism, destruction and devaluation of art. These same concepts are attacked by critics who feel that they contaminate rigorous study and perpetuate a lazy relativism in which the writer no longer needs to be concerned with being accountable for his statements. As my thesis will show, this is simply not the case. While these concepts do indeed share a playful vagrancy that may at times seem to court the convoluted for its own sake, their greater significance is located in their ability to generate engaged and committed critique that adopts a more active and political stance.
CHAPTER 2
BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Reception Studies in Interdisciplinary Performance

Unlike the death proclamations heard throughout the 20th century for so many artistic traditions and master narratives (opera, orchestral performance, the string quartet God, the Author, the character, painting), I do not in any way intend to claim that traditional performance practices for music are dead. Instead, the priority this study is to re-evaluate the authorial positions held by composer, musician and critic/musicologist, and how these roles can be reconfigured through interdisciplinary performance practices. The following chapters examine the oppositions between modes of evaluating music and those of experiencing music-based interdisciplinary work.

My use of the term 'interdisciplinary performance' in this writing refers to a very specific form of interdisciplinarity. This conceptualization of interdisciplinary performance is based upon the idea of *inter-esse*, defined as a space of in-between-ness and pull. This is to say that my understanding of interdisciplinarity is predicated upon a desire to create liminal spaces within which there exists a pull between disciplinary structures, content and genres. Much of this pull is, in turn, underpinned a recognition of disciplinary or essential forms. An interdisciplinary performance must exhibit a pull between distinct genres great enough that one has difficulty categorizing it as any one thing. It is not choreographic enough to be defined as dance; it is not performed within the rituals and form of music enough to be considered music. Opera is not an interdisciplinary form, because it is never pulled far enough away from the conventions
of music performance. Thus, 'inter' refers to not satisfying enough conditions to be a part of a specific discipline. In constant ontological flux, it is equally a form of anti-disciplinarity. Though this definition may at first glance seem to be suggesting a radically different form of interdisciplinarity than the more common, and entirely mis-used, definition of interdisciplinarity as "many disciplines working in conjunction," it is actually a return to what Barthes suggests as form that emphasizes the in-between. In Barthes view, as in my own, that which is interdisciplinary ruptures and moves between traditional disciplinary and generic boundaries:

...it begins effectively (as opposed to the mere expression of a pious wish) when the solidarity of the old disciplines breaks down -- perhaps even violently, via the jolts of fashion -- in the interests of a new object and a new language neither of which has a place in the field of the sciences that were to be brought peacefully together, this unease in classification being precisely the point from which it is possible to diagnose a certain mutation.²

Thus, returning to my statement regarding opera as a disciplinary form, it retains this distinction of disciplinarity by the emphasis it places upon music. Though it is true that it unifies the visual, sonic, dramatic and choreographic, its essence can almost always be pinpointed as music. Opera is not a mutation in the way Barthes describes; it is certainly a form in which the arts are brought together harmoniously under the guidance and dominance of the musical.³

Based upon this notion of interdisciplinarity, this research has developed from practice-based questions regarding how an audience negotiates discipline-specific modes of viewing in a performance that incorporates many artistic disciplines. It has also

³ There are, of course, exceptions to this rule. Gertrude Stien's Operas are an example of purely literary operas that were not meant to contain music, considered by the author to function under the rubric and accoutrements of opera.
evolved from recurring conversations with peers and colleagues regarding the hyper-signification of elements in interdisciplinary performance. Just as a photography exhibition, play, or installation each contain their own specific and unspoken codes for how the viewer should best receive the work, in the modernist aesthetic of listening, the ‘pure contemplation’ of sound (immovable in one’s chair, in darkened surroundings, and with an absence of peripheral movement and ‘noise’), is often revered as the ideal way to experience a musical event. As a challenge to this aesthetic, interdisciplinary performance, with simultaneity of elements as a basic tenet, foregrounds a dialogic experience, providing questions for the viewer of how to read the elements of the work. It disrupts purely formalist readings that highlight the unity and teleology of structure.

Along with the benefits of interdisciplinary performance practice comes an equal degree of challenge. Indeed, it is the very focus on the dialogic nature of the practice that challenges audiences to engage with the work as a form of critical thought. Instead of providing the object as answer/statement, the artist is involved in dislocating the stability of meaning. The process of viewing reflects this dislocation of meaning in its superimposition of frames for reception. The inclusion of live performance in an installation may superimpose structures of musical perception with those of visual perception. Should these musicians then be seen as objects? Should the movement and gesture be seen as theatrical? Should the music be heard as subtext? In this dialogical paradigm, artistic engagement can become threatening. There are often far less contextual frames to inform the viewer if s/he is ‘getting it’, or even if s/he is viewing what which is meant to be viewed. Alternatively, there can also be far too many contextual frames as possible options for reception. Recognizable structures in one disciplinary form are
contradicted, or subverted by those of another. The pianist moves – is this choreographed or is it purely a by-product of sonic production? Anxiety can be generated by interdisciplinarity’s transgression of historically enforced forms of pure viewing – the white cube of the gallery, and the proscenium, illuminated stage and darkness enveloping the audience in the theatre. In effect we have cultivated venues of intense focus at the expense of viewer-centered experience. The openness of viewer-centered distraction seems in many cases to be too overwhelming. The in-betweenness or inter-esse⁴ of the work creates tension, or its opposite, disengagement.

Moreover, this tension extends to the abundance of simultaneous signs in interdisciplinary performance that confounds the perception of linear narrative, while at the same time offering the possibility of narrative readings. Narrative theorists in fact suggest that the viewer often adopts narrativization as a ‘coping mechanism’ in relation to interdisciplinary and fragmented performances.⁵ In this instance, spectators channel the overload of information into narrative layers. By narrative I am not referring to specific stories, although this may be one form of narrativity, but instead a logical series of events that fit a specific pattern, as in Vladimir Propp’s structuralist theory of folktales.⁶ As conceptualized by Monica Fludernik, narrativization is a reception strategy used in reaction to works that contain unreadable and radically inconsistent fragments of

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⁴ "Interesse or 'inbetweeness' as an experiential structure of aesthetic interactivity nurtures a sensibility for heterogeneity and contingency and reflects the present urge of individuals to project always in a provisional sense their lives as a work of art; Dasein becomes Design." Henck Oosterling, “Philosophy, Art and Politics as Interesse: Towards a Lyotardian post-Kantian Aesthetics,” *Issues in contemporary culture and aesthetics*, 9 (1999): 85.


narratives. The reader/viewer tries to recuperate the inconsistencies between potential narrative signifiers through a re-structuring of actions and event structures. In addition to narrativization, a diverse array of reception practices, referred to as cognitive schemata by psychologists, are subconsciously deployed by the viewer depending upon the context: a business meeting, lunch with a friend, a sporting event, a thesis oral exam. Within these frames, the relationships between subject and object changes how we gather, receive and interpret information, which, in turn changes the information results. The reception of art, like perception in general, cannot escape Heisenburg’s uncertainty principle or the ‘observer effect’ in sociological research. Within artistic events alone there is a diverse assortment of reception strategies – structural listening, narrative, musical, visual and kinetic semiotic reading – that the viewer usually employs automatically. In interdisciplinary performance however, these cognitive schemata become entangled, requiring the viewer to adopt a strategy (like distraction) that allows for a fluid reading of disjunction, fragmentation and juxtaposition.

Another important factor guiding reception is disciplinary history. In this context, we contemplate how the artifact departs from or continues from what we know of that disciplinary tradition. The diversity embodied by interdisciplinary performance leads to a hyper-signification (and sometimes read as an under-signification) of signs. Within interdisciplinary performance, all elements are potentially meaningful, in various ways to various artistic disciplines. The disciplinary frames normally used to contextualize meaning are layered. An example of this occurs in the relational installations Untitled 1996 (tomorrow is another day) (Appendix 1), and Untitled, 1999 (tomorrow can shut up and go away) by Rirkrit Tiravanija. In both pieces, Tiravanija replicates his apartment.

complete with kitchen, bathroom and fixtures for viewers to occupy and use. In each
instance, the gallery remains open 24 hours to allow the house to be occupied as such.
Although the works themselves, as installations in a gallery, cannot be categorized as
interdisciplinary or inter-arts pieces, they do engage multiple, or ‘inter-’, reception
strategies. Particularly for the viewer uninitiated in the conceptual and relational
discourses of this work, Tiravanija’s creations pose the challenge of negotiating several
viewing practices that simultaneously invoke the sacrilized perception of gallery space,
and the subsequent re-negotiation of use-value of objects in this space, the convivial
space of a party, and the implied intent of conversation with those who are strangers.
These multiple frames of perception, “produce modes of sociability that are partially
unforeseeable,” as it becomes the work of the viewers/participants to define the
interaction. Relational works such as Tiravanija’s expose the context of containment and
specificity enforced in gallery space and promote open interaction with the work that
challenges modernist curatorial practice.

**Performance Practice, Part I: Disparities Between Adapting Scripts and Scores**

Debora Cartmell’s examination of Cinematic adaptation defines three categories:
transposition, the adaptation between genres; commentary, adaptations that comment
upon the source text; and analogue, adaptation that takes the idea, concept or narrative
features of a source text, but radically alters the basic features of the source. In both
commentary and analogue forms, postmodern adaptations of dramatic works have

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9 Deborah Cartmell, *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*, eds. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda
become commonplace. The general acceptance of postmodern adaptation is widespread in most theatre communities. Within the discourses of theatre aesthetics and dramaturgy, current questions regarding the ethics of theatrical adaptation can seem dated. The German term *Regietheater*, literally meaning ‘director’s theatre’, developed as a pejorative criticism of the director’s imperative to present re-contextualized and deconstructed adaptations of canonical plays. The debates on *Regietheater* and the limits of interpretation have had a long and exhausting history within the theatre community. The reign of *Regietheater* in Germany, often dated from Heiner Müller’s 1970’s performances to Alexander Lang’s reinterpretation of Brecht’s “The Round Heads and The Pointed Heads” in 1983, spawned many heated debates. These were paralleled in North America following Richard Schechner’s 1969 adaptation of Euripides’ “The Bacchae” in “Dionysus in 69” and the appropriation controversy regarding the Wooster Group’s use of Arthur Miller’s “The Crucible” in “L.S.D. (...Just the High Points...)” in 1983. Although discussions on theatrical adaptation certainly continue today, when they do arise they do so with some sense of tiredness, and as a mere rehearsal of hermeneutics rather than an impassioned exploration of the topic. It is now commonplace to refer to Post-dramatic performance in order to conjure the context of adaptive performance that uses works instead of embodying them. What is most telling in the current literature on *Regietheater* is that the majority of critiques, most of them dismissive, now appear in

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operatic reviews. Theatrical adaptation is generally accepted as a viable performance practice for staging a play. Some contemporary playwrights, the most notable being the American, Charles Mee, enforce the rule that every production should be a complete revision of the script provided, a radical variation that incorporates contemporary references to current events, local histories, and radical departures from the textual content. Performances of Mee's plays should only exist as re-mixed collages.

In contrast to the abundance of commentary and analogue theatrical adaptations, similar forms of performance-based adaptation for Western art music seldom occur. In fact, other than jazz and muzak, which can be considered forms of transposition adaptation, the idea of a staged adaptation of 'absolute music' is a relatively foreign concept. With this last statement I wonder what the reader imagines such an adaptation of Western Art music to be. Can we imagine a feminist adaptation of Beethoven's Eighth Symphony? Can we envision a postcolonial adaptation of Debussy's _Le petit Nègre – Cakewalk_? What one would most likely envision as an adaptation of Western art music is stylistic adaptation: compositions performed in the style of another era – a romantic adaptation of a Bach prelude, a jazz adaptation of _The Rite of Spring_. Perhaps it is difficult to visualize conceptual adaptations of Western art music because, unlike a script, the score has only notes to be realized by the musician. No choreographic, gestural, scenic or declamatory elements are available to adapt. Or rather, this is merely the way it would appear. In truth, the elements of a music performance, including the scenic aspects of stage and venue, gestural aspects of movement and blocking, and textual aspects in the

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13 A notable exception to this is plunderphonic works. For this study I will specifically refer to absolute, non-theatrical forms of music, as adaptations of opera and music theatre are frequently adapted.
addition of spoken word, although not primarily specified as part of the score, are just as adaptable as the elements of a theatrical performance.

Why then, does it seem less problematic to devise postmodern adaptations of Shakespeare, while revering Western Art music as a separate category? It is not that we revere Beethoven more than we do Shakespeare. Why do derogatory words such as ‘tampering’ come to mind when thinking of music adaptation? Why is there a narrow range between performing what is written in the score on the one hand and creatively re-contextualizing the score on the other? Is it simply because we can more easily locate the literary meanings of a play than we can of a string quartet? Is it therefore somehow less appropriate to re-stage or adapt a work that does not contain explicit narrative content or language? Since Adorno’s 1978 statement that music “presents its social problems through its own material and according to its own formal law – problems which music contains within itself in the innermost cells of its technique,”¹⁴ musicologists and cultural theorists including Janet Wolff, Susan McClary and Laurence Kramer have written at length on the nature of art and music as conceptual statements.¹⁵ Semiotic and Narratological approaches also have gained increased prominence within the literature and John Shepherd and Peter Wicke’s examination of structural homology and music has been particularly influential across the fields of music sociology, aesthetics and musicology.¹⁶ Yet despite these rich and varied analyses, there remains persistent

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opposition, manifested in oblique and overt forms, to the idea of music as anything other than an imprecise language, transcendent and ineffable.

Even while there are those who consider musical works as readable as Conceptual statements, the attempt to apply more radical performance practices, either interdisciplinary or theatrical, is met with a strong resistance from musicologists and performers who hold authorial intention in high regard. This begs the question of why we continue to embrace intentionality in musicological discourse and for evaluating successful music performance, despite decades of hermeneutic criticism? Monroe Beardsley’s intentional fallacy, Barthes’ proclamation of the author’s death, and Foucault’s analysis of the position of the author have long reverberated throughout artistic discourses, and in fact seem to now be dismissed as axiomatic. Strangely, however, these ideas seem only to have recently permeated the insulation of musicology and have yet to reach the fortified walls of performance practice.\(^\text{17}\)

**Performance Practices, Part II:**
The Work, The Author, and Interpretation as Adaptation

As noted by musicologists Lydia Goehr and Richard Taruskin, a modernist model of museum curation can be applied to historical musicology. In this paradigm, music

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\(^\text{17}\) The rise of New Musicology, a term coined by Lawrence Kramer in the 1990’s, contained a significant integration of Critical Theory and musicology, but, in comparative terms, lagged far behind both the critical discourses of Visual Studies in the early 80’s and Literary Criticism which was theorized concurrently with the Critical Theory discourses of the 60’s. Although writings by Lawrence Kramer, and *Music and Cultural Theory* by Shepherd and Wicke make references to the ‘death of the author’ trope, there are few examples from the Musicological literature explicitly dealing with the topic. See Jeongwon Joe and S. Hoon Song’s “Roland Barthes’ text and aleatoric music: Is the birth of the reader the birth of the listener?” (Muzikologija: Casopis Muzikoloskog Instituta Srpske Akademije Nauka i Umetnosti, vol. 2, 2002): 263-281.
performance is conceptualized as an 'imaginary museum' in which individual pieces are understood as autonomous works, as if they were objects placed behind display cases. The responsibility of the 'musical curator' is equated with the ethically righteous duty of preservation. Goehr’s *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* traces the evolution of the work concept from the year 1800 to the present day understanding of the work as a fixed, unchanging object. Goehr notes that in the seventeenth century, composers could be considered similar to fine craftsmen, and their works contained less of a sense of ownership that we grant them today. As described by Taruskin, the further development of the autonomous work resulted in today’s stringent and proprietary sense of fidelity:

The Romantic notion of the autonomous transcendent artwork entailed a hierarchized, strictly enforced split between emancipated creators, beholden (in theory) to no one but the muse, and selfless curators, sworn to submission. The producers of timeless works are the gods, exulting in their liberation from the world of social ("extramusical") obligation and issuing peremptory commands. The recipients of the commands are the Nibelungs, bound scrupulously to carry out the masters' intentions for the sake of their glory, their own lives pledged to a sterile humdrum of preservation and handing-on.¹⁸

Thus, the museological trope that Goehr and Taruskin employ is one in which the musical object becomes fixed as an artifact within a teleological history and as an autonomous product severed from its web of multiple social referents. In relation to this, the historical authenticist movement can be understood as a restoration process by which layers of dust are removed, perhaps including the ‘detritus of postmodern criticism’, and the pristine nature of the work is restored through reclaiming notions of authorship and Werktreue ideals. In their analyses, both musicologists suggest that this imaginary museum of music needs to be demolished.

However, before dismantling the imaginary museum entirely, we might do well to look at the full potential of the museological metaphor, and more particularly, of curation. The job of a curator, to bring context to the presentation of the work, is indeed a useful metaphor for music performance. Unlike Goehr and Taruskin’s heavily outdated understandings on the role of the museum curator as one who seals-off works in hermetic cases with interpretive panels documenting authorship, period, and date, we need to re-define the concept of curation as a dynamic activity wherein the curator is responsible for elucidating several aspects of the work in relationship to multiple contexts. Museum curation provides a beneficial metaphor for our discussion of adaptation, as it allows us to consider adaptation as a form of re-contextualization similar to more current processes of museum curation. Furthermore, this analogy between performance practice and curation foregrounds questions of mediation and authorship that are highly familiar in musicological discourse. The curator’s voice emerges through choosing where and how to situate works both on the macro level, the layout in the exhibition rooms and look of the rooms themselves, and on the micro level, grouping in display cases and creating interpretive materials. Both levels function as an authorial structure, forming a syntax and narrative that the audience then reads. These concerns of contextualization, negotiations of authorship and mediating voices are central to our discussion of adaptation in performance.

Far from abandoning the author and ignoring the idea of authorial intention, I propose that the rejuvenation of performance practice through interdisciplinary methods can in fact act as a reconsideration of the position of the author. As with Foucault’s investigations on authorship, these methods work “not to restore the theme of an
originating subject, but to seize its functions, its invention in discourse, and its system of discrepancies.”19 Whenever a text is performed, a negotiation of authorship is taking place. In theatre, a script’s performance is sometimes viewed as a product of the primary author realized by a director, dramaturg, design team and a cast of performers. The performance is claimed as a realization of the author’s intent, not an adaptation of the author’s intent. In opposition to this understanding of performance and interpretation, I propose that ethically, there is relatively little difference between the binary oppositions of passive realization as a positive process, and aggressive adaptation as a negative process.

On a scale of interpretive violence toward the text, critics see ‘realization’ as the least violent practice, generic (of genre) adaptation as occupying the middle ground, sometimes positive – when it remains true to canonical readings of meaning and avoids ‘tampering’ – and sometimes negative, and notions of conceptual adaptation (contemporization, Regietheater) as the least positive, inflicting the most violence toward the text. For the remainder of this study I will be mainly concerned with forms of conceptual adaptation and how they are portrayed as interpretive violence and a form of purposeful (and unethical) mis-reading.

A recent opera review on the online contemporary music journal Sequenza21 derides these forms of conceptual adaptation as:

…the barbarities and inanities of Regietheater, in which subverting the intentions of the composer and librettist appear to be the order of the day. I suspect that Regietheater is driven by the same impulse as the current fad for ‘theory’ among literature professors, namely, the desire of the untalented for revenge against the creative artist. Indeed, one

wishes that opera directors, set designers, and comp lit professors were required to take
the Hippocratic Oath, the first tenet of which is ‘Do no harm.’

The critic thus essentializes interpretation as creation envy. A second example of this
phenomenon, in this instance occurring as literary criticism, shows how criticism itself
feels the need to circumvent the notion of interpretive violence. The Double Hook, a short
novel by Shelila Watson, is densely written and replete with interpretive ambiguities. In
her preface to Angela Bowering’s study of The Double Hook, Shirley Neuman takes a
defensive tone that clearly exhibits the fear of violent interpretation. Neuman’s claim is
that Bowering “seeks above all not to appropriate the novel to her criticism, she refuses
the violence criticism generally visits on the text. Instead she enters the text as might a
devout phenomenologist, immersing herself and us in it...never imposing herself.” Later
Neuman notes that “her method is Sheila Watson’s own...” and that “Angela Bowering
[is] speaking from within the text...” Unlike the attacks on criticism that often declare
the critic’s voice as a parasitical or viral intrusion, Neuman’s statements affirm
Bowering’s voice as a part of Watson’s text. Bowering does not hold an ancillary
position, but is instead an emic observer within the world of The Double Hook. Indeed
from this introduction we may infer that Bowering is little more than an extension of
Watson’s voice, a vessel channeling meaning, perhaps to make up for the fact that, as
Neuman notes, “Sheila Watson has made few public statements about The Double
Hook.”

Moreover, Neuman emphasizes the reverential nature of the critic as a “devout
phenomenologist”. The word ‘devout’ is telling. Bowering is only recounting the

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22 Ibid.
experience of Watson’s carefully crafted world, and merely realizing Watson’s meaning within the essay genre while faithfully serving the author. But what does it mean for the voice of the critic to be aligned so strongly with that of the author? There is no question that we revere authors, and often this reverence is merited; however, within the relationship between adaptor, be it director, dramaturg, or critic, to author, there is a negotiation and appropriation of meaning regardless of whether one sees her or himself as conduit for an authorial voice to speak through or as a debater with the author. The dialogical relationship is always significant. By underestimating this significance, those who claim to merely realize in fact hide behind a mask of ethical superiority. In fact they reassert their authority, claiming it as part of the original author’s. This superiority is misguided, for what is ethical is the exact opposite of mere realization. An ethical relationship lies not in assuming that one’s work is only a reiteration of the author’s voice, a thing that can never be recuperated, but instead that one’s interpretation is valuable as an ‘act of violence’, and that this act is a positive strategy to challenge the canonization of meaning. By claiming that one’s writing or performance falls completely within the frame of authorial intention, or, as Neuman suggests, emanates from within the origin text itself, the adaptor hides their ideological subjectivity. ‘Letting the work speak for itself’ in performance or criticism is an impossibility, as there will always be levels of mediation. Regardless of whether the mediation is linguistic (as in translation), generic (as in a ‘passive’ adaptation), or conceptual (as in radical adaptation), the text is always re-made, re-viewed through the eyes of those mediators/adaptors.

When those involved in bringing a work from text to live performance assert that they are remaining faithful to authorial intention, they underplay their participation in the
creation of meaning. In performance, this disassociates the creative team from the interpretive act, an act that is an inextricable part of performance. The disassociation from subjective interpretation is often read as reverence to genius (the playwright, the artist), but also makes untenable claims to authenticity and therefore authority. Applying Margery Wolf's critique of multi-vocal anthropological writing, the writer/interpreter who hides behind the voices of others claims a direct, unmediated level of authentic authority that "puts us in more danger of appropriating the experience of the other than does the old-fashioned 'me looking at them and telling you about it' mode." As recent work in anthropological theory has demonstrated, one cannot examine aspects of a culture, measure a phenomenon, or perform a work without interpreting it. Likewise, even when a musical performance is a note-for-note execution of an Urtext edition that carefully adheres to editorial notes, it is nonetheless an interpretation.

Can the claim then be made that all acts of adaptation are also acts of appropriation, taking the text and re-presenting it with one's own voice? This is perhaps easy to understand in commentary and analogue forms, but what about in relation to generic adaptation? Here, criticism tends to position generic adaptation, often occurring in adaptations from page to screen, as less radical or disruptive. By making the work available (more palatable, less confusing) to a wider audience, the adaptor justifies adaptation as merely an altruistic act of public service; the adaptor in this case hides behind the name of the author, and thus feeds off of the author's status; however, if we consider the structural aspects of a work as fundamental aspects of the work's meaning then perhaps the adaptation of genre is as radical as an adaptation of content. Generic

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adaptation becomes even more transformative when we realize that each genre carries
with it its own cultural economy, which in turn frames the meaning of the adapted work.

These questions about interpretation and authority may also illuminate aspects of
Western 'Art music performance. In particular, it is possible to read performance as
similar to the process of generic adaptation: the musician is involved in a process of
adapting 'the score' to 'a performance'. The musician, by claiming that s/he is merely a
conduit for the composer's voice, may not need to account for subjective interpretive
choices. In the same vein, it is also possible to consider historical performance practices
of music as acts of appropriation, as adaptations that inflict their own kind of violence
toward the text. It is only due to the canonical position of historical performance practice
that the violence in this case is read not as violence, but as an altruistic form of
preservation.

Critically Practiced Theory

All of this so far may strike a familiar note of celebratory high postmodernism
that can often adopt, sometimes unintentionally, tones of moral, and conceptual relativist,
superiority; however, musicology's peculiar position of a younger brother receiving
hand-me-down clothing from a brother ten years older and the anachronicity of
musicological criticism are indeed significant concerns. This is most evident in the very
recent application of poststructuralist discourse to musicological methodologies
suggested by Kevin Korsyn and Andrew Dell'Antonio. In relative terms however, and

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University Press, 2003); Kevin Korsyn, "Beyond Privileged Contexts: Intertextuality, Influence and
in particular to those who have been immersed in 'postmodern' debates since as early as the 1970s, it is within recent history that musicology has begun to critique the formalist legacies of modernism, and even more recently begun to accept such discourses as beneficial. Rose Rosengard Subotnick, writing on musicology and criticism in the 1980s described how the study of Critical Theory was seen as a "purely derivative and parasitical enterprise, even though for years, now, it has dominated curricula in English literature at most American universities."25 More than twenty years later, Steven Connor, editor of the 2004 Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism, goes as far as to report "the strange absence of a mature postmodernist discourse within music studies," and suggests that "relative conservatism and autonomy of the world of academic music study may account for its long resistance to postmodernist formulations and arguments."26 On a surface level, Connor's criticism leveled against the field of musicology is questionable, particularly in relationship to feminist musicological studies and Lawrence Kramer's articles and books that explicitly took postmodernism and musicology as their subject in the early 1990's.27 Moreover, since the rise of the so-called "New Musicology," a second-generation of Critical Theory-influenced writings intent on reconciling the split between high postmodernism and music analysis has emerged. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist in Rethinking Music present this shift in acknowledging the value of multiple and

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sometimes conflicting outlooks in what they term "a musicology of the provisional." In relation to these distinct phases of development in Postmodernist/Critical Musicology - the earlier reactionism of 'New Musicology' and the more moderate current views - how then can Connor's statement be justified?

One could reason that Connor's statement is primarily based in his subject position within the discourse of Critical Theory. As a scholar who has been researching postmodern and post-structural topics for more than forty years, it may certainly seem, as noted by Subotnick, that musicology has been slow to react to developments in Critical Theory. However, his claim may also be made in reaction to the split between the familiarity with and sometimes use of Critical Theory in the musicological discourse, and the notable lack of application of this discourse as an essential part of the curriculum of equal value to music history and music theory. A veiled conservatism currently exists, in word supporting a general openness to Critical Theory, but in practice reluctant to implement it as part of the general curriculum.

Connor's statement can also be linked to the general rhetoric used when describing Critical Theory in musicological writings. In one such article on music education, Ellen Koskoff derides musicologists using Critical Theory as a:

...rebellious lot of postmodernists, with their individual readings, deconstructions and non-centered non-theories. There is not enough time to hear all the voices, let alone absorb or teach them; no way to structure a curriculum that will be everything to everybody; no way to add any more to the canon with taking something (important, that we used to teach) out.

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29 An example of this is evident in Ellen Koskoff's "What Do We Want to Teach When We Teach Music? One Apology, Two Short Trips, Three Ethical Dilemmas, and Eighty-two Questions" Rethinking Music, eds. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 546.
30 Ibid.
Her criticism is endemic of the misconception that to implement Critical Theory into the curriculum entails the loss of more important subjects. Her statement further implies that this implementation is motivated by a value-free relativism, an “everything to everybody.” Even in Kevin Korsyn’s Decentering Music, one of the most critical historiographic accounts of the schism between Critical Theory and musicology, and itself an in-depth analysis of musicological rhetoric, sets up a distinction between the centrality of musicology and the periphery of Critical Theory:

Although the sort of Critical Theory I will invoke, with models drawn from a variety of fields, may initially appear peripheral to music, I hope readers will resist such first impressions.¹¹

Korsyn thus infers that the majority of his readers, professional musicologists, will initially judge Critical Theory as peripheral to music, and moreover that he (somewhat tentatively) hopes they can resist these reactions. Soon after this, Korsyn declares that his “engagement with some post-structuralist writers may initially resemble a series of hip references, I hope the necessity for this engagement will eventually become clear.”¹²

Again we are given the tentative hope that he might be able to convince his reader that he is not just providing ‘hip’ references. Finally, in the most outrageous of these statements Korsyn notes how “at first glance, one might be tempted to dismiss the term ‘intertextuality’ as mere jargon, yet it is a vital concept.”¹³ It is nearly unfathomable how Korsyn can claim that intertextuality, a term with a long and respected history and employed across most disciplines within the humanities for almost forty years since its first formulation by Julia Kristeva in her essay “Word, Dialogue and Novel” in 1969,

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¹¹ Korsyn, Decentering Music, 8.
¹² Ibid., 8-9.
¹³ Ibid., 37.
could be dismissed, and moreover be considered “mere jargon.” The rhetoric of each of these statements unmistakably displays the status of Critical Theory within musicology.

Impelled by this rhetoric, my study arises from a critical attitude toward the explicit and implicit positionings of Critical Theory, and post-structuralist discourses in particular, as other to the ‘real’ study of music, represented by music history, theory and analysis. The particular anomaly I perceive is not that there is an absence of this research, but rather that it is not practiced consistently in educational, or implemented at all in performative, contexts. Of course Critical Theory courses are always available for the student to enroll in (in other departments) if they choose to (and they are not required courses in music degrees). One need look no further than undergraduate music syllabi to see the privileging of formalist theory in music analytical forms from functional harmony, counterpoint, through to serial analysis and set theory. The question thus must be asked: why are these Critical Theory courses not required (as viable forms of analysis) toward the completion of a practice-based degree, either in performance or composition?

It is not that Critical Theory alone remains unimplemented in these fields, but that philosophy and aesthetics on the whole remain segregated from practice. The ‘intellectualization’ of creativity is greatly frowned upon by those instructors who see it as detrimental to musicality. While theatrical performance practice has experienced what many recent critics see as an over saturation of theory, work that is now commonly referred to as “Postdramatic Theatre”, it could be argued that music performance practices have largely remained within a historical and romantic trajectory of craft and

technique. While it is not my intention to suggest the complete liquidation of structuralist listening and formalist analytic forms in music education from the ledger, nor to assert the necessity to completely redefine performance or creative practices as conceptual inquiry, it is certainly necessary to critique the centrality of these structuralist models and question how we might displace the continuing privileged space they hold within the discourses and practices of listening and music performance. While the pedagogy of Critical Theory in music education will not be explicitly addressed as a chapter or sub-chapter in this thesis, I have raised the significance of the issues here and will again return to them in order to acknowledge the underlying ground upon which the following writing is overlaid, as they have provided the impetus for this study in general. I feel it is imperative to show how the general discourse, curricula and structures of educational instruction have great influence upon both artistic practice and reception outside of the institution.

Ultimately, it is my hope that this writing will provide a starting point to theorize alternative forms of artistic practice and discourse that promote increased risk and engagement. Adopting the force of interpretive violence, distracted reception and conceptual polysemy can allow, through their contradiction and aberrance, an ethically grounded dialectics for incisive critical exploration. Similarly, following the tangential paths of these forms requires a critically engaged viewer to navigate between and around the artificial monosemic presence of the artistic object as product.

36 Similar calls to action, for political, activist, and polemical rhetoric have been issued by John Rajchman, "The Lightness of Theory," Artforum 31 (September, 1993), 165-6, 206, 211.; Ralph P. Locke, "Musicology and/as Social Concern: Imagining the Relevant Musicologist," in Rethinking Music eds. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist, 1999; Kevin Korsyn, Decentering Music, 2002.
CHAPTER 3
CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE PRACTICES
FOR WESTERN ART MUSIC

Introduction

The twentieth century has witnessed a somewhat pathological fixation with writing obituaries for master narratives and traditions. This is no less true in the realm of music. Artists and critics including Bertold Brecht, R. Murray Schafer and Leon Botstein have pronounced many traditional genres of music performance from opera to symphonic composition dead, dying, or to become as extinct as the dinosaurs. Boulez himself has issued two particularly forceful proclamations: "the String Quartet is dead" and "Schoenberg est mort."¹ Both of these statements were intended as part of Boulez's attack on outdated classical forms, particularly the disjunction between Schoenberg's new serialist language and continuing use of traditional forms. Both statements are also indicative of Boulez's modernist advocacy for historical amnesia. Most recently, Jeff Talman has applied Boulez's statements on Schoenberg to Boulez himself, showing that now "Boulez is Dead."² For those of us who would like to believe that these statements are no more than dated modernist lamentations for an idealized golden age of concert-going, it is easy enough to see otherwise by viewing the vast array of websites found under a search for classical music and death. The results of such a search include artsjournal.com's apocryphally titled "Deathwatch - Is Classical Music Really Dying?" site to the more recent series of entries in the contemporary music e-journal Sequenza21

regarding “classical music and extinction”. There is even a survey of the literature on Classical music and death. Far from being apathetic about these death-threats, composers throughout the 20th century have often attempted re-vitalizing the so-called ‘dying form’ of concert music by exploring interdisciplinary creation, extending their compositional practices to embrace visual, kinetic, and theatrical elements. This turn towards artistic integration in music composition resulted in a wide range of interdisciplinary experimentation falling under the general rubrics of intermedia, happenings, Fluxus events and instrumental theatre. However, although composers have challenged the traditional forms of concert music by exploring varieties of interdisciplinary synthesis there has, until recently, been a reticence toward the creation of new performance practices for the presentation of concert repertoire.

But what exactly does it mean to perform Western art music with contemporary performance practices? In this chapter I outline two concepts that inform contemporary performance practices and lead to interdisciplinary realizations of concert music. By the phrase “interdisciplinary realization” I refer to an adaptive staging of Western Art Music that includes aspects of other artistic disciplines. These inclusions range from theatrical elements such as gesture, movement and spoken word, to visual elements such as digital media and installation. To describe these adaptive performance practices I will firstly discuss the idea of treating the musical score as a theatrical script, and secondly examine the concept of post-criticism and its relationship to works by The Wooster Group.

Modernist and Contemporary Views of Performance Practice

The study of performance practice can be defined as the examination of how a text has been performed in various eras, how it can be performed in the present, and why it should be performed in these ways. In this definition, I move away from the aims for performance practice "to pinpoint conditions of performance, conventions, and stylistic developments, and so form a clearer understanding of a composer's intentions and expectations." Hermeneutic debates regarding intentionality, the role of the musician, and authenticity in historical performance practice have dominated the musicological literature for many years. I do not intend to recount the epic development of these debates here. Instead, I will provide an overview of modernist positions and more recent writings on the role of the musician as preparation for my later formulations of contemporary performance practices involving adaptive theatrical and interdisciplinary approaches. Contrary to the position in which "scholars must try to establish the amount of freedom allowed the performer," I will examine methods that increase the agency and creative vision of the musician, and that are not, as so often feared, an unrestrained promotion of subjectivity, affectedness and ego. In particular, I will use Peter Kivy and Jane O'Day's concepts of personal authenticity as a framework for re-evaluating the necessity of creative vision and interpretation in defining what the ethical responsibility of the musician should entail.


Two now infamous quotes of Schoenberg and Stravinsky provide us with a point of departure for our discussion of the modernist ideals of performance practice:

The performer is totally unnecessary except as his interpretations make the music understandable to an audience unfortunate enough not to be able to read it in print.\(^7\)

...execution and interpretation – is at the root of all the errors, all the sins, all the misunderstandings that interpose themselves between the musical work and the listener, and prevent a faithful transmission of the its message...\(^8\)

These views of performance practice focus on the concept of the musical score itself as the work instead of the performance of the score as the work; the performance itself is almost superfluous. In these instances, the work is synonymous with the composer’s singular vision of an ideal and within which ‘the composer’s intent’ is conceived of as a fixed, monologic entity. Stravinsky’s statement that music should not be interpreted, merely executed, implies that the music should, ideally, ‘speak for itself’. The modernist ideal represents music performance as a kind of autonomous object, an exact reproduction of an original, and as an accurate copy of the composer’s intent. In this model, music performance functions, as Nelson Goodman argues, as an allographic act, as in the re-tracing of a signature. These modernist views stem from the concept of the Werktreue, literally defined as faithfulness (Treue) to the text (Werk) and, by default, the composer. The Werktreue concept presents a model of performance practice in which, as Nicholas Cook persuasively argues, “the performer’s only legitimate aspiration becomes

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one of ‘transparency, invisibility, or personality negation.’” Musicians are expected, as per Stravinsky, to simply execute the music as if they were typists, albeit highly trained, technically virtuoso typists. Richard Taruskin notes that modernist views of performance regard performers “as undesirable middlemen, whose disappearance would enhance communication between composer and audience.” Charles Rosen further suggests that “the goal of the responsible performer should be to renounce the delights (and uncertainties) of creative imagination and judgment and to realize that ideal sounding as closely as possible.” This “ideal sounding” has most often been equated to the Werktreue concept. Peter Kivy argues that this “ideal sounding” has often been aligned with the more nebulous understanding of the composer’s ‘intention’, the certainty of which is less fixed and predetermined than many would like to believe:

The composer's performing instructions, whether expressed or inferred, take on, implicitly, by our calling them performance intentions, the status of stentorian admonitions, no matter what the circumstances.

The result is that composers' performing intentions – even though they may far more properly be called wishes or suggestions, provisional instructions, or tentative recommendations – by that very naming take on an authority that the composers perhaps never “intended” them to have.

Kivy thus concludes that the score should be treated as an outline for performances. Using the analytical language of Barthes, the score could similarly be understood as a text for re-readings as re-writings. These modernist assertions amount to an essentialization of the roles of composer and performer: the composer is the creator while

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11 Quoted in O’ Day, Virtue or Virtuosity, 76.
the performer is the executant. Compositional input is to be eliminated from the musician’s activity, and the specific roles are maintained. A clear example of the resistance to interpretation is the critical reception of Glen Gould’s performances. Gould, whose performances were derogatorily called ‘composerly’, was often criticized by those who felt these performances used scores only as ‘pre-texts’ for his own sublimated desire to compose. In the face of this criticism, Gould was adamant about what he felt was the ethical responsibility for the musician to “recompose canonical works”.¹³

The musician subjecting Western Art music to personal critique and deliberate distortion and deconstruction of the text are not new, as demonstrated by Glenn Gould’s “open aesthetic” practice.¹⁴ In musicology however, the benefits of unconventional and subjective performances practices have, until recently, been anathema. The endorsement of postmodern performance practices, although familiar, and to a large degree considered outdated in theatrical discourse, are much more recent in musicology. One reason for this occurrence may be the fear associated with allowing radically subjectivity into the realm of normative propriety, the fear that subjectivity promotes the unethical attitude of ‘anything goes’.

The Ethical Responsibility of the Musician

These modernist views ideal the goal of performance to re-present or re-state the composer’s idea, as if re-tracing a signature. The score, as the intellectual property of the composer, is almost literally conceived of as the material equivalent of the composer’s

¹⁴ Ibid., 75. Bazanna draws on Umberto Eco’s idea of the ‘open work’ to describe Gould’s performance practice.
voice. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the arguments put forth by, and boldly foregrounded in the title of, Edward T. Cone’s *The Composer’s Voice*.

Developing out of the same motivation to question the responsibility of the musician as this present study, Cone’s writing delves into the musician’s lack of critical exploration of the score in music performance:

Instead of asking himself, “Am I experiencing this music and conveying my experience to the audience?” the musician asks, all too often, only “Am I playing this correctly? Am I following the rules of observance?”

Despite this similarity, Cone’s writing differs in its intent to show how the musician should present, and how the audience should consequently hear, musical works as a vehicle of a musical persona’s contemplations. He defines how “music is best performed and best listened to as the reification of the imagined reflections of a hypothetical individual—ultimately a projection of the composer.” Fred Everett Maus, in an incisive critique of Cone’s perspectives, explores how Cone defines the unity of a musical work in terms of a single encompassing persona that controls everything: “it is to be posited as an intelligence embracing and controlling all the elements of musical thought that comprise the work.” Subsequently, “the goal of participation [as a listener] must be identification with the complete musical persona by making its utterance one’s own.” Maus concludes that, for Cone, “to listen to music is to yield our inner voice to the composer’s domination.” Thus, in relation to performance practices, the ethical responsibility of the musician can be formulated as the goal to re-present the composer’s

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18 Ibid.
voice. These views take as a given that music performance should value re-presentation of authorial intent over dialecticism and dialogism. This is to say that the musician should not be concerned to establish a dialogical relationship with the work they perform, but a mimetic one. However, as earlier mentioned, since it is impossible to achieve performance of any text without mediation, subjectivity cannot be eliminated. A musician cannot achieve the precision of duplication; s/he is always involved in processes of creation, erasure and omission. Consequently, since this subjectivity cannot be eliminated it is essential that it be acknowledged and that the musician be conscious of how s/he mediates between intention and interpretation. This dialectical relationship necessitates that the musician develop an explicit understanding of his or her approach.

This re-evaluation of performance practice is discussed in Peter Kivy and Jane O'Day's writings on "personal authenticity". These writings, although far from Gould's notions of a "recomposing" performance practice, discuss the potential and need for "personal authenticity" in performance, or as they define it, the act of interpretation based on the subjective views of the interpreter. Unlike the harsh modernist position that the performer should attempt to remove all elements of his or her unique personal understanding of the work, Kivy and O'Day highlight the need for a performer to display a high level of commitment to artistic innovation in their performances. Musicians are here seen in the role of creative artists, or even as co-authors of the final work. Bruce Ellis Benson echoes this shift towards performer-centered creativity by conceptualizing performance as an essentially improvisational activity. Peter Kivy argues that performing may be understood as analogous to the process of arranging. However, it is Jane O'Day who goes the furthest in her protest for musicians to exhibit integrity in performance:
More than mere transmitters, more than even explicators, performers may fittingly be described as advocates for musical compositions. Their task is to commend such works to listeners. Implicit in the charge of commendation, however, is an assumption of trustworthiness on the part of the interpreters...In short, there is an ethical dimension to the task of interpretation...²⁰

These attitudes towards performance practice share the proposition that the creative role of the musician should be encouraged instead of marginalized.

But what exactly is this ethical responsibility of the performer if it is not merely re-presenting the composer’s voice and being faithful to their instructions? Benson, Kivy and O’Day’s conclusions are ones of moderation: creativity of the performer should be equally balanced with historical contextualization. However, this ethical dimension of performance often entails a negotiation only between the minutiae of ‘personal authenticity’ with the Werktreue ideal as a concept bound to authorial intention. Here, the issues of interpretation merely pertain to the sonic quality of the performance: articulation, phrasing and ornamentation. It is also necessary to question what the ethical role of the performer as an interpreter is on a conceptual level. How does a performer maintain his or her ethical responsibility to the meaning of a text?

I would here like to re-contextualize the Werktreue ideal as a function of faithfulness to the overall narrative, conceptual, or thematic interpretation or vision of the text that is performed. An equal level of ethical engagement should exist on a conceptual level: how should the work be performed to bring about an understanding of its conceptual properties? An ethical personal authenticity can and should be aligned with the musician’s conceptual interpretation of the text. His or her task is to advocate a committed vision of the works s/he performs. If the musician believes that the text enacts

²⁰ O’Day, 19.
a narrative of battle then the performance must in some way coincide with this reading. The conception of personal authenticity is inextricably bound to an understanding of the musician’s ethical artistic responsibility to the text. Moreover, I will argue that more activist models of performance practice are needed to increase the minimal agency normally afforded to musicians and to re-assert his or her role as authorial voice, as an equal part of the performance as intertext. These models are based around the ideas of musical score as an oration or theatrical script, and methods of polyvocal and post-critical performance practice. Following the lead of director and playwright Charles Marowitz, I will advocate modes of performance practice that attempt to “re-discover and re-angle the classics – not simply to regurgitate them.”\footnote{Charles Marowitz, Recycling Shakespeare, (New York: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1991): 24.} The responsibility of the performer is to take a dialogical instead of mimetic approach in their performance. In order to better understand how this approach may be conceived it is necessary to examine the history of rhetoric, oration and dialogue in the music and role these play in re-defining the concept of the musician’s voice in performance.

**The Score as Script**

One of the most familiar debates in music criticism is that of music as language. The idea of music’s rhetorical properties can be located as early as the sixteenth century German treatises on musica poetica and extends to the application of specific rhetorical principles to compositional practice during the eighteenth century. Nineteenth century composition and criticism emphasize music’s dramatic qualities.
Many eighteenth century critics including Sulzer, Forkel, Matheson and Koch discuss the correspondences between rhetoric and music, each of whom wrote treatises on the roles of grammar and periodicity in music composition.\textsuperscript{22} Regardless of whether, as Mark Evan Bonds suggests, it is more likely that theoretical analyses imposed rhetorical readings of compositions, or whether treatises influenced compositional practice, the interaction of music and rhetoric up until the end of the eighteenth century was significant. An early biographer of Haydn emphasizes the importance of rhetoric as a structural model for composition:

A musical composition is an oration that is made with figurative sounds instead of words. The motive is the proposition, the assumption one sets out to prove. In the same manner as the orator, who, having proposed his theme, develops it, presents proofs, presses the argument forward, and recapitulating what he has already said, leads it to its conclusion – in this same manner, the composer must proceed with his work.\textsuperscript{23}

C.P.E. Bach believed that an instrumental work "cloaked in a grammatically and syntactically correct form should imitate a performance of an enthralling oration."\textsuperscript{24} He conceived his trio sonata H579 (W161.1) in such a rhetorical manner: a conversation between two characters, a Sanguineus and a Melancholicus in which each character tries to lure the other out of his mood. If the role of the musician is similar to that of an orator, we can expand our analogy further and, as Nicholas Cook proposes, consider the potential of the music score to function similarly to a theatrical script. Although Cook does not go as far as to say that musicians should \textit{literally} perform the score as if they

\textsuperscript{22} Periodicity describes the process by which small-scale units are concatenated into increasingly larger ones.


\textsuperscript{24} See Miriam Nastassi, "Rhetorik in der Musik: Dargestellt am Beispiel C.Ph.E. Bach und seiner Sonate in a-moll für Flöte allein" for a more detailed discussion on Bach's A minor Flute Sonata and rhetorical principles.
were performing the roles of characters in a play, he does suggest that the score, as a script, choreographs “...real-time, social interactions between players: a series of mutual acts of listening, and communal gestures that enact a particular vision of human society.”

This role of the score as a social script is explicitly manifested in the Fluxus artist George Brecht’s *String Quartet*, an event score that consists solely of the instructions for the musicians to walk on stage with their instruments and “shake hands”. This performance thus presents the very idea of the musical event as an act of meeting and sharing, and highlights the performative elements of this interaction. To suggest the idea of music performance as a theatrical metaphor for interaction is little more than a re-inscription of Goethe’s ideal of the string quartet as a meeting of four intelligent voices in a discussion. The concept of music as drama has been further applied by Fred Everett Maus to suggest that the analysis of music can take the “scheme of explanation or interpretation that applies to human beings...[that] works by identifying certain events as actions and offering a distinctive kind of explanation for those events. The explanations ascribe sets of psychological states to an agent...” In essence, Maus suggests that the structure of the music is its plot. Indeed, as articulated by John Rink, the dominant paradigm of much Romantic era music is the dramatic narrative, and many composers composed absolute music within a framework of dramatic character development reflected in the structure of musical events.

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25 Cook, http://www.societymusictheory.org/mto/issues/mto.01.7.2/mto.01.7.2.cook.html#FN8
An Application of Theatrical and Interdisciplinary Performance Practices

These concepts of music as rhetoric, narrative and drama can also be used to generate new performance practice models. These models re-assert a definition of musical performance as an act of communication in which the musician performs the oratorical role in solo work, or a dialogic role in ensemble works. These performance practices allow for musicians to emphasize their parts as voices in dialogue. In application, the practices necessitate an extra-musical counterpoint presented as a layer of narrativity mapped onto the musical presentation itself. I am not suggesting that the musician simply tell a story as he or she performs, but instead that a vision of this narrative be enacted through visual, gestural, or theatrical elements, of which storytelling may be a part. The musician’s role in such performance practices would be to selectively choose the elements that would best serve their vision. An example for a theatricalized performance practice could, for instance, utilize Stanislavskian concepts of ‘objective’ and ‘intention’. The clearest example of this theatrical method is when focusing on the intention to do something produces a more realistic and engaging effect than consciously focusing on the emotive outcome itself. The application of intention and objective work in music performance would affect both the extra-musical performative elements, but may also re-vitalize the conception of phrasing and musicality of the music performance itself. Instead of performing affectedness – rapture, sadness or joy – the performer would visualize him or herself as an agent within a narrative with certain

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28 For a example of these applied to a specific performance, see Appendix 2, on the interdisciplinary performance Ligeti.

29 The merging of music with poetry, prose and critical genres, in which the musician speaks as much as they play the music, has been developed in the genre of Instrumental Theatre by Mauricio Kagel, Dieter Schnebel and in the genre of Concert Theatre works by North American musicians including pianists Kathleen Supové and Anthony De Mare.
actions and intentions that would produce the desired outcomes. The specific use of the
gaze may also be a powerful tool. In a typical concert, the musician’s focused gaze on the
score creates a hermetic relationship. His gaze fixed upon the score, he does not demand
to be engaged with on a dialogic level and can exist purely as an object necessary for
sonic production. By subverting this condition with subtlety and without theatricality, one
can effect larger changes in the reading of the work. The use of simple extra-musical
gesture or of heightened or abstracted musical gesture, and lastly, of movement in the
performance space, namely theatrical ‘blocking’ may also provide ways to work with
extra-musical layers of meaning. This theatrical performance practice would also
examine how the mise en scène of the performance functions to physically manifest the
thematic content of the score as script. The mapping of this extra-musical,
interdisciplinary content onto the musical performance would need to be subtle so as not
to overshadow the sonic elements, and would thus function instead simply as an
interdisciplinary palimpsest.

Director Veronica Vasilevski’s “On Concert Theatre,” explores this issue of
overshadowing the music when using interdisciplinary and theatrical performance
practices. She draws attention to the challenges created by, and negative responses
associated with, the “theatricalization” of concert music in Concert Theatre practices.
Vasilevski has worked for many years as a director-creator of devised Concert Theatre-
theatrical realizations of compositions originally created for a concert performance. As
commentary adaptations, these realizations re-contextualize compositions by layering
narratives that can provoke the listener to experience the performance from a more
conceptual framework. The director of devised Concert Theatre approaches the
composition in the same way he or she would a script by an author; his or her vision for the presentation of the work is developed though the use of visual and theatrical extension. Vasilevski presents the misgivings of composers and performers who question the re-contextualization of musical works. Several composers and performers express the opinion that adding extraneous elements to concert music performance is no better than “putting a dress on a tree”. Many critics of the genre express their fear that the purity of the music and the composer’s intentions may be obscured by the addition of unnecessary frills.

Since it is easy to construe such a theatricalization of music as melodramatic, musicians may choose to maintain a non-narrative layering so that the resultant effect is one of surreal visual and corporeal dislocation rather than a contrived portrayal of “musician/Romeo swooning over musician/Juliet”. Unlike the histrionics performed by the virtuoso, the use of gesture, movement and gaze would not be based around emotive representations of affectedness. Although musicians utilizing Concert Theatre highlight the fact that the performance has as much to do with their presence as it does with the music itself, these interdisciplinary realizations do not simply manifest the musician’s self/identity as the performance, but rather expand the range of possibilities for the musician to present a ‘personally authentic’ and distinctive reading of the musical text. For although an effusiveness of gesture by a musician may convey emotional content of the music, it may just as easily annihilate/replace the content of the music with the content of performative “transcendental inspiration”.

The examples provided here are only a few of the many possible options for how theatricalized performance practice could re-emphasize music performance’s dialogical
nature. There is a vast array of theatrical and interdisciplinary elements that could infuse music performance with a greater sense of contextualization and defamiliarization. The aim of this defamiliarization, as will be presented in my later discussion of distraction, provides incitement for the audience to critically reflect on the music as conceptual statements part of a broader social understanding of the music. This practice would alter the role of the musicologist. No longer "placed in the combined role of legislator and law enforcement officer"\(^\text{30}\), the role could be re-defined as that of a drammaturg, who works in collaboration with the musicians, asking them questions to help clarify their conceptual approach, providing research on subjects relating to the concept/vision, and giving feedback as an 'outside eye'. Further examples for contemporary performance practices, ones that perhaps allow for a greater degree of conceptual rigor, can be formulated from Critical Theory models represented in the collage processes of Post-Critical writing.

**Collage and Post-Critical Writing**

Writers including Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg have called collage the single most influential artistic innovation of the 20th Century. From Robert Rauschenberg's *Combines* to John Oswald's plunderphonic works and Charles Mee's plays, collage allows the viewer to question the ontological status of objects, situations and cultural artifacts through the presentation of the object or portion thereof within a new context. Collage provides the viewer with a tool with which we may re-examine culture and history through a process of distortion and juxtaposition. It presents a model of what Heidegger terms *poesis*, or self-revelation of objects as they disclose their truths.

\(^{30}\) Cook, http://www.societymusictheory.org/mto/issue/mto.01.7.2/mto.01.7.2.cook.html#FN8
to us. This bringing-forth "lets presences come forth into appearance". Artists employing

collage techniques use the archive of culture to re-consider, forming accretions of history
and theory that provoke questions rather than answer them.

In relationship to the polyvocal nature of collage, the theatre critic Roger
Copeland notes that, "the seemingly unrelated elements [of these works] begin to
resonate off one another - across gaps of both space and time - resulting in protean,
unstable, and wholly provisional relationships," as "the component parts of any
successful collage speak with separate, even disunified voices." These ruptures between
the real or referenced object and its distorted context create a puzzle or question that the
viewer must address. In an assessment of Jasper Johns' collages, the critic Leo Steinberg
notes that "Elements work against one another so hard that the mind is sparked. Seeing
becomes thinking." As further described by Copeland, discrete fragments of collage
create "a perceptual/intellectual 'flicker' that draws one's attention in conflicting
directions." However, unlike the dialectical fusion created by montage, "in collage, the
eye of the spectator tends to fluctuate freely between disparate points on the same
shallow plane...[and] is not automatically guided upstream center. One's attention...moves
in a collage-like fashion between shifting points in space." Thus, the viewer experiences
simultaneous rather than successive events.

32 Roger Copeland, "Merce Cunningham and the Aesthetic of Collage," TDR: The Drama Review, vol. 46,
33 Ibid., 26.
34 Ibid., 15.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 22.
Hans-Thies Lehmann has characterized performance that emphasizes the disjunction of collage and non-teleological structures as Postdramatic Theatre. Lehmann has identified many of the works that I will look at, particularly those of the Wooster Group, under the rubric of Postdramatic Theatre. Although I do not take issue with Lehmann’s categorization, I do feel it is more valuable to identify these works not for their Postdramatic qualities, but rather for their existence as practice-based forms of criticism, theory and interpretation. Moreover, in no way are the two terms mutually exclusive. However, as will soon become apparent, it is important for my conceptualization of a conceptual approach to music performance that I apply the approach of Post-criticism as outlined by the literary critic Gregory Ulmer.

Using a similar conceptualization to Postdramatic Theatre, Ulmer defines the concept of post-criticism as a creative form of critical discourse that rejects realist or mimetic modes in favor of collage-based writing styles. Performative examples of this include David Antin’s talk poems that combine the genres of lecture, stand up comedy, storytelling and poetry, as they move freely between comedic irreverence, philosophical speculation and political debate. Written forms of post-criticism include works such as *Glas* by Jacques Derrida and *One Way Street* and *The Arcades Project* by Walter Benjamin. Ulmer builds upon Derrida’s definition of post-critical *collage* (in *Glas*):

...a calculated insemination of the proliferating allogene through which the two texts are transformed, deform each other, contaminate each other’s content, tend at times to reject each other, or pass elliptically into the other and become regenerated in repetition...Each grafted text continues to radiate back toward the site of removal, transforming that, too, as it affects the new territory.\(^{37}\)

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Formally, the term post-critical applies to a text that extends beyond the form of critical essay and blurs the distinctions between fiction, poetry and prose. The content of post-critical works offers a variety of materials for the viewer to examine, without explicitly guiding the viewer though these relationships.

The traditional tendency [of criticism] has been to try to pin down and fix a specific signified to a given signifier. However, in post-criticism, language functions not in the matched pairs of the signifier and signified, but instead answers with the third meaning; there is no clear signified but there is a sliding of the signifier under the signified, which results in the infinite skid of meaning.  

Although the genre emphasizes creative artifice in its style, post-critical texts continue to imply a form of criticism because of the position of the writer/creator: Derrida and Benjamin are recognized as cultural theorists almost regardless of the genre their works take. Consequently, although these works maintain their overall characteristics as works of criticism, they do not engage in its monologic discourse, preferring instead to have the reader interact with the raw materials, drawing associations and making connections as they move through the work.

Such is the experience offered in Derrida’s *Glas*, in which the reader experiences simultaneously unfolding texts by Genet, Hegel, Heidegger and Freud and the boundaries between the creative and critical dissolve. According to Derrida, Glas is “neither a philosophical text, nor a poetic text; it circulates between these two genres, but while trying to produce another text, which is of another genre or which is without genre.”

There is no explicit overarching authorial voice to lead the reader to conclusions; the reader instead finds him or herself witnessing a dialogue between several voices, in many

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ways itself a theatrical exchange. This is not to say that Derrida's authorial presence is absent, as he has chosen the structure of the quotes' simultaneous procession. Moreover, Derrida's name should not be underestimated as a frame that one reads the materials though, calling forth a select body of poststructuralist discourse.

A similar example to *Glas* is *The Arcades Project*, in which Benjamin turns away from the idea of laborious theoretical exposition, using instead unglossed constructions of direct citations. Of his intent in *Arcades* Benjamin states: "I needn't say anything. Merely show. I will purloin no valuables, appropriate no ingenious formulations. But the rags, the refuse—these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them." 40 Benjamin's role in *Arcades* is that of what Derrida describes as *bricoleur*, or an artist that creates his work from the detritus of culture. *Arcades* is strewn with dead ends; themes are dropped, plans announcing the work's final shape are canceled by still other plans, and continual revisions and repetitions abound. With its blind alleys and its maze-like tangle of passages, critics have referred to *Arcades* as the literary equivalent of a city. Equally as disorienting is the dizzying collage of quotations presented in Benjamin's *One Way Street*, which Benjamin refers to as "...like robbers lying in ambush on the highway to attack the passerby with weapons drawn and rob him of his conviction." 41 The commonality between each of these works is their requirement that the reader investigate the interactions between text fragments as they maneuver toward an overall understanding of the work. As defined by Ulmer, these postcritical texts exist as collages of interruption, in which Brechtian disruptions of linearity and sudden fractures in narrative promote a heightened critical reflection toward the

issues under examination. As described by Barthes, these forms of writing create an “intellectual art” that simultaneously produces theory, critical combat and pleasure.

**Collage and Post-Critical Performance Practices**

The writings by Derrida and Benjamin display Ulmer’s theory of post-critical collage as it pertains to rhetorical form; however, it is not only post-critical writings that can engage in the paradigm of theory/criticism as artistic practice, but performance-based works as well. Perhaps the clearest examples of post-critical collage within the realm of performance are the works of the Wooster Group. As a parallel development to the polyvocal style of writing employed by Derrida and Benjamin, the interdisciplinary works of the Wooster Group engage in a model of post-critical *performance*. This form of post-criticism functions as an event by which to perform theoretical/analytic criticisms of cultural artifacts. For the Wooster group these artifacts “from the archive” are plays. Indeed, they use a wide range of texts and styles across disciplines both as their quarry from which to mine cultural statements.

The Wooster Group’s works include fragmented, collage-based realizations of Gertrude Stein’s *Dr. Faustus Lights the Lights*, Chekov’s *Three Sisters*, and Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*. As described by Bonnie Marranca, these performances “refuse the option of revelation and instead perform the tension between being known and not being known.”42 Though it is the tradition in theatre for the audience’s gaze to be directed from one element to the next, Wooster shows bombard their viewers with dialogue and sound. Their audience is purposely lost. Within the cacophony of elements the viewer is able to

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see remnants of a play within the context of play. This game the Wooster Group plays is one of continual shifting, repetition and rehearsal that results in no final product or object that is capable of being reproduced. The spectator witnesses fragments that place him/her in a similar position to that of the reader in Benjamin and Derrida’s post-critical writings and must perform the task of locating connections between images, sounds, movement and spoken text. As articulated by Ron Vawter, the Wooster Group’s productions act as processes in which the flight tapes of the 20th century are replayed in order to see what went wrong. Thus the Wooster Group attempts to foment doubt and confusion through the performance: quotation and collision of images, texts, and styles, thwart habitual responses to linear narrative. Again, as articulated by Marranca, the Wooster Group’s goal “is not the acquisition of knowledge as a civilizing activity or a foundation of cultural and social values, but exactly its opposite: the de-centering of the human being and the destabilizing of knowledge and beliefs.”\textsuperscript{43} This is an important distinction, as it could be surmised from the distanced, lecture-style delivery of texts, and the physical presence of these texts on stage that the Wooster Group is engaging with a twisted form of Cartesian Perspectivalism, fixing the Gaze of their disconnected ‘eye’ toward the cannon of literary works in order to arrest their meaning.

In correspondence with the conception of their performance as post-critical collage, the Wooster Group’s director Elizabeth LeCompte refuses the role of the traditional director, who imposes a singular vision of the play. She is instead a collaborator who leads the ensemble though their own improvisational discoveries, and then uses fragments of these to amplify multiple modes of perception and perspectives.

rather than to solidify any singular reading of the play. LeCompte furthermore positions her work with the Wooster Group as that of researchers undertaking an experiment, or dissection of a cultural artifact. Their research methodology is one of “irony and distancing techniques [used] to cut through the intellectual and political heart”\(^{44}\) of the works they examine. These techniques, that include reading stage directions, performing a critical analysis alongside the play, and using microphones and non-theatrical declamation, works to provide the audience with access to the text as a document. According to LeCompte, the distancing of the plays from an emotive and realist mode of theatre creates a situation wherein the audience can engage in conceptual inquiry. It is necessary, however, to contextualize the success of this framework in Wooster Group shows as dependent upon a balance, or tug-of-war, between emotional distancing and surreal wonder.

In tandem with this understanding of the Wooster Group’s work as post-critical performances of theatrical texts, I would like to propose the idea of a post-critical performance practice for music. Analogous to the Wooster Group’s process of layering, fragmenting and creating performance-based palimpsests of texts, a post-critical performance practice would present a music performance as a palimpsest, as a collaged layering of texts that unfold simultaneously. A similar abstraction of music performance from the traditional frameworks of concert performance would result in form of reception wherein the audience would be distanced from a purely emotional cathartic relationship. As in Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt*, the distanciation entailed in this performance practice would create an audience not of passive viewers, but of engaged researchers, learners

\(^{44}\) Savran, 102.
experiencing a kind of performative musicology. This presentation of musicology takes its cue from an intertextual form of analysis that presents simultaneous, polysemic interpretation to stimulate an exploratory framework for the viewer.

**Intertextuality**

Julia Kristeva postulates the concept of intertextuality in terms of directionality: the text is a point that moves along a path on both a horizontal and vertical dimension. On the horizontal axis, "the word in the text belongs to both the writing subject and the addressee," while on the vertical axis "the word in the text is oriented toward an anterior or synchronic literary corpus." This is to say that the text is more a process than a product and will be understood in relation to the reader's familiarity with the voices that the author has responded to in the creation of the work. This description also points to the way in which readers gather and build meaning through subjective points of contact. The text means more than its author declares it to mean. It is a fabric woven from various threads of the cultural context of both writer and reader. In *Revolution in Poetic Language* Kristeva explains that the concept of phenotext refers to "that part of the text bound up with communication...and appears to present the voice of a singular, unified subject": the author. The genotext is comprised of "phonetic devices' such as rhythm and intonation, melody, repetition and even kinds of narrative arrangement." The intertext materializes as the genotext ruptures the phenotext. This perspective is

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45 Performative Musicology can be understood as a polysemic practice in itself. Firstly, as it has been described in this chapter, it can function as musicological research that is presented through interdisciplinary, artistic and performance-based means. Secondly, the term can be understood in the sense of performative writing, wherein the author attempts to *do something with prose*, using 'interpretive violence' to provoke the reader. In this instance the writing activates the reader.

46 Kristeva, 66.

particularly informative for our discussion of performance practices, as it provides a way for us to discuss the language of musical performance. In musical performance, the performative aspect of playing music involves many levels of extra-musical signification, including gesture, that are just as much a part of the performative language as the rendering audible of the notes. Although this genotextual information that a musician produces in performance has been studied extensively within music psychology as a factor that influences the audience’s reception, approaches in music pedagogy toward conscious uses have been overlooked. Alternatively, musicians are taught that they must eliminate inefficient movement and gesture from their performance, as it is distracting to the music. Although it is true that the use of non-specific movement – ‘moving to the music’, and displays of ecstatic affectedness – can certainly be distracting to music performance, I would argue that this is because they are not explicitly conceptualized as gestural and choreographic elements that are layered into the development of the overall performative language. Part of this is due to a lack of training – musicians undergo years of intense training to master the use of their instruments, but are given relatively little training on the use of their bodies when not in relation to their instruments. A sincere and convincing use of gesture and movement comes from developing those skills with a trained professional from within that discipline.

A second application of intertextual theory is to propose an intertextual performance practice based on the understanding of a musical text as a site of intersecting voices. In an interdisciplinary adaptation of the work these voices can manifest themselves on a larger level: they form a framework for the creation of new performance-based understandings of the work in question. The intertextual presences in the
composition are expanded within new interdisciplinary elements that occur simultaneously or successively to the music performance. We must note, however that this understanding does not propose a search for absolute filiation - it is not an attempt to locate all original sources and the influences of a work, as the voices that make up a text are innumerable, anonymous, un-traceable. For it is not only previous artistic works that exist as threads in the intertext, but a chaos of voices and experience from the history of the author.

An argument against the inclusion of any element other than the musical material itself in a contemporary performance practice is that music can present nothing more than its quality as a language of imprecise beauty. The meaning of the music is located in its purity of its structure of and in the inability to precisely articulate its semantic meaning; its meaning is transcendent. This ineffable quality of music’s meaning functions as what Derrida would term a ‘transcendental signified,’ that would “exceed the chain of signs and would no longer function as a signifier.”\(^{48}\) It is transcendental because it refers to nothing other than itself. In this model, it is recognized that the structure of the work is its meaning. Thus, to present anything other than the work’s structure is to obliterate its meaning, and the Werktreue ideal.

Yet it should be understood that these ideas for contemporary performance practices are not at odds with the Werktreue ideal, but rather, can act as greater explorations of the works’ situatedness in historical and contemporary contexts. These practices allow for a greater play between theory and practice and for collision between musicology and performance. Interdisciplinary, Post-critical performance practices

mediate between the play of periphery and centre, between author, spectator and object, while manifesting a web of historical, authorial, and contemporary analytic voices. They locate the spectator in the position of evaluator between the ideas of *Werktreue* and 'personal authenticity'. They do not ask that the spectator blindly accept the composer's nor analyst's view of what the work is, but rather that s/he enter into a dialogue about the nature of the work and its relevance to their position. In the discourse of intertextual theory, these performance practices initiate explosions of the *phenotext* — an unraveling of the weave — and create a surreal expanse of simultaneous interdisciplinary manifestations of the *genotext*.\(^{49}\)

The disruption of the fixed and monologic voice of the composer as 'author-god' in Western art music performance is well overdue. The modernist view of musician as executor of the work, akin to the transcription by a typist, needs to be replaced by the role of musician as activist. Activism, in this sense, can be described as a highly dedicated involvement in action to bring about change. The role of the musician should not simply to render the notation into audible form, but instead to enact a vision of the text/script, and to create a 'personally authentic' performance of it. Moreover, by utilizing theatrical, and post-critical performance practices, the musician can re-claim and foreground music performance as a site for polysemic interaction. Contemporary performance practices must strive to create situations in which the musician opens the musical text to play, deconstruction, and most importantly, to communicate to the listener the various perspectives of the musical text they discover. It is now necessary to revise the score prefaces on historically accurate ornamentation, and editorial treatises on how the

\(^{49}\) These manifestations will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter on distraction and polysemy.
flawless Urtext has been unearthed from numerous corrupted editions. We should, in a theatrical impulse of play, find ways to augment, replace and interrupt these notes, adopting Dionysian practices to the effect of that advocated by playwright Daniel MacIvor: “Have fun. Go Crazy. Lie. And tell me something I don’t already know.”

As with the contemporary understanding of the curator’s responsibility to contextualize artifacts and art in meaningful and multiple ways, so to the musician, producer, and interdisciplinary director, has an ethical responsibility to present the work in a well-conceived adaptation of figure and ground. Reiterating claims made by Mauricio Kagel in relation to his composition Ludwig Van, it is important to question why we employ the same frames for listening to Beethoven as we do for Meredith Monk, I believe it is imperative that we offer and promote alternative strategies for reception that correspond to the structure and content of the works themselves. It is to one of these alternative strategies that I turn to now: distracted reception.

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CHAPTER 4

DISTRACTED RECEPTION IN
MUSIC-INFLUENCED INTERDISCIPLINARY PERFORMANCE

Introduction

I deplore ‘stunts’. Those tediously meandering compositions that endeavor to distract the listener from the lack of musical content by various gimmicks such as flashing lights and projections!

- Interview with Canadian composer Barbara Pentland (1979)

Music in a concert-hall must rely on itself and the perfection of its execution; it is, as it were, under glass.¹

- Ezra Pound

Pentland’s statement is illustrative of the mistrust of works that eschewed the modernist project of distilling each art form to the purest essence of its media. The inclusion of visual elements in concert music performance is presented as an attempt to draw the listener’s attention away from a lack of compositional skill and toward the sensational and dazzling content of visual disruption. Her statement implies that proficient composers need only the purity of musical content in order to communicate their ideas. Music is perceived as the essence of the performance while the visual elements are relegated to the role of frivolous ornamentation, and worse yet, as gimmick.

Ezra Pound’s dictum provides a similar conceptualization of autonomous contemplation. However, Pound’s image takes Pentland’s statement of purity one step further by presenting a scene in which the stage and musicians are behind the glass of a museum display case or a Petrie dish. These controlled and contained environments will,

in Pound’s conception, allow the listener to objectively contemplate the music they hear. The concert experience is described as a situation in which the listener must intellectually or scientifically examine an object in order to pinpoint its essence, its internal truth. Indeed, this idealized purist performance aesthetic could be considered an aural microscope, allowing the listener to hear the form and structure to the same degree of detail. The ascetic environments of the concert hall, theatre and gallery have become the ideal spaces for pure contemplation.

This chapter will focus primarily on the development of autonomous reception across the arts and the associated assumption that the alternative to this pure contemplation, distracted reception, promotes a dis-engaged attitude toward the work under consideration. My particular conceptualization of distraction in the context of this chapter contrasts the term’s standard characterization as a lackadaisical attitude. I instead use the term in a capacity for critique of tacitly approved systems of reception as processes of monosemic uncovering. In essence, I am proposing a view of distracted reception as a foil to directed/authoritarian viewing, in opposition to normative, teleological and structural regimes of contemplation. Analogous to Umberto Eco’s concept of the open work, I would like to identify distraction as an open practice that critiques the assumed values of creative and critical production and reception. In total, I propose nothing less than an attack on the primacy of ‘clear communication’ of signs promoted in both Art and Language\(^2\) and formalist/structural listening practices, and objectivist discursive traditions. Ultimately, distraction may act as a method for increasing the agency of the spectator to engage in reception as a continuous dialectic process of examination and in which contradiction and polysemey are embraced instead of

\(^2\) I will return to these topics toward the end of this chapter, in a discussion of Conceptual Polysemey.
eliminated. Related to the Situationist concept of the dérive, distraction provides a method to circumvent normative structures for reception, propelling the viewer to enter into self-determined dialogic relationships. Distracted reception also promotes a relationship to perceiving the object as part of a system of presentation: the spectator is not only able to contemplate the object, but to read the work as a part of its periphery.

To begin with, I will situate my study in opposition to current (ideal) listening regime in music: Structural Listening. Following this, I will examine the historical context of distraction as it applies to knowledge acquisition and perception of the world. From here, I will examine some early modernist writings that critique the negative effects of distracted reception in artistic contemplation and the reactions to these writings, as exemplified by Walter Benjamin writings on cinema and montage and Brecht's writings on Epic theatre and Verfremdungseffekt. Benjamin and Brecht's writings on what could be called techniques of 'forced distraction' are a direct assault on earlier theories of distraction as a passive form of reception. Benjamin and Brecht thus provide a starting point for theorizations of distraction as an effective method to heighten critical awareness and the spectator's engagement with the work. In these methods, the artist uses the shock of distraction to push the viewer from a passive state into one of greater critical engagement and reflection. From these theories I will further argue that, within the (anti)genre of interdisciplinary performance, distracted reception is a model for viewer-centered interpretation. This paradigm exposes distraction as a state of heightened

3 "One of the basic Situationist practices is the dérive [literally: "drifting"], a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. Dérives involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll. In a dérive one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there." Guy-Ernest Debord, "Theory of the Dérive," Internationale Situationniste #2, (1958): 1.
contemplation, as a process of creation wherein the viewer participates in an authorial capacity.

**Autonomous Listening**

Although a great deal of recent musicological discourse, most notably Lydia Goehr’s *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, has critiqued the concept of the autonomous musical ‘work’⁴, within the realm of performance itself, the modernist aesthetic of uninterrupted listening predominates in Western Art Music performance and is a strong indication that this autonomy is still upheld. Rose Rosengard Subotnick has critiqued this listening practice, what she terms Structural Listening. Subotnick describes the development of Structural Listening, articulated in the writings of Schoenberg and Stravinsky, as the ideal method through which musical meaning is apprehended through a formalist reading of musical structure. As the real-time aural equivalent of formalist analysis, Subotnick shows how Structural Listening has often been privileged in musicological discourse as the ideal strategy for comprehending a work’s unity. In this paradigm, the development of the compositional idea, its structural development can be taken as the work’s ‘meaning’. Thus, the work’s organicism, represented through its unified systems, stands in for a conceptual reading or an understanding of the work’s social significance. Despite Schoenberg and Stravinsky’s claims that Structural Listening entails a heightened engagement with the work, Subotnick suggests that it may actually reinforce passive listening, as it is based in a reception strategy of recognition rather than dialogue. The value of Structural Listening is for listeners to be able to recognize how

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⁴ Goehr traces the emergence of the concept of the autonomous ‘work’ of music as an object conceived by composers in the eighteenth century. Composers began to consider their compositions discrete, perfectly formed, and completed products.
works demonstrate specific forms and harmonic progressions rather than reflecting on a larger critical context of the work.

As necessitated by the structural unity as the meaning of the musical work, the role of the serious listener is to engage him or herself in the focused act of structural listening in order to fully comprehend the compositions they listen to. As with other reception practices, this is equally a removal from viewing the object of contemplation in its context as part of an event; spectators privilege the isolated sonic object, in this case the sounds constituting the composition, as the aspect of the performance from which the most significant information will be gained. The contextual elements of the event, existing outside the work, are the elements that need to be eliminated from the field of perception; they are the distraction to the autonomy of the musical listening experience. This is reflected to a large extent in recent musicological writings that describe eighteenth century listening practices as inattentive, in which the music functions as background to social activities.\(^5\) True listening, according to these writings, does not occur in situations where the attention is divided. Partial attention is equated with inattention.

These attitudes have continued to dominate normative practices of listening to the extent that when spectators come to view interdisciplinary works involving live musicians in non-accompanying roles a notable tension regarding appropriate modes of reception, and consequently the significance of signs, ensues. Not surprisingly, these attitudes spill over into the population of ‘uninitiated’ listeners, who often preface their statements on listening with “I don’t know much about music, but...”. Those not versed in the history of Western Art Music feel the overwhelming presence of appropriate

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listening practices, and then subjugate their responses to those who are able to correctly understand the work. The privileging of formalist music theory, despite claims to the contrary, is veiled behind a general attitude of disgruntled acceptance towards cultural criticism and critical theory, as the brother-in-law that the family accepts, but only at gatherings where he cannot be avoided.\(^6\)

The general mistrust of the polyvalency of distraction also spills over into the often-encountered aesthetic response from those outside of the artistic elite. The statement that one doesn’t “get it” is revealing not so much as a comment on the difficulty of reading a work, but instead as a statement of the perpetuated myth that understanding the singular “it” is the ideal outcome of an artistic experience. What is needed at this juncture is a re-formulation of the concept of distraction as a form of passive, unengaged experience, to a view of distraction as a polyvalent, de-centered method of ‘provisional’ reception. The concept of reception changes from a goal-oriented search for understanding a product to an understanding of reception as a continual process.

Since Western Art music listeners are implicitly and explicitly instructed from an early age that in a musical experience all that is not the sonic and ephemeral beauty of the music itself is essentially irrelevant (the incidental and peripheral aspects of the musical event – gesture, the venue...), how then does an audience evaluate interdisciplinary works, such as those from my own practice, that utilize compositions, musicians and music performance as a fundamental part of the conceptual content or structural

\(^6\) David Cecchetto, “Fortified by the liquor of Critical Theory, his comments are disregarded for their inappropriate provenance and delivery, independent of content. Like a drunken ‘I love you.’” Unpublished comment, May 14, 2006.
framework? I propose that, as related to historical concepts of forced distraction, viewer-centered distraction provides a peripatetic form of attention that is particularly, but not exclusively, valuable for engaging with interdisciplinary and inter-arts works. The autonomy of pure viewing practices fetishizes the art as object, and eliminates the possibility to read the event, the syntax of the overall presentation and the discoveries of the wondrous that come with this. Distracted reception is a method to heighten inter-perceptive strategies.

**The Threat of Distracted Viewing**

It is difficult to consider distraction as a positive framework for contemplation. Why should we want to introduce something into our processes for reflection that threatens the clarity of perception? Everyday sight, as described by James Elkins is already naturally:

"...irrational, inconsistent, and undependable. It is immensely troubled, cousin to blindness and sexuality, and caught up in the threads of the unconscious. Our eyes are not ours to command; they roam where they will and then tell us they have only been where we have sent them. No matter how hard we look, we see very little of what we look at. ... Seeing is like hunting and like dreaming, and even like falling in love. It is entangled in the passions, jealousy, violence, possessiveness; and it is soaked in affect, in pleasure and displeasure, and in pain."

The development of the Gaze then, can also be understood as a coping mechanism that develops in response to the unrestrained process of the distracted Glance. Unlike the focus of the Gaze, with its promise of reliable information,

The flickering, ungovernable mobility of the Glance strikes at the very root of rationalism...unable to participate in the unitary mysteries of reason, the Glance is relegated to the category of the profane, of that.

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which is outside the temple. Before the geometric order of pictorial composition, the Glance finds itself marginalized...Against the Gaze, the Glance proposes desire, proposes the body...

The distracted quality of the Glance should not, however, be equated with dis-engaged reception. This is perhaps the most important point I would like to make in my introduction to distraction: I do not suggest we adopt reception practices that reject rigorous reflection, but indeed that distracted reception can act as such a form, and also a counteraction to the limited formalist-based forms of purposeful reception that are privileged in institutional and pedagogical frameworks.

If, as Richard Schusterman writes, “art increasingly [has come] to function as a locus for our habits of sacrilization...and the classics of literature have become our sacred texts while museums have replaced churches as the place where one visits on the weekend for one’s spiritual edification,” then by embracing distraction are we also implicitly making a moral choice? Is the rejection of pure contemplation unethical? Can the threat of distraction be understood as a threat of elements that lead the viewer astray from the word of the author? The art historian and one-time member of the Art and Language Group Charles Harrison describes how the “proper proceeding” for the modernist concept of ‘beholding’ in gallery space “was to stand before the work of art, passive, alert and dis-engaged from all interests and preoccupations. If emotion welled into the resulting cognitive void, the work was taken to be good.” Harrison further relates how “this ‘feeling’ was itself a kind of formality or closure within Abstractionist discourse, functioning much like the notion of ‘seeing the light’ in the discourse of a

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religious believer.” Harrison shows how the purity of structural experience is equated with transcendent meaning.

As noted by Christopher Small and Leon Botstein, the role of the concert hall has, for the general public, likewise replaced the role of the church, where spiritual edification is received within the silent space of contemplation. Moreover, represented through the transcendent, ineffable meaning of music, edification can be received without necessarily having to engage with the actual content; since music’s content is explicitly conceived of as ineffable, it needs no discussion. The gods of Mozart and Beethoven are revered; the metonymy of “hearing Mozart,” becomes hearing the word of Mozart.

**Historical Contexts of Attention and Distraction**

As articulated by Rousseau, “all the fine arts have some unity of object, a source of pleasure they give to the mind: for the attention divided settles nowhere, and when two objects occupy us, it is proof that neither of them satisfy us.” This statement is indicative of the familiar axiom that great works of art transfix the beholder in a sublime state. It logically follows that the art that promotes distraction is not successful because it does not possess sufficient presence to provoke a meaningful or pleasurable reaction in the viewer. As earlier demonstrated by Pentland’s admonitions, distraction is a result of art that lacks coherence. These views portray distraction as the terminus to artistic experience. As soon as the viewer’s contemplative state is broken, the meaningful

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11 Ibid., 35.
13 Later in this chapter I will discuss the motivations behind the development of spiritualization of reception, and of the figure of the artist in relationship to R. Murray Shafer’s writings and creative work.
interaction with the work is terminated. Distraction is condemned, as it precludes the spectator from properly assessing the singular truth of a work. Reception is positioned as an autonomous act in which the viewer avoids inter-perceptiveness between content and context. The beginnings of this fixed viewing practice can be located in the development of perspective developed in Alberti’s treatise *Della Pittura* of 1436. As Norman Bryson notes, before the development of perspective, in the Byzantine era “…the construction of the viewing subject is in fact multiply determined; the desired homophony devolves into the polyphonic zigzag of voices mutually out of phase.” Pre-Albertian painting condenses multiple viewer vantage points within the same work. Reacting against painters who “…fail to practice composition, and instead scatter everything about in a confused and haphazard fashion, so that the narrative seems rather to be disordered, than enacted,” Alberti formulated a method which enabled the painter to “locate and measure in perspective all the figures and objects in his picture, which would then appear to the spectator placed at the predetermined viewpoint as a real scene.” Although writers discuss this tradition of positioning the viewer as if s/he was looking out of a window, it is equally apparent that the perspective that the viewer participates in is also that of the painter who records the scene. As soon as the viewer is directed to stand in the place of the painter, the viewer can then retrieve the painter’s perspective. The viewer’s fixed position is in direct relation to the single statement the viewer is meant to discern from the work.

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15 Bryson, 102.
16 Ibid.
Although the etymology of the word distraction comes from “to draw in different directions” or “to pull apart,” it has obviously come to acquire abundant negative connotations. Firstly, as a noun it implicates frivolous pleasure. In this, one may think of the seventeenth century divertissements in France and the later divertimenti, both forms of “table music” or background music that is a pleasing distraction to a main event. These forms reflect the social function that music played in gatherings where it was quite common to let one’s attention move between conversation, eating, listening, and even singing along (or not) with the music. The sense of distraction as pleasing diversion is also reflected in Brecht’s description of the German word Zerstreung. Although the term has a similar etymology to distraction, from streuung, meaning to scatter and spread, Brecht defines it as a passive form of viewing for the “sated class”. Secondly, the term distraction suggests a potentially hazardous action such as when driving a car or a vice such as laziness. As noted by William Bogard, distraction is also a threat to the social control desired by institutions:

In Catholic theology, for example, a world without distraction is one where nothing disturbs one’s prayers to God — distractions, such as uncontrolled or impure thoughts, are a sign of man’s imperfection and inherent sinfulness. For bureaucracy, it is a world of dutiful, law-abiding, on-time citizens; for the school, a classroom of focused and docile students; for Capital, a shop of committed workers.

Distraction, as opposed to these forms of control, provides a site of resistance. Nineteenth century writings in psychology demonstrate how distraction’s binary opposite, attention, became the moral standard by which proper contemplation was judged. The late

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nineteenth century psychologist Max Nordau even links degenerate behaviors with distraction:

Untended and unrestrained by attention, the brain activity of the degenerate and hysterical is capricious and without aim or purpose. Through the unrestricted play of association, representations are called into consciousness and run riot there. Weakness or want of attention produces, then, in the first place false judgments respecting the objective universe, respecting the qualities of things and their relations to each other. Consciousness acquires a distorted and blurred view of the external world...Culture and command over the powers of nature are solely the result of [focused] attention; all errors the consequence of defective attention.²¹

This quote, taken from Nordau’s 1892 book Degeneration paints a clear portrait of normative attentive behaviour in the nineteenth century. It presents distraction as an intellectual deficiency, as a symptom of illness, or, as Théodule Ribot claims, of cultural inferiority.²²

As early as Descartes’ writings on attention as the key to “intellectual illumination, a source of light which brings our ideas out of obscurity”, focused perception, in the tradition of Cartesian Perspectivalism, has been aligned with moral standards and the precision and clarity of knowledge.²³ These claims are difficult to dispute, as it is certainly true that attention applied to study most often results in a deep appreciation of the work in question; however, in relation to the understanding of distraction as an unacceptable or immoral model of reception within the positivist paradigm, the concept should be analyzed as a viable form of artistic reception. Particularly as a mode of reception for understanding works that use fragmentation,

²² Crary notes that Ribot Psychologie de L’Attention (1889) was a primary source for Nordau’s Degeneration. In Psychologie de L’Attention Ribot classifies distraction as the characteristic of “children, prostitutes, savages, vagabonds and South Americans,” 35.
²³ Riley, 11.
collage and polysemy, distracted reception is an invaluable tool that compliments other forms of artistic reception. I am here positing a definition of distracted reception that promotes moving between, as an inter-receptive mode that de-privileges hierarchical, autonomous and teleological forms of reception.

**Modernist critiques of Distraction in Art**

In writings in the Rationalist tradition, distraction comes to increasingly be seen as a threat to perceiving the singular essence, as objective truth. Objective truth, in these instances, is represented in process from Descartes’ theorization of sight as a source of empirical knowledge and more recently in modernist discourses of authorial intent. Rejections of art that promotes distraction gain particular influence in several modernist writings. Kracauer’s 1926 essay on “The Cult of Distraction” in film spectatorship and Adorno’s 1938 “On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening” are two such works that describe the perils of distraction. Although later to revise his views on distraction in film as a reflection of modern culture that was able to redeem the viewer from being a mere consumer of modernity, Kracauer’s early writings on distraction including “The Cult of Distraction”, describe it as:

> ...a process of overstimulation that disturbs the possibility of appreciation or controlled, voluntary attention...The sensory apparatus is confused by the constant bombardment...and simply gives up, unable to focus long enough on a single stimulus as a proper centre of attention, thus reducing the registration of stimuli to an even field of undifferentiated perception.\(^{24}\)

It is clear from this essay that distraction is the polar opposite of culture. Adorno also wrote witheringly of the ‘culture-industry’ and the way that it encouraged ‘regressive

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listening' through the ceaseless churning-out of a commodified (mass-market orientated) music which demanded nothing more than the passive registration of stereotyped melodic and harmonic formulas. Adorno's cautionary essay on regressive listening makes it clear that the public has "learned to deny their attention to what they are hearing even while listening to it."25 The strategy that Adorno terms 'deconcentration,' develops as a defense mechanism to cut off awareness of unbearable standardized musical products: "the uncompelling and superficial nature of objects of refined entertainment leads to the inattentiveness of the listeners."26

Adorno's objections to distraction must, however, be split into two components: firstly, his lamentation for the serious engagement with listening processes and secondly, his statements on what this meaningful listening is constituted by. His assertion that listening "has regressed, arrested at the infantile stage"27 carry some importance as reactions to the increasing use of music as background noise, and the rise of concerts as bourgeois pastime and place to let music's affective qualities wash over the senses without attending to the works in an intellectual capacity. In this respect, Adorno re-states similar concerns as Brecht and Kraeauer to the responsibilities of the viewer: "Not only do the listening subjects lose, along with the freedom of choice and responsibility, the capacity for conscious perception of music...they stubbornly reject the possibility of such perception."28 Although Adorno's writings specifically describe jazz and popular music forms as fetishized objects of entertainment, and addiction, it is apparent that his views

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26 Ibid., 284.
27 Ibid., 280.
28 Ibid.
on fetishization can apply equally to the concert audience who treats the experience as mere entertainment. Despite his admonitions against unengaged listeners, Adorno’s position on the ideal aim of listening continues of the trope of pure contemplation. Distracted reception is nothing more than “an excuse for absolving the listener from the thought of the whole, whose claim is comprised in proper listening”.

Here we return to the objective of ‘proper listening’ as an understanding of the work’s structure, its unification as a completed object, autonomous from an understanding of its relationship to the current performance and historical contingencies of meaning.

The beginnings of the critique from passive distraction, to distraction as existing on a continuum between distracted attention and attentive distraction, instead of in a binary opposition, appear in writings on forced distraction by Benjamin and Brecht.

**Techniques of Forced Distraction**

Although the response to distraction has been historically linked to a lack of control over one’s perceptual abilities, Benjamin and Brecht, against the prevailing modernist attitudes, argue for distraction as a positive method of heightening perception and increasing engagement. These methods are what could be called methods of forced distraction: distraction used as a structuring device to provoke the viewer into adopting a critical attitude to the work at moments of jarring juxtaposition.

In Walter Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, the concept of “reception in distraction” is treated not only as a method of appreciating cinema, but also as a defining feature of modern society. As Frederic Schwartz describes,

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29 Ibid., 284.
Benjamin defines distraction by contrasting it with the immersion of traditional aesthetic contemplation; he sees the latter as passive and the former, in its dispersal of attention, characteristic of the cognitive state of the competent, experienced practitioner of a trade or profession.\(^{30}\)

Coinciding with the constant barrage of advertising images, the fast-paced nature of city life and the rapid transitions of mass media, Benjamin presents distraction as a form of perception demonstrated most clearly in cinema’s use of montage, the technique by which a single pictorial composition is made by juxtaposing several sequences. In film, Benjamin reasons, “reception in distraction” finds its true training ground because of its suitability for capturing the fast-paced essence of modern life.

Benjamin continues his essay with a critique of the French writer Georges Duhamel, who expresses anxiety that the cinema is:

...a pastime for helots, a diversion for uneducated, wretched, worn-out creatures who are consumed by their worries...a spectacle which requires no concentration and presupposes no intelligence...which kindles no light in the heart and awakens no hope other than the ridiculous one of someday becoming a 'star' in Los Angeles...\(^{31}\)

Like Descartes, Duhamel’s assumes that while the masses seek distraction, pure concentration is an essential requirement in order for the spectator to appreciate the full message of a work. Moreover, Duhamel treats the genre of cinema itself as a distraction, as a frivolous activity opposed to the serious act of artistic contemplation. Cinema, as distracting entertainment, is built from an array of distractions used in montage. Since cinema promotes viewing a quick succession of visually pleasing images that interrupt each other, the viewer does not need to engage in the artistic act of contemplation. His argument presupposes that for the work to be of value, the viewer needs to engage with it

\(^{30}\) Schwartz, 420.

in a focused and uninterrupted meditation. A later quote reveals Duhamel’s reaction to
the futility in contemplating cinema, for as soon as his eye has grasped a scene it is
already changed: “I can no longer think what I want to think. My thoughts have been
replaced by moving images.”

To counter Duhamel’s distaste for the shock effect of the film, Benjamin argues
that montage instead creates a heightened presence of mind through distraction. The
moment of shock, or interruption of an image by another causes the viewer to fuse
together the two meanings into a single reading. Distraction through montage from one
image to another results in a dialectical transformation and a more complex engagement
with the work as a whole. Notwithstanding Benjamin’s thesis, it is important for us to
distinguish between the uses of montage in specific works as well as to place the
reception of montage in a historical context. As with any utterance, the speed and
intensity of the material, in this case the juxtaposed film clips, determines the readability
of the language. Moreover, whereas as a greater intensity of montage is readable now, the
inceptive stage of montage’s development is similar to the point at which one tries to
understand a full conversation of a language they are just learning. The reactionary
critiques of Duhamel and Kracauer must ultimately be read in this light.

What further complicates Benjamin’s theorization of distraction is the
inconsistency of a second characterization of the concept. Later in “The Work of Art in
the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Benjamin discusses the concept of distracted
viewing as similar to the tactile appropriation that occurs in the reception of architecture:

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32 As further noted by Howard Eiland in his discussion of Benjamin and distraction, due to a
simultaneously “positive” and “negative” attitude toward the concept, a clear understanding remains
particularly elusive. Although, as with the meta-conceptual aspect of Benjamin’s Arcades, it could be
argued that the lack of continuity mimics the concept of distraction itself.
Buildings are appropriated in a twofold manner: by use and by perception—or rather, by touch and sight...the tasks which face the human apparatus of perception at the turning points of history cannot be solved by optical means, that is, by contemplation, alone. They are mastered gradually by habit, under the guidance of tactile appropriation.  

The viewer, in effect, understands the work through embodied reception, though passing through the art/architecture and contemplating and exploring its form through experience of attentive distraction. In viewing film, Benjamin reasons that the viewer develops a kind of virtual tactile appropriation in response to the sensuous and overwhelming nature of the form. In this, Benjamin calls to mind the previously discussed critique of beholding and of Duchamp’s rejection of the retinal effect of painting in favour of activating critical thinking in his presentation of ‘undecidable’ situations and objects. Although we may critique the power of film to create the jarring disjunctions that provoking the viewer into critical reflection in the current shock-centered violence of movies today, in the historical context of the early 1930’s this technique would have a much different effect. It is clear from both of Benjamin’s essays that the new role of the viewer was to be that of an examiner, a role also advocated by Bertold Brecht.

The didactic potential of art is a consistent theme in the writings and Epic Theatre creations of Bertold Brecht. In Brecht’s concept of Verfremdungseffekt, loosely translated as alienation effect, but also referred to as defamiliarization, distanciation and “making strange”, the sudden interruption of the narrative with non-naturalistic elements such as song, placards and gestures promotes conscious reflection through breaks in the realism of narrative. Like montage, the interruption of the image with another causes the viewer

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to step back from viewing the work as a pleasing entertainment and adopt a more critical
stance to the fractured moment of abstraction. As Howard Eiland notes:

Whether by means of sudden intervention of song, the use of caption, or what Brecht calls the gestic conventions of the actors, the interruption of sequences creates gaps that undermine the audience’s illusion of a “world” on the stage and make room for critical reflection...it brings the action to a halt, occasioning surprise, and hence compels the spectator to adopt an attitude toward the situation in question.  

Through this technique, Brecht sought a kind of reception in which the audience would experience discovery through alienation. Rather than soothing or warming the audience, the ‘alienation effect’ defamiliarizes ordinary actions and objects and consequently promote contemplation through distraction from realism. In Brecht’s writings he describes this break in narrativity as a type of distraction with a pedagogic function, promoting critical reflection. The alienation effect has the ability to counteract “the ‘witchcraft’ (Magie), the ‘hypnosis,’ ‘the fog,’ the state of trance induced in spectators of bourgeois theatre – a state which Brecht compares to that of “sleepers dreaming restlessly with their eyes open.”

Brecht viewed his technique of distraction as a positive method that was able to enhance the didactic nature of theatre. Again to historically contextualize this practice, we must make note that, as with the effect of film montage, Brecht’s alienation technique would also have had greater currency in its time. Since the inclusion of non-narrative or absurdist elements of contemporary theatre is more commonplace, an audience member may not be distracted at all when an ‘out of place’ element is introduced into a performance. The overall success of Verfremdungseffekt as distraction is dependent on the preceding seamlessness of the work. The audience needs to be enrapt before this rapture can be broken.

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34 Eiland, 53
35 Ibid., 34.
Unlike Wagner’s conception of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, where the arts are unified in service of developing an overall narrative, Brecht promotes the radical separation of artistic elements so that they can be used as tools to break the narrative. This idea of disparate media working in conjunction, or what Sergei Eisenstein would later call “polyphonic montage” is here understood as an attempt to create a system in which all the elements would be equal, as if each were functioning as a circus attraction, contributing to the whole. In his 1923 essay on theatre, “The Montage of Attractions”, Eisenstein proposed a system of 'attractions' – aggressive actions in the presentation of a theatrical work – that subjected the audience “to emotional or psychological influence... calculated to produce specific emotional shocks in the spectator.”

Eisenstein notes that the idea was largely based on the Grand Guignol and the traditional circus. However, Eisenstein’s metaphor of circus attractions as polyphonic montage is somewhat misleading. For circus attractions are often experienced as discrete events within a larger whole, and within this structure it is the viewer, not the artist, who ultimately determines how these events are enjoined. More importantly, the circus spectator/participant is less likely to experience distraction as an abrupt confrontation, or an instance of alienation or shock that leads to a heightened critical reflection toward a *particular* end. In experiencing a circus, attention is engaged in the ‘flow’ of distraction rather than punctured by artist-dictated montage. Thus, the carnival experience of viewer-centered distraction is more likely to function as a method whereby the spectator is unceremoniously distracted by the proximity of simultaneous events; the spectator allows him/herself to move freely though the artwork, using distraction as a sorting machine to

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37 Ibid.
gather meaning. As Umberto Eco would argue, the alienation effect and montage, as conceived by Brecht and Eisenstein, are techniques of the 'closed' artwork, while viewer-centered distraction techniques belong to the 'open' work as a perpetual mobile of development.

**Viewer-Centered Distraction**

The distracted mind, more susceptible to external influence, no longer addresses the world in terms of its own subjective concerns, but now is capable of a more dialogic, less authoritarian, engagement with the world.38

Montage and the alienation effect, as techniques of author-controlled distraction, operate as structural devices in the writings of Benjamin and the Brecht's Epic Theatre practice. In contrast with this kind of artist-planned distraction is that of viewer-centered, chance-determined distraction models advocated by John Cage and R. Murray Schafer. Cage and Schafer present us with theorizations of distracted reception that allow for spectatorial freedom to create the macro-structure of the work, while the artist retains control over the micro-structure. Cage's *Musicircuses* and R. Murray Schafer's *The Greatest Show* present clear examples of aleatoric, or chance-based methods for viewer-centered distracted reception.

Cage's early *Happenings* and events with Kaprow, Rauschenberg and Cunningham at The Black Mountain College in the 1950's eventually led to the development of his first *Musicircus*, first performed at the University of Illinois in 1967. Without providing scores or other performance instructions, he invited artists, musicians and performers to simultaneously present their works within the same space, the audience

free to move throughout the space at their leisure. Cage intended that his circuses have
"no unique sonoric source, or for that matter, any aesthetic element...privileged over
another."39 The individual music works within the Musiccircus were dispersed in random
order; string quartets playing in administrative offices and sitar players, pianists, and
harmonica players within hallways. Although Cage has acknowledged his preference for
the spectator to create the links between the music, and find the meaning within the
chaos, often the opposite would occur. Musicians, with many years of training in the fine
art of listening and improvisation, would naturally begin to work together, leaving their
autonomous performances for a more collaborative role within the circus.

This collaborative role was also extended to the spectator. Cage specifically
created the Musiccircuses to generate a field in which the spectator was required to use
distraction as a tool to “make an individual whole”40 from the materials s/he was
presented with. Cage believed that the mere presentation of simultaneous sound events
would motivate the spectator to devise individual meaning of the work instead of
responding with frustration. Indeed, the results of the work, documented by Charles
Junkerman in ““nEw / foRms of living together”: The Model of the Musicircus” and
following a presentation in Chicago in 2003 show an overwhelming positive reaction to
the open form of audience-determined interpretation;41 however, in analyzing the
reception of these recent performances it should also be noted that Cage’s status might
significantly have influenced the legitimacy of the process. Furthermore, at the Stanford

40 Ibid.
41 Charles Junkerman, ““nEw / foRms of living together”: The Model of the Musicircus,” in John Cage:
Composed in America. Perloff, Marjorie and Charles Junkerman, eds., (Marjorie Perloff and Charles
accessed 21 April 2006.
presentation in 1992,\textsuperscript{42} it is necessary to take into account that the audience was engaging with the presentation within the walls of highly respected academic institution, and in proximity to Cage’s own performance of \textit{Muoyce}. These factors would add an even greater legitimacy to both the macro- and micro-events of the Musicircus and thus influence the degree to which one would approach work with the intent of vigorous examination.

No such atmosphere of reverence is apparent in R. Murray Schafer’s \textit{Patria 3: The Greatest Show}, devised as a village fair to be held in a large outdoor space. Influenced by Marinetti’s “Variety Theatre”, written in 1913, Artaud’s “Theatre of Cruelty” and Cage’s ideas of simultaneity and audience participation, the composer R. Murray Schafer began to conceive of what he came to call the Theatre of Confluence:

\ldots a transformable environment like a circus… I would call such an arrangement \textit{a form of possibilities}. By rearranging some of the time and space zoning, by allowing improvised blocks to modulate within a highly organized whole, a theatre would be created that would be truly a ‘theatre of first nights only.’\textsuperscript{43}

Schafer’s \textit{The Greatest Show} is just such an attempt. The setting of the performance is outdoors at night where a network of booths, towers, tents and kiosks is grouped about like at a small-town fair. The other performance areas include a large stage, called the Odditorium, on which the show opens and closes, and three large appropriately coloured tents called the Rose Theatre, the Blue Theatre, and the Purple Theatre. These venues contained ‘restricted shows,’ so-called because one cannot obtain entry with normal coupons but has to win entry by playing the game shows or participating in other

\textsuperscript{42} The performance was designed as part of Stanford’s Department of Music’s 50\textsuperscript{th} year anniversary celebration.

activities offering tickets as prizes. There is even a University Theatre where professors pontificate and wrangle about the significance of Schafer’s other *Patria* works before a single bench seating four people at most, an obvious parody on the nature of musicological discourse. Schafer’s overarching image for all of these areas is a labyrinth:

One feels at the epicentre of a great and uneven disturbance of colours, noise and music erupting everywhere throughout the grounds. Yes, all this is similar to walking down a busy street in one of the more cockeyed towns of the modern world. Both are colourful, simultaneous and haptic. But the fair is not contoured for quick passage. It leads you out in all directions and holds you back at the same time; it demands participation.\(^{44}\)

Moreover, *The Greatest Show* represents a retrospective of the artistic issues that Schafer had been reflecting upon until 1986. The performance is a collage of Schaferian ideology: his beliefs of the role of music to stimulate community-based interaction, thoughts on Canadian identity, on the soundscape and the neglected act/art of listening, an amalgamation of performances of works form his *Patria* cycle, his thoughts on opera, C.J. Jung, and as a portrait of himself literally, musicologically, and in the guise of Wagner. The show also creates a meta-structure wherein his earlier Patria works are deconstructed, “literally pulverized to pieces, shaken down scene by scene and action by action until only the siftings remain.”\(^{45}\) Consequently, *The Greatest Show* appropriately enacts the often misleading/wrong metonymic phrase that one often makes by saying that the ensemble is ‘performing Schafer’. As further described by Schafer:

Here is a very special ritual - completely without a sense of striving, and promising no rewards. You wandered about amused and amazed, never sure whether you were there to be entertained or entertaining - for the moment you won a balloon or lost your money while upside down on a

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\(^{44}\) This description of this work is taken from Schafer’s notes found on Jerrard and Diana Smith’s costume, set and mask design webpage: *The Greatest Show: Site-specific The search for a Location* available at http://www.patria.org/pdp/ORDER/SSGS.HTM, accessed 5 December 2005.

\(^{45}\) Schafer, *Patria and The Theatre of Confluence*, 121.
sky ride, you became an actor, watched by others and excited by their watching.\footnote{Ibid., 122.}

Later, Schafer restates that the work "the hooks, yanks, lunges, and thrusts of the hawkers and hucksters make you the centre of attention."\footnote{http://www.patria.org/pdp/ORDER/SSGS.HTM, Schafer's emphasis} Finally, in a description by Thom Sokolosky, the director of the Peterborough festival production in 1988, it is noted that:

The performer should understand that it is the spectator who becomes the surrogate hero or heroine [or victim] once the volunteer hero and heroine have disappeared and been chopped up respectively during the opening unit.\footnote{Schafer, Patria and The Theatre of Confluence, 129.}

Of note in these statements is Schafer's intent to redirect the audience's attention away from the performance of the work and toward the performance of themselves and to the roles they are playing within the ritual. Schafer himself speaks of the "recovery of the sacred" through an exaltation of nature and a rediscovery of the senses. The vast majority of his works use mythological figures and embody a distinctive mysticism and present a transcendentalist perspective of the natural environment. Anthony Sheppard describes this motivation by modernist composers to create music theatre works that transform the performance into a ritualized event or to move the performance into a space for ritual activity, like a church, as a method that frames the audience as a congregation.\footnote{Anthony Sheppard, Revealing Masks, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001): 20.} It also effectively re-asserts the role and impact of the artist, diffusing the threat of authorial homicide by re-positioning the artist in the important position of social activist or spiritual figure.

_The Greatest Show_ can also be understood as a variation on Sergei Eisenstein's concept of montage as "circus of attraction" actualized as interdisciplinary performance.
The Greatest Show is a clearly developed form of Schafer’s Theatre of Confluence, in which “all the arts are fused together, but without negating the strong and healthy character of each other.”50 Drawn from the metaphor of tributaries flowing into a river, the idea relates to our definition of viewer-centered distraction, in which attention flows from one tributary into another, gradually swelling with the meaning of the larger whole. Attention flows from one thing to the next and is “not forced, but nevertheless inevitable.”51 Unlike Cage’s Musicircuses, Schafer wanted the audience to able to experience each module in a “discrete act of discernment” that is different from the uncontrolled sensory overload Cage was presenting. Schafer’s interdisciplinary works are a direct response to what he perceived as the “messy excretions” of happenings and ‘mixed media’ works he criticizes as an “intra-psychic ‘trip’ [that] is no more a work of art than a trip to the dentist.”52 Although Schafer felt that ‘chance promotes new modes of perceiving...[and] delight in the unexpected,”53 he also believed that a balance was necessary between total chance and total control. Schafer’s devising practice for this work, and others, what he terms form of possibilities, consists of mediated, loosely structured modules that are, in themselves, chance based. The Greatest Show is an attempt for confluence relationship between control and indeterminacy. Just as “one understands nothing when one is totally involved,” the audience of The Greatest Show is given opportunities to move between states of participation and contemplation. Continuing Schafer’s metaphor of confluence, at times the spectator’s attention moves

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50 Schafer, Patria and The Theatre of Confluence, 27.
51 Ibid., 28.
52 Ibid., 29.
53 Ibid., 32.
with the gentle flow of a brook, at other times it is swept away by the intensity of the rapids.

These peripatetic performances bear a resemblance to the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century practice of flânerie. The flâneur makes his first appearance on the streets of Paris from 1826,\footnote{Although Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson locates the first usage of the term in a Parisian pamphlet in 1806, entitled \textit{Le Flâneur au salon ou M. Bon-Homme: examen joyeux des tableaux, mêlé des vaudevilles}, the development of flânerie gains most of its momentum in the 1830s. For a more detailed discussion see \textit{The Flâneur}, ed. Keith Tester, (New York: Routledge, 1994).} and develops from the 1830s onwards in Balzac’s celebratory writings on the Flâneur-artiste and in the writings of Baudelaire. The flâneur emerges as a detached observer of the crowd, the spectacle of the city and as one who seeks the meaning in the modernization of his environment. His\footnote{Critics have noted that the figure of the flâneur is only afforded to men. Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson describes the nineteenth century attitude to exclude women as flâneurs because “no woman is able to attain the aesthetic distance so crucial to the flâneur’s superiority. She is unfit for flânerie because she desires the objects spread before her and acts upon that desire.” Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, “The Flâneur on and off the streets of Paris”, in \textit{The Flâneur}, 27.} process “…consists of strolling at an overtly leisurely pace, allowing [himself] to be drawn by intriguing sites or dawdle in interesting places”\footnote{Rob Shields “Fancy Footwork, Walter Benjamin’s notes on flânerie” in \textit{The Flâneur}, 65.} and he “is like a detective seeking clues who reads people’s characters not only from the physiognomy of their faces, but via a social physiognomy of the streets.”\footnote{Ibid., 63.} The wandering, anti-teleological observation of the flâneur requires a careful perception, phenomenological research and reflection under the cover of one who is not engaged. The role requires performing disinterest while actively engaging in detailed detective work. The flâneur must perform leisure and detachment in order that the object of research, the crowd, not change their behaviour. The anonymity of the flâneur is thus similar to that of the unobserved ethnographer. Perhaps this constitutes a missing element in successful interdisciplinary works that require distracted reception – there is less
anonymity to research and probe the intricacies of the work due to the fact that the viewer may, at various points, become the unwitting performer and thus come under observation.

**Contextualizing Distraction, Alternatives in Music Performance**

Distracted reception is further dependent on the context of performance, the venue, the audience constitution, and the type of event, each of which dictate the kind of attitude the viewer/listener should adopt. A clear example of this is the difference between behavioral norms of the jazz club and concert hall. While conversation in a jazz club is permitted and even expected, it is not at a classical concert, even though the works presented may be of equal complexity. The differences between the appropriate methods of reception in these venues are striking. The jazz club, in which food and drink are consumed, conversation is allowed and the audience is afforded greater mobility, is reflective of the musical paradigm of improvisation, in which the musician’s mobile attention produces a work of process that is not fixed like a score. The jazz performance is understood in terms of a social gathering rather than as an aesthetic experience. However, while conversation during a concert serves a social function, it can also allow for greater freedom to reflect and contemplate the performance through the active expression and discussion of ideas. Simply put, conversation may act as a method of externalized contemplation. As social interaction, and as a distraction to internal contemplation, it may stimulate a heightened level of reflection.

It is interesting to note that, in the opposite vein to opening up the musical experience to forms of viewer-directed attention, many orchestras have opted to explore

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58 As in 18th Century concerts as social gatherings. In *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, Goehr notes the frequency and normalcy of interruption, false starts, as well as singing along, conversing and applause during a concert in pre-1800 performance.
the realm of video projection. Although there is great entertainment value in such a
device that can provide the audience with a rare opportunity to see magnified views of
exactly how bored the trombone player is or of how intense the conductor needs to frown
in order to get the musicians to do what he or she wants, in relationship to an
understanding of the work being performed, it dictates a single view of important
orchestral sub-events.59 Ultimately, this mediatized performance practice oversimplifies
what to look for in the music performed. Indeed, this move towards focusing and
directing the spectator’s attention toward the singular ‘significance,’ is an extension of
Wagner’s megalomaniac desire to eliminate all non-essential distracting elements. This
choice is no doubt equally motivated by the desire, as discussed by Benjamin in “The
Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” to bring things closer, for the
intimacy and possession of the ‘real’. The presence of screenic presentations in
performance effectively channels attention away from the performative and toward the
mediated imagery. This is due to the dominance of screen interfaces in contemporary
culture and their promises of efficient information exchange.

Notwithstanding the dubious results of mediatization in concert music
performance, the move towards experimentation with alternative forms for Western Art
music performance is significant. In the realm of new music performance, chamber
ensembles and solo musicians have moved their concerts into clubs and public venues. In
opposition to the stationary experience of listening to music in the concert hall,
composers, musicologists and music critics have begun to explore alternative
performance practices for presenting concert music by increasing the sense of embodied

59 The Vancouver, Boston, and Houston Symphony Orchestras have each explored the use live projections
of musicians as they perform.
reception. As opposed to the notion of forced distraction, in which the listener-viewer is distracted by a planned event, be it montage or alienation technique, musicians and ensembles have experimented with distraction as a position of physically moving though a work. The participant is given the full freedom to explore relationships between interdisciplinary elements.

Janet Cardiff's installation *Forty Part Motet* (Appendix 2) is one such work in which each of the forty parts of *Spem in Allium* by Thomas Tallis is individually replayed from one of forty speakers set up in a circle. These speakers, roughly the size of human heads and set upon tripods roughly the height of human bodies, evokes a strange surrogate presence of the singers. The spatialization of parts motivates the participant to enter into the composition, moving between harmonies and exploring relationships between music and visual materials at his/her own pace. Cardiff's work provides a structure for purely auditory form of distracted reception for Tallis' music.

Each of the previously mentioned interdisciplinary events and installations allows the viewer to explore the space; distraction, the method by which the viewer creates a whole from the parts. These artists become facilitators of experience, providing structures and content for the spectator to use in their own process of creation. The works promote a greater level of interaction and response from the participants, allowing them to be both repelled by the abundance of the chaos and also drawn into an environment of sensory experiences. Unlike a concert hall where the interdisciplinary forms are presented in a highly contained environment in which they are to be observed from a fixed perspective, the fluid forms of circus and installation create a space for an embodied viewer, a terrain in which the listener can move between fragments.
Thus, placing the multiple elements of these works in a concert hall setting works against an understanding of the complex interactions between them. For in the fixed perspective view of a theatre, the viewer is asked to solve a puzzle in which they are not allowed to fully maneuver the pieces. Perhaps the best example of this is evident in the earlier discussed genre of Concert Theatre. While these works provide a multiplicity of focuses relating to a specific musical meaning, I would argue that they are mostly unsuccessful in format only because they are situated in a location that in not conducive to the kind of distracted perception that allows the viewer to fully explore the connections between the various disciplines. The modern concert hall, based in Wagner’s innovations to control the viewer’s attention, was designed so that the viewer’s gaze was directed toward a central focus – the stage – on which a singular narrative event would unfold. When multiple events unfold without a clearly identifiable linear structure, as occurs in many interdisciplinary works, this historically encoded singular focus is confounded, creating a tension in reception that works against attentive distraction. It is instead as a mobile participant that reception in distraction can reach its fullest potential, asking the participant to explore the connections between the disciplines and then giving them the freedom to undertake this exploration and to choose their own path by which they experience the work.

**Directed Focus in Interdisciplinary-based music performance**

Wagner’s impulse to control perception was rigorously enforced in aid of allowing the spectator to see through the distracting ornamentation to the core of the work. Wagner’s temple of ‘higher listening’ at Bayreuth was a statement on the necessity
for pure contemplation as an ethically superior mode of reception. By darkening the audience space, lowering the orchestra out of view he was successful at isolating the audience’s attention, fixing their gaze, and effectively “subordinating their will to the will of the artist.”  

Norman Bryson argues that we must locate alternatives to the scopic regimes of the Gaze:

To dissolve the Gaze that returns the body to itself in medusal form, we must willingly enter into the partial blindness of the Glance and dispense with the conception of form as con-sideration, as Arrest, and try to conceive of form instead in dynamic terms, as matter in process…

Bryson’s call to action, against Descartes’ presentation of vision as a capturing device for knowledge acquisition, proposes a more process-oriented visual mobility. He urges us to consider the poly-scopic practice of the Glance that correspondingly results in polysemic interpretation. These somatic viewing practices that Bryson historically situates in Byzantine painting are currently employed in relational works espoused by Nicholas Bourriaud. What Bourriaud describes as relational aesthetics critiques the disembodied ‘eye’ of Cartesian Perspectivalism, and opens up the scene for distracted viewing. These works are an affront to the will of pure contemplation, represented by the gallery and concert hall.

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62 Ibid.
63 Bryson, 131.
Framing Distraction

All that precedes the work enframes and contextualizes it. As Richard Schechner states, "the theatrical event is only theatre because it is framed as theatre."64 While many would disagree that this definition contains the necessary and sufficient criteria for the categorization of theatre, it cannot be denied that acts of naming, introducing, and framing art irrecoverably alter the viewer’s perception of the work. A primary example of this phenomenon is Fluxus event scores titled as ‘music’, or performed in concert venues. These ‘acts’ that could just as appropriately be called performance art, theatre, or everyday life actions are recontextualized by the category ‘music’, thus influencing the reception of the work. Moreover, the act of framing far precedes this general artist-based intentional statement. Program notes, venue, constitution of the audience, the extra-musical gestures used by musicians, all contribute to the process of reception. And we may go even further in our list of factors that influence reception, for it may also be understood that while the interpretive statements in program notes explicitly create meaning (and often over-determine it), indeed all the material in the concert program implicitly frames the work. The inclusion of a biography in program notes places the biographical as a key to the understanding the piece, placing the work as a response to the chain of events in the composer’s life. Historical contextualization place the pieces within the Zeitgeist, treating them as tokens representing characteristics of a specific era. In the end, these particular types of interpretive material may, ironically, reduce the listener’s conceptual engagement, as s/he is given a product that fulfills its duty, as the standardized

64 Richard Schechner, Performative Circumstances: From the Avant Garde to Ramlila, (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1983); 207.
program note, as a signifier of cultural capital. The standardization of format alone can create a situation wherein interpretive materials lose their ability to provoke thought, and instead fulfill the role of mere ritual signal. The event becomes a product and the program note little more than a receipt, guaranteeing that a cultural experience has been purchased.

In the realm of visual culture, the syntax of the museum determines how art is read, both in their physical location (at the end of a hallway, in a small room, in an opulent palace) and in their proximity to one another. As Mike Bal has argued in *Looking In*, the museum, gallery, or exhibition is the work, and each piece acts as a statement placed in a sequence by the curator.\(^{65}\) The gallery is a book. The same claim may be made for music: the concert is also a book. This also may reveal an aspect of why contemporary compositions are poorly received. For when a newly commissioned composition is book-ended by works that may have nothing to say (conceptually, structurally or historically) to the work they frame, we are presented with an anthology in which each chapter is chosen by criteria of diversity instead of conceptual dialogism.

In each of these instances it is striking that although all elements in artistic presentation, from the overt to the hidden, determine meaning, we do not explicitly notice that they do so. This is because, as earlier mentioned, the purity of the cultural spaces reinforces the aims of autonomous perception. The white, or solid-coloured walls of the gallery eliminate all visual detritus, the darkness of the theatre eliminates the visual distraction of the audience and the lighting in both venues further directs the spectator’s focus. Modernist forms of presentation involve isolating the object on a supposedly a-semiotic ground so that the work may 'speak for itself'. In an interdisciplinary

performance that highlights conceptual polyphony, multiple disciplines, and allows for viewer mobility, viewers are unprepared for the level of self-direction they are provided with. Faced with the challenge of choosing their own methods for filtering meaning the spectator is given the keys to a machine that they have not been trained to operate. In this context, suddenly everything becomes too potentially meaningful, or, alternatively, too under-crafted. The pure-viewing contexts of cultural spaces have created a paradigm in which the spectator needs not struggle to gather information; it is spoon-fed to them in an easily accessible format. This is not to say that the works themselves are not challenging to comprehend, but rather that alternative frameworks allowing the viewer to research, organize, and create connections between works are marginalized in order that the autonomy of individual artist's works as objects is maintained. We must ask how much the insistence of maintaining these structures of presentation promotes active engagement and how much they simply fetishize the spectacle of 'the art' as an object.

Relational Art Practices

Less is Less. More is More.\footnote{Thomas Hirschhorn, title of an essay for the exhibition catalogue \textit{Thomas Hirschhorn}, (Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, 1995).}

- Thomas Hirschhorn

Developments in contemporary installation practices challenge the pure-viewing contexts of cultural spaces enforced by the pristine context of the gallery. The excessive, 'messy' environments, in material and conceptual aspects, of artists including Rirkrit
Tiravani, Tomoko Takahashi, Luis Jacob and Thomas Hirschhorn (Appendix 3), work against systems of containment. Their works often present the spectator with detritus not contained within a sculptural focus or frame, or illuminated within grid-lighting. Far from merely a reactive response to the purity of the white cube, as in Duchamp’s exhibition entitled “First Papers of Surrealism”, or the absurdism of Parade and other dada events, these anti-aesthetic works of considered distraction attempt to foil the containment of essentialized object as product. They counteract the Gaze’s medusal objectivism. However, as critic Martin Herbert describes in response to similar works represented at the Dionysiac exhibition at the Centre Georges Pompidu in 2005:

...there is a sense of having arrived late at an event, the action having already happened. The miasmic traces left lying around for one to sift through tend to sate the eye quickly, rather than give the viewer a feeling of freedom to roam within disorder.\(^{67}\)

This criticism is regularly leveled against artists working within the realm of the physically messy and conceptually polysemic. The suggestion most often made in response to this criticism is that we must temper the Dionysian with equal parts Apollonian order: we must sufficiently guide the viewer. It seems very much as if the present role of the artist or critic is aligning with an unspoken expectation to present thumbnails and summaries to be scanned, in order to compensate the viewer who is already taking time away from a busy schedule. Efficient communication is being conflated with conceptual engagement. This notion of clear communication, a one-to-one relationship between visual sign and signified in the gallery space may in fact work against the active engagement through exploration we seek from our audiences. This notion is detrimental for two reasons. Firstly, as ‘communication’ it reinforces the idea

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that there is a singular, or at least privileged, message awaiting the spectator. Comprehension exists on a binary level wherein the message is either understood or not understood. Secondly, by eliminating the ambiguity of the work, the viewer does not need to deeply probe into it’s nature, as the message, regardless of whether this is the case or not, is already known. Tony Godfrey argues in his survey *Conceptual Art* (1998) that in comparison to the majority of Art and Language work:

...only someone initiated in the mysteries of formalist art history could appreciate the philosophical rationale for Noland staining his canvases rather than painting them. But anyone could understand the language of Lawrence Weiner or Dan Graham’s works. Likewise, cold though the language may seem, and difficult though the mental gymnastics needed to conceive it may initially appear, a piece like *Any Moment* [Appendix 4] by Victor Brugin from 1970 is comprehensible to any reasonably literate person.  

Godfrey suggests, as other conceptual artists do, that much conceptual work, and particularly Art and Language Group works, is more transparent in its signifying practices. Perhaps within the narrow context of those trained to glean the signified from the visual art sign – the elite audience composed of other artists, art school graduates and galleristas – this model can be, and often is, successful. However, Godfrey actually suggests that any viewer able to read is able to understand the meaning behind the statement. This is fallacious, as it could be argued that the same holds true for any written work. In fact, it could be argued that it is the very simplicity of the discourse, like the dense simplicity and complexity of Haiku, which creates a field of un-readability around the work. These ideals of visual semiotics motivates visual arts practices in general to locate the essential, core meaning of the work and pair down the materials so that the work can be appreciated as a statement. Within a context that seeks a larger audience,

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however, and particularly within municipal and provincial public galleries that continually devise outreach programs, there is a disconnect between the language and the ideal interpreter of that language, the actual viewer that is present. This is not to say that these should be rigidly aligned, but exactly the opposite: that there is not a singular progression between these steps; the sign system for construing meaning is not constructed in this format. How often is the audience made aware, regardless of whether there is a singular position of meaning held by the artist, that it is as good to engage with a work on the viewer’s terms rather than reacting in frustration when unable to pinpoint the artist’s singular ‘it’. A criticism of polyvocal work is that it becomes difficult to speak meaningfully about a work whose essential nature is to evade stable readings. Nonetheless, the impetus behind needing to delineate the stability of the work comes from the same impulse as the desire to maintain the autonomy of Werktreue ideals and containment of reception for fear of the unrestrained proliferation of meaning.

In opposition to the commodification of meaning it is increasingly necessary develop and promote systems of reception, such as distraction, that allow for exploration not dependent upon understanding ‘the concept’ as a singular entity. As similar to educational theory, the success for this form may indeed lie within the transparency of its aims: to immediately state, in interpretive materials or other frames, that although the reading or viewing may be difficult, a more profound level of understanding will emerge through the process. In this paradigm, the distracted understanding of a concept would be based on provisionality and flow of information.
Difficulty and Conceptual Polysemy

If I could say it in one sentence I wouldn’t have to make a work. 69

- Tomoko Takahashi

I myself manage to hold large numbers of wholly irreconcilable views simultaneously, without the least difficulty. I do not think others are less versatile. 70

- Salman Rushdie

The axiom of Objectivist metaphysics affirms that reality exists, and that it exists independently of human consciousness. The Law of Identity states that anything that exists is determinate, that is, has a fixed, finite nature: “A is A”. The tradition of analytic philosophy imposes a positivist search for verifiable facts that work against the polysemy that is promoted by relativist thought. This is not to suggest, as those who fear Derridean dissemination do, that no interpretation should be argued to be more pertinent than any other, but rather that multiple, conflicting interpretations can exist simultaneously without needing to create fixed valuative judgements. Moreover, it is our responsibility to understand this multiplicity as more than a form of nihilist equilibrium, or to bring about the critical paralysis and unaccountability so feared by relativism’s detractors. 71 It is necessary to critique the interpretations on their own grounds rather than resorting to the derogatory ‘foul-play’-call of solipsism. These remarks may seem defensive, or even

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71 Terry Eagleton and others have argued that poststructuralist critique can allow the critic to advance any and all claims to interpretation without responsibility to these claims. Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996. Derrida himself argues against this in his afterward to *Limited Inc.* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988).
outdated in comparison to the more current critical trends of situated relativism, but they are not, as I have already shown in my description of recent musicological discourse.\footnote{A further example is Michael Spitzer's \textit{Metaphor and Musical Thought} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), in which the author disparages the "much exaggerated 'death of the author' conceit so beloved of postmodern philosophy" that leads to critiques in which the study of mediation "somewhere along the line, down some sort of \textit{sorties} slippery slope...slides into solipsism and relativism, so that it becomes not just impossible but even unethical to defend the primacy of the authority of a text." 92-3.}

In theatre and film, the decision to present a clearly legible adaptation, an adaptation that streamlines narrative and character development, is sometimes motivated by the fact that, unlike the reader of the novel, the spectator in performance has no control over re-reading or pausing; the spectator is at the mercy of deciphering meaning in the moment of presentation. The reasoning behind such a decision may be presented as a way to make transparent the author's core ideas and to eliminate that which could distract from a clear reception of the primary essence of the work. While I am not proposing that the practice of adaptation is purely based in simplification of content, I would suggest that, in adaptation from text to performance, the challenging element of artifice is far too often eliminated in favour of an easily consumable product. This is most notable in the multitude of Hollywood film adaptations that replace complexities, tangents and contradictions with standardized plot lines. As an alternative to the suppression of difficulty and density as a method to avoid overwhelming to the audience with 'unnecessary' distraction, I suggest that by using methods of interdisciplinary performance we may create a space of open inquiry that allows the audience time to explore the work. A first example of this is to incorporate the context of viewing installation, whereby the audience is provided the capacity to pause and re-view material presented. A second example is to use the program note as more than a source of biographical information and historical contextualization, instead replacing it with
questions and statements that explore the conceptual, difficult, dense material being presented that contain a density of their own. The impetus behind this choice is a conceptualization of interpretive material that does not ‘explain away’ or contain meaning, but that instead provokes and sets in motion a dialogic listening process.

In relation to this advocacy of difficulty, we must also ask to what degree must an artist, curator, or producer be responsible for devising a map or a guide to lead the spectator through the work? How much do we need to temper the Dionysian with Apollonian order? These questions are echoed by the interactive/participatory theatre community who question:

To what extent has that invited audience been sufficiently prepared to operate, if not on the same terms as the performers, at least as much more than passive onlookers?...Rule books are not necessary! But, explicitly or implicitly...some element of signposting is needed.  

Or is it enough to simply preface these works with press releases, promotional materials and interpretive statements regarding the polysemic intent of both content and viewing? Reactionary responses often follow from this: One is not doing his/her job as an artist if s/he is not providing a particular readable (consumable) product: “The belief in clear communication of ideas plucks intellectual work into a capitalist market system in which things are only of value if they can be bought and sold.” In answer to this, Schafer asserts, “so what if instead of five-act fauteuil monstrosity we produce a confection of 100 atrocities; amusing, ironical, linked only in the head of the wandering visitor.” As has been demonstrated in many of this chapter examples, these concoctions of atrocities, built from conceptual polysemy and distracted reception, critique the concept of the

74 Allen, 33-34.
75 Schafer, 123
music composition as a finished object, as “something corruptible, which can occupy a physical space (take its place, for example, on the shelves of a library).”

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Discussions of distraction and polysemy have functioned in this study as a means of eliding the rigid roles set out by those who seek to maintain a level of authority through genre specificity. I have sought to counterweight the beliefs that critical and creative activity should remain within the realm of those whose roles warrant it. It is through proposing the simultaneity of roles that we are able to best re-invigorate discussions of what it means to move between non-essentialized critical/creative positions: musicians exploring methods to infuse their practices through critical and research-based models; musicologists employing creative, and activist modes of discourse; and spectators performing the roles of creator and researcher. Despite much research to the contrary, the unspoken assumption that interdisciplinary critique provides a less pertinent understanding to discipline-specific knowledge of the text/score is still prevalent in musicological discourse. Writers including Kramer and McClary are often critiqued for their uneven musical analyses. This discrediting technique marginalizes the importance of what they do contribute to the knowledge of Western art music and implicitly promotes a value hierarchy between strong discipline-specific knowledge and weaker interdisciplinary knowledge. This would of course not often be stated outright, and indeed is denied, but, as I have shown in several examples, is certainly implied within the rhetoric. I believe this to be a significant cause behind the lack of multi-modal influence between listening and performing, and Critical Theory. The intersections between these subjects remain largely unmapped both in and outside of the university context. Though Critical Theory is heavily drawn upon in musicological research, there
remains a disjunction between its use in research and its less- or non-essential place within the pedagogical frameworks for listening and performance.

In this light, recent work such as that of Kivy and O’Day on personal authenticity in performance practice and Cook and Everist’s anthology bridging music theory and Critical theory are important additions for their attempts to develop connections between methodologies long considered mutually exclusive; however, the rhetorical moderation of these writings can be equally considered a tactic for inclusion within the ranks of those within the discipline. Particularly noticeable in Korsyn’s writings, rhetoric functions as a subversive rather than overt tactic to gain entry into the ranks of musicology. In my own writing, I have overtly addressed specific ways to promote dynamic equilibrium between critical theory, interdisciplinary examination and multi-modal artistic practices, and traditional musicology, and analysis, as methodologies for understanding music in both performance and listening practices. These interdisciplinary, multi-modal practices achieve cross-pollination between theory and practice.

Relational Art for Whom?

There also are several criticisms to the notions of relational art, viewer-centered distraction and conceptual polyvalency that I have yet to address. One such issue, raised by Clair Bishop in a discussion of Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics, critiques his claim that “encounters are more important than the individuals who compose them.”¹ In response to what she views as an uncritical promotion of ‘democracy’ in the works identified under Bourriaud’s rubric of relational art, Bishop asserts that “…if relational

¹ Nicholas Bourriaud, quoted in Claire Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” October, 110, (Fall 2004): 65.
art produces human relations, then the next logical question to ask is what types of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?" As in the previously mentioned Tiravanija installations, Bishop notes the tendency for relational art not to produce rigorous discussion around/of the conceptual sphere. Dan Fox, associate editor of Frieze, echoes this: "What can I get from a conversation at a Tiravanija installation that I can’t get from meeting my friends in the pub?" What both critics note is the recurrence in relational art for a "...networking among a group of art dealers and like-minded art lovers, and...the atmosphere of a late-night bar. Everyone has a common interest in art, and the result is art-world gossip, exhibition reviews, and flirtation." At issue here is not Tiravanija’s work, but the claims made for it by critics such as Bourriaud, that the relational work is inherently superior to optical contemplation because it is based social interaction, and is consequently "political in implication and emancipatory in effect." There are two issues to sort out in these criticisms, firstly the valuative judgment between the polarization of intellectual discussion and ‘gossip’, and secondly, the formation and constitution of such relational communities, particularly in relationship to ideas of democracy.

Firstly, works such as Tiravanija’s works often provoke critiques based on a hierarchy of interaction, where good intellectual conceptual discussion is in opposition to bad networking. Nowhere, however, does Tiravanija state that his goal is to induce discussions of critical theory, democracy or even institutional critique. That conversation, meals, drinks are shared is enough for Tiravanija, but has also led to the of Tiravanija’s

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2 Bishop, 65.
3 Dan Fox, "Welcome to the Real World," Frieze, 90 (2005): 76.
4 Bishop, 67.
work as *mere* conviviality. The gallery experience is idealized as something separate from everyday life, different to the bar or the studio. In contrast to this binary opposition, it is important to note that neither the mere conviviality nor the critical discourse occur in wholly separate spheres. As with the environment that is itself halfway between home and contemplative space, there is instability between the two modes of discourse. Indeed, it is often conviviality that generates the most profound and unexpected dialogue, as the level of risk to discuss complex issues is heightened in such an atmosphere.

Secondly, it is assumed that relational work that promotes discussion in makeshift communities does so in a democratic sense, across the spectrum from those initiated and uninitiated in the discourse of contemporary art alike. The communities that are formed produce a transparency of the ‘work’ made evident in the discussion of the concepts that the artist puts forward for discussion. It is assumed that this discussion is self-recursive, creating a meta-discourse on the nature of interaction, site-specificity, the space of the gallery, and the perennial favorite: the ontological status of the art itself. The implicit utopian proposition is one in which a community joins together across social, economic strata to engage in discussions of how to improve society at the local and/or global level. Or to be more accurate, these are the recurring statements made in exhibition reviews. As noted by Dan Fox, there is a terminological loss of meaning in reviews of relational works that recycle an incessant repetition of empty buzzwords:

...‘meeting’, ‘exchange’, ‘dialogue’, ‘collaboration’, ‘discussion’, ‘relational’, ‘social’, ‘democratic’, ‘political’, ‘Utopian’. They have a familiar currency...but do I understand them in the same way you do? Can you tell me what this glossary of convivial togetherness means, or, more precisely, what we’re supposed to do with it?\(^6\)

\(^6\) Fox, 75.
Returning to Clair Bishop’s critique, we need to ask whether these goals of stimulating conceptual discussion do so best in the context of the gallery space, a privileged space visited largely by those who are, from the beginning, conversant in the practices of contemporary visual art. This question is, of course, dependent on the gallery presenting the work and the gallery’s viewership. A small artist-run centre with a specific mandate may attract a well-informed public drawn from the artistic community, whereas a larger institution that has a greater diversity also attracts a more diverse public, often across age and cultural demographics. These contextual factors must not be underestimated when discussing the nature of relational works.

In relation to these questions it is worth analyzing a specific piece that falls between relational visual art and performance. *Habitat* by Luis Jacob (Appendix 5), exhibited from November 5, 2005 to February 26, 2006 at the Art Gallery of Ontario was a work that is both used and viewed by an extremely diverse public, from children to large groups of ESL students to those aware and unaware of relational aesthetics, or contemporary art in general. The ‘habitat rooms’ created by Jacob are used at different times by those who do have particular connections/privilege to the spaces: each weekend a DJ uses the DJ space, small group meditation sessions occur every two weeks and the artist himself hosts a scheduled reading group. Outside of these activities, all rooms are open to be used by patrons as they see fit. As described by the curatorial statement, “Habitat”:

...will push the boundaries of gallery use with this installation comprised of a series of five ‘living spaces.’ Defined by clusters of domestic furniture and appliances, the installation will consist of a Meeting Area, Yoga/Mediation Area, DJ/Music Area, Hard/Soft Area, and Sleeping/Reading Area. Each will suggest various possibilities for use that will challenge the viewer to decide between simply viewing the
installation as a work of art and getting involved in the various activities programmed for each space.\textsuperscript{7}

Jacob’s work raises the same questions articulated by Bishop on the idealistic democratic us of the gallery space and the community that uses the space, but in its execution does not privilege one mode of use. Unlike Bourriaud’s understanding of relational art’s function to create utopias, or ‘prototypes’ for new ways of being in the world, Jacob’s installation suggests a polyvalency of both use and meaning. It is a habitat for use and for observation. Moreover, exhibited in a provincial gallery, it is a work that brings diverse publics into contact with activities from the reading group discussing art theory to the DJ re-mixing conversation and music generated by the patrons themselves. As described by Jacob, at the very least, \textit{Habitat} suggests diverse alternatives to forms of pure contemplation sanctioned within the gallery space.\textsuperscript{8}

This critique of embodied reception also applies to interactive works. It is often assumed, and this is also the case in early participatory theatre of the 1960’s such as the Living Theatre, that active participation in the work creates a more engaged viewer. While these works may provide the viewer with a more physically active role, it may be far from the case that they are engaged in an intellectual or artistic sense. In fact, many viewers become overwhelmed by the physically active interaction, or the process itself, as they learn how to control the system and master the interface. Although all of these may lead to engagement as enjoyment, they do not necessarily promote \textit{conceptual} engagement. The role of the interactor in these works performs the role of the missing mechanical part that makes the machine function. Their participation, in this instance, is


\textsuperscript{8} Luis Jacob, email interview by author, 30 April 2006.
reduced to rule-recognition. I consider the open form of relational works I have been discussing to represent a divergent aesthetic from interactivity, one in which the goal does not revolve around the learning of ‘rules’ for control of the situation, and the viewer is made aware of this in advance.

Another layer of complexity that enters into relational work, one that is specifically related to my own practice, is that of performative and interpretive material frames. Unlike a relational artwork, a relational performance needs to consider how the inclusion of performers can direct the nature of the interaction. While it is easy to state that by including performers, the discussions will ultimately be steered by these performers in the specific direction that the artist intends, in reality there are far more contingencies to take into account. Firstly, there is the very inclusion of the performers that can work against stimulating dialogue. The traditional mode of performance dictates a hierarchy wherein the performers impart knowledge while the audience receives this information. Thus, when performers appear outside of the performance space, the natural response from the audience is not to interact with them unless they explicitly require participation. In order to generate pure conversation between performers and audience, it is thus necessary to invoke non-acting forms, namely to eliminate the actorly essence of the performer. This can become quite difficult, as in certain cases it is the mere presence of a live body that demands interaction facilitates hesitancy in the audience toward such interaction. The audience member feels they may have to ‘perform’, or that they may be held accountable for what they do and say, and the fear associated with this is that others who are watching instead of interacting will ultimately evaluate their ‘performance’. It is therefore of utmost importance that the artist working in relational forms consider the
environment for stimulating the kind of interaction they want to achieve as well as the
behaviour and perceived 'roles' of the performers. Interpretive guidance, including
program notes and interpretive text panels, as a second framing device, can provide much
direction toward the rules of engagement; however, they may also negate some of the risk
that produces engagement. The more one frames the work, the more this frame may
threaten to overwhelm the piece as its sole meaning. Moreover, these discipline specific
elements may also act as frames to signal overall reception filters to contextualize the
work.

**Practicing Difficulty or Hermetic Exclusion?**

For many, the two options presented in the above heading would be considered
consequent, the 'or' would be replaced with 'leads to'. Mimetic criticism, or writing that
increases the transparency of the cultural artifact, attempts an impossible doubling instead
of proposing a dialogic relationship in which criticism questions what the artifact refuses
to disclose about itself. It is the role of such criticism, as an artistic form in its own right,
to suggest what the artifact might conceal. Although I do not intend to open up the
lengthy discourse on the ontology of criticism, I would here like to address the promotion
of difficulty in art and criticism as related to dialogic processes. The often-reactive
argument for both conceptual work and Critical Theory is that difficulty represented in
these genres consists merely of clever intellectual games designed merely to bewilder.
Early critiques of Derrida's 'unreadable' style and more recent criticism on Judith Butler
focus on the pure spectacle created by the writing. Critics argue that these authors'
stylistic density and play of language creates a hermetically enclosed readership. In
response to these criticisms, we should note that it is the unreadability of the language that is being attacked, as if the goal of criticism should be to strive for complete transparency. “As she [Butler] repeatedly emphasizes, grammar and style are not politically neutral,” and “Learning the rules that govern intelligible speech is an inculcation into normalized language, where the price of not conforming is a loss of ontological as well as epistemological intelligibility.”\(^9\) How we write is equally important to what we write. As a basic pedagogical principle, the challenge of learning is directly related to the complexity of what we learn. In relation to my study of reception I have shown how the process of reading is just as important as what we read, indeed, the process \emph{is} what we read. Reading and writing, as challenges to received knowledge, as political acts, \emph{cannot} be transparent.

\textbf{A Matter of Words}

Finally, in relation to the various words and phrases that I have used within this study only as a counteractive measure to evade the numbing repetition of ‘distracted reception’, the reader may wonder why I would chose to remain with the negative connotations conjured by the word ‘distraction’. Perhaps the playful contradiction of ‘rhizomatic focus’ or more neutral ‘dispersal of attention’ would promote a healthier sounding image of the kind of experience I am suggesting; however, the negative references of distraction are not ones that should be dismissed. My use of the term has been more than a forceful misreading of what we have come to commonly understand, in it contemporary usage, as an undeniably disagreeable quality. The idea of distraction conveys exactly the kind of feel that pervades the kind of interdisciplinary works I have

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been discussing and have followed in my own artistic practice. For within these practices lies a simultaneity of concepts and structures that, like distraction, pull the viewer’s attention between layers. The micropolyphony of a work, to use Ligeti’s terminology, creates tension within the very act of viewing that produces engagement of its own. For when one’s viewing is distracted, they may be missing something equally important; the hierarchy of the most important thing to view is dismantled. As with the thrust of violence rather than the damage, it is the movement of distraction rather than the paralysis that should be sought. The negative connotations of these terms are essential in order to provoke; in this way, they function on a level of metadiscourse.

Thus, I would argue that it is the very same negative connotations of distraction that keep the concept itself in movement. Tied to historical (some would claim outdated) language of Brecht and Benjamin, the moralistic discourse in early twentieth century pedagogical theory, and the reactionary statements regarding the perils of mass media, the concept of distraction carries with it a healthy relationship between acceptability and unacceptability. The idea of distracted reception is itself a concept in a state of distraction: our attention is pulled between positive and negative poles. I should at this point reiterate that I am, in no way, promoting distracted reception as the best way to understand all artistic works, nor that distracted viewing and interpretive violence are to be accepted without critical skepticism. In fact, this is opposite to my aims, as it is in many cases necessary to take a highly critical relationship to criticism that espouses these concepts because of the threat they may potentially seem to pose. Polemics and ventures of heightened risk should not be marginalized and polarized as rampant subjectivity bent on destroying objective truth. The paths of interpretive violence, distracted reception,
polysemy, and difficulty all offer the possibility to lead away from detachment and toward a more critically engaged space for examination. Ultimately it is the level of risk that these terms embody, not the negative results that I am seeking. The negative associations with these terms promote a process of ethical consideration. The overwhelming volume of critical theory that can be read with distance and purely for the sake of keeping up with the latest, the large number of artists producing work that can be scanned for evaluation based on its relationship to established traditions, these apathetic/disinterested responses are becoming more prevalent in the over-saturation of culture. As with Paul McCarthy's installations that place the viewer in a direct relationship to the risk entailed in violent acts and difficult situations, we need to explore forms for engagement that move past the pure shock value of alienation. Distracted viewing, as attentive distraction, and interpretive violence and polysemy in adaptation, as calls to provocation, provide the means to do this.

Further Development

If these tactics provide a means for heightened critical engagement, then what specific forms might they take? Shock, difficulty, alienation and risk are highly relative terms. This is why, in my final summation, I shall emphasize that the nature of difficulty cannot promote engagement without working in conjunction with its opposite pole: seduction. Without the pull between poles, without the inter-esse of attractive repulsion and distracted attention, the difficult does indeed become no more than a gimmick, trend and hollow enterprise. How the pull between these poles is realized is a matter for further theoretical and practical research. Although these questions are being explored by several
of visual artists working in relational models I have already mentioned, it remains to be seen how these issues are negotiated within Western Art music-based inter-arts practices. These explorations are taking place in the recent works of Heiner Goebbels, who treats extended musical quotations as statements for conceptual performance works. *LOSE combo* of Berlin has also begun the exploration of music performance as critical theory, using film and installation as their ‘research’ tools. From these recent experiments, what remains is to further develop the exploration of practice as research. These new interdisciplinary and multi-modal forms risk failure, attempting that which challenges in its difficulty, pulls thorough distraction, and creates ruptures and collisions in our understanding.
WORKS CITED


Rirkrit Tiravanija, *Untitled 1996 (tomorrow is another day)*. Exterior view.

Rirkrit Tiravanija, *Untitled 1996 (tomorrow is another day)*. Interior view.
Appendix 2.


Appendix 3.

Making something big, enlarged doesn't mean it is important! A very big space does not mean it is a very important space! But it gives a commitment to something. That's why it is big or enlarged. And simultaneously the enlargement makes it empty! So - the commitment and the emptiness together remove the meaning! It suggests another meaning - a different meaning.

<24h Foucault> was not a festival. I wanted to give space for contemplation. I wanted to give space for being involved and for confrontation.

As an artist, sometimes feel stupid facing the result of my work. And I felt stupid facing the result of my work of 24th Foucault. But I think the mission is to hold out this ridiculousness, the ridiculousness of the Untouchable. I think art work is never perfect. After all, my work has other goals than to be made without errors. I want to do an Artwork where errors and lack are not important.

I want to work with excess. I want to work in over-page and in over-capacity. I don't want to do too much, to avoid lines. I want to work with energy. Energy = Yes! Quality = No!

Cynicism without negativity and without self-satisfying criticism. I want to do a work that resists the moralist and the nihilist tradition.

Michel Foucault's contribution to philosophy is not to discuss. Art and philosophy are not to discuss.

"24h Foucault" is not a contribution to discussion. It is a homage without respect, made.

Audiotheque

I tried to give forms. It is not mean to make forms! I tried to give what is a form of my own. "24h Foucault" wanted to be a form of my own! I want to give form to what I mean when I say yes.

I don't want to make a political artwork. I want to do my artwork politically! Doing the work politically means trying to work well out.

Documentation by Thomas Hirschhorn
0  ANY MOMENT PREVIOUS TO THE PRESENT MOMENT

1  THE PRESENT MOMENT AND ONLY THE PRESENT MOMENT

2  ALL APARENTLY INDIVIDUAL OBJECTS DIRECTLY EXPERIENCED BY YOU AT 1

3  ALL OF YOUR RECOLLECTION AT 1 OF APPARENTLY INDIVIDUAL OBJECTS DIRECTLY EXPERIENCED BY YOU AT 0 AND KNOWN TO BE IDENTICAL WITH 2

4  ALL CRITERIA BY WHICH YOU MIGHT DISTINGUISH BETWEEN MEMBERS OF 3 AND 2

5  ALL OF YOUR EXTRAPOLATION FROM 2 AND 3 CONCERNING THE DISPOSITION OF 2 AT 0

6  ALL ASPECTS OF THE DISPOSITION OF YOUR WON BODY AT 1 WHICH YOU CONSIDER IN WHOLE OR IN PART STRUCTURALLY ANALOGOUS WITH THE DISPOSITION OF 2

7  ALL OF YOUR INTENTIONAL BODILY ACTS PERFORMED UPON ANY MEMBER OF 2

8  ALL OF YOUR BODILY SENSATIONS WHICH YOU CONSIDER CONTINGENT UPON YOUR BODILY CONTACT WITH ANY MEMBER OF 2
9
ALL EMOTIONS DIRECTLY EXPERIENCED
BY YOU AT 1

10
ALL OF YOUR BODILY SENSATIONS
WHICH YOU CONSIDER CONTINGENT
UPON ANY MEMBER OF 9

11
ALL CRITERIA BY WHICH YOU MIGHT
DISTINGUISH BETWEEN MEMBERS OF
10 AND 9

12
ALL OF YOUR RECOLLECTION AT 1
OTHER THAN 3

13
ALL ASPECTS OF 12 UPON WHICH
YOU CONSIDER ANY MEMBER OF 9
TO BE CONTINGENT
Appendix 5.

Luis Jacob, *Habitat*, 2005
Luis Jacob, *Habitat*, 2005