



# Journal of Somaesthetics

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## Preface

### Somaesthetics and Sound

The intertwining of sound and the body is fascinating and multifarious. Until fairly recently, sound has mainly been studied in terms of listening, sound reproduction technologies, and acoustical measurements. In turn, the body, especially that of someone producing sound with their voice or with an instrument, has commonly been approached as a physiological entity. Lately, however, the embodied and experiential aspect of sound has increasingly gained ground in research and pedagogy as well as in the arts. In a short period of time, studying the experience of listening or producing sound has generated a number of fruitful approaches and methods for sound studies. The field has, so to speak, “come of age.”

However, the advancement of this field in recent years does not mean that it would not have existed before. Numerous pioneering studies focusing on the sound experience of human beings have been published, some well before the turn of the millennium and some more recently (e.g., Benson, 2003; Bicknell, 2015; Burrows, 1990; Eidsheim, 2015; Ihde, 1976, 2007; Jankélévitch, 1961/2003; McCaleb, 2016; Neumark, Gibson, & Leeuwen, 2010; Vitale, 2010; Welten, 2009; Winter, 2009). The number of published articles and books on the subject is increasing, as exemplified by extensive anthologies such as *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies* (Pinch & Bijsterveld, 2011), which considers sound and music to be experienced “in such diverse settings as shop floors, laboratories, clinics, design studios, homes, and clubs, across an impressively broad range of historical periods and national and cultural contexts” (Pinch & Bijsterveld, 2012, para. 1).

Research of speech and singing is another field of sound studies that was almost completely focused on exact sciences, such as phonetics, anatomy, physiology, and acoustics. During the last decade, however, the spectrum of approaches has expanded considerably with publications such as the *Journal of Interdisciplinary Voice Studies*; a book series called *Routledge Voice Studies*; and a number of carefully crafted articles, anthologies, and monographs. An impressive example of the broadening of this field, which would have been unimaginable ten or twenty years ago, is the recently published *Oxford Handbook of Voice Studies*. This book identifies six modes or domains of research that may be transferable to other fields of embodied or experiential sound studies as well as somaesthetics:

- 1) *prompts* (texts, artistic forms, everyday practices that the voice performs or executes),
- 2) *performance* (what comes into being during vocal engagement, including sounds, their character, silences, and the trajectory along which these elements unfold),
- 3) *material dimensions and mechanism* (the physicality of the voice and its function),
- 4) *auditory/sensory perception* (the part of the vocal feedback cycle that is concerned with auditory and any sensory perception of voice, including auto-perception),

5) *documentation, narrativization, and collection* (the modes of research that focus primarily on voice in the form of the secondary forms of documentation and data collection), and

6) *context* (the meta-context within which we understand the other domains, and, equally importantly, the domain that affords and limits insight into a given phenomenon). (Eidsheim & Meizel, 2019, pp. xxiv–xxvi)

As Eidsheim and Meizel (2019) note,

*initiating the process of mapping the territory and naming the six domains is only a first step in a much larger project: the collective work of charting voice-related areas of scholarship and practice for the purpose of facilitating new entry points for scholars and illuminating connections across fields.* (p. xxvi)

Substituting “voice” with “sound” might make the six modes or domains of research, as well as this statement, relevant to broader study of the sound–body relationship.

A journal issue on sound and somaesthetics is an ideal medium for disseminating some of the subjects of research, approaches, points of view/being, and methods for studying the embodiment of sound. As the field is in the process of expanding and researchers are finding new options for interdisciplinary study, such a journal issue is only one of the numerous platforms through which this fascinating area can be developed. It will be interesting to see how the increasing interest in the embodied experience among sound and voice researchers will change the utilization of somaesthetics as part of these approaches as well as how this tendency towards the body in sound studies will encourage scholars of somaesthetics to address sound-related themes in their work.

In this issue of the *Journal of Somaesthetics*, contributors from various fields explore sound as manifested in the body, as originating from the body, or as a meaningful, embodied experience. The focus is on the body-aesthetic or somaesthetic dimensions of sound, music, and the voice. The articles deal with improvisation, playing instruments, singing, theatre, and the philosophy of sound. In most articles, sound is approached from the embodied experience of the sound producer (i.e., the player or singer). Some authors base their reflections on their own experiences, while others use research material they collected through interviews and discussions.

In her overview article, Anne Tarvainen maps out the most interesting writings in the field of somaesthetics, music, sound, and the voice. She introduces Richard Shusterman’s texts on these subjects and presents the writings of other scholars who apply somaesthetics with sound-related approaches. The aim of Tarvainen’s article is to offer some entry points for readers interested in applying somaesthetics to research and/or artistic practices involving music, sound, and the voice.

In his article, Stefano Marino focuses on jazz drumming and improvisation. He links his analysis to somaesthetics and pragmatist aesthetics and points out that improvised music can be understood as somatic knowledge. Marino articulates the bodily nature of improvisation, highlighting the thoughts of numerous theorists without neglecting musicians’ perspective on the subject. Marino concludes that jazz drumming is comparable to other somatic activities, such as yoga, because it is equally practiced for cultivating somatic consciousness and exhibiting sophisticated use of the body.

Focusing on the lived experiences of two professional musician-teachers, Grace Han studies the essential role of the body in practicing the cello. Traditionally, becoming a professional instrumentalist in the field of classical music has been conceived as an endless repetition of instrument-specific skilled movements. These ideally result in automatic, habitual routines that allow the musician to shift his or her attention toward abstract musical ideas. In her interview-based study, Han questions this conventional dichotomy, instead understanding the everyday work of a musician as a vehicle for self-understanding through imagination, bodily awareness, and liberation.

Drawing upon the currently growing body of research on music as an experience of embodiment, Salvatore Morra focuses on the Tunisian lute, *‘ūd ‘arbī*, and its “sounding Tunisian.” Understanding the senses as inseparable from one another, he explores “the notion of Tunisian sound in relation to touches and bodies of *‘ūd ‘arbī* players and the meanings they construct.” Morra first introduces the *‘ūd ‘arbī* and the tradition of playing it and then describes the embodied process of building, hearing, and touching the instrument.

In her article, Charulatha Mani describes the artistic process of composing “Sonic River,” a vocal piece co-performed with another singer. This work is based on the Karnatik (South Indian classical) musical tradition. During the vocal and somaesthetic process, Mani explores the development of her own bodily awareness and links these reflections to the yoga tradition. Mani criticizes the patriarchal tradition of Karnatik music, which ignores the bodily experience, and discusses how to democratize the vocal practices of this prestigious music culture.

In his article, composer Peter Bruun looks at the theater project “Sound of the Audience,” which he executed in Copenhagen with two directors, a musician, and a group of local residents. For three months, the group rehearsed a performance in which the performers acted like an audience, producing audience sounds such as speech and coughing. Then, the work was performed in front of an actual audience. The article is based on the composer’s own experiences as well as conversations with one of the participants. In it, Bruun ponders whether there can be music without sound. He looks at the function of music in community-making and discusses the function of music between and among people in a world where music distribution is largely digitized. He concludes that music is a fundamentally communal bodily activity that “begins in the flesh.”

Based on interpretations of *Klangfiguren* (“sound figures,” commonly known as Chladni figures) by the early German Romantics Novalis and Johann Wilhelm Ritter, Alexis B. Smith traces the universal language of nature, described by Novalis as the “true Sanskrit.” This language, which is closely related to music, contains sound, writing, and meaning simultaneously; like in Sanskrit, there is no longer a separation between objects and their names, nor between humans and nature. Drawing upon the properties of Sanskrit and Ritter’s scientific and poetic narratives about the sound figures, Smith argues that sound figures have a prominent role in *The Novices of Sais*, in which Novalis develops Poesie as a universal language and sound figures are alluded to through poetic, metaphorical imagery.

*Anne Tarvainen and Päivi Järviö, Issue Editors*

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## Music, Sound, and Voice in Somaesthetics: Overview of the Literature

*Anne Tarvainen*

**Abstract:** *During the last ten years, somaesthetics has been increasingly applied in studies of music, sound, and the voice. In this overview, I will map out the most interesting articles and books in this field after briefly introducing somaesthetics and considering how its various dimensions could be utilized in issues related to sound and music. In addition, I will discuss the role of the body in previous academic approaches to music. In the first main section of the article, I will introduce some texts by Richard Shusterman, the developer of somaesthetics, in which he deals with music, sound, and the voice. After that, I will present the writings of other scholars who apply somaesthetics in their music-, sound-, and voice-related approaches. This article is intended to give an overview, not to comprehensively deal with the content of these texts, and to offer some entry points for readers interested in applying somaesthetics to research and/or artistic practices involving music, sound, and the voice.*

**Keywords:** *music, sound, voice, body, embodiment, somaesthetics, musicology, music education.*

Somaesthetics is a line of philosophy introduced by the American philosopher Richard Shusterman in the 1990s (see, e.g., Shusterman, 1999b, 2008, 2012c). It has been particularly influenced by John Dewey's pragmatism as well as the philosophies of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Michel Foucault, Simone de Beauvoir, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and William James, among others (Shusterman, 2008). One of the main ideas of somaesthetics is that bodily experience can be cultivated. By practicing body consciousness, one can free oneself from harmful bodily manners and improve one's overall quality of life. Shusterman suggests that a researcher working in the field of somaesthetics should not only approach things analytically but also critically examine the physical practices of our culture, suggest new forms of somatic conventions, and put them into practice. Therefore, in addition to analytic and theoretical considerations, somaesthetics involves pragmatic examination and practical implementation of bodily disciplines (Shusterman, 2012c, p. 42–45).

Analytic somaesthetics examines the nature of bodily experiences and practices and how knowledge and reality are constructed in them. This field deals with body-related ontological and epistemological issues as well as socio-political considerations, such as bodily norms

(Shusterman, 1999b, p. 304; 2012c, p. 42). In research on sound and music, this could mean, for example, critically analyzing the experiences and conventions of producing and listening to sound as well as discussing the relationship of sound to the environment, culture, social practices, power, and norms.

Pragmatic somaesthetics is prescriptive and suggests new kinds of somatic practices and methods. In addition, it involves critical review of existing somatic methods and proposes potential improvements. (Shusterman, 1999b, pp. 304–305; 2012c, pp. 42–43) In regard to sound and music, pragmatic somaesthetics may critically examine, for example, methods of playing instruments, singing, and teaching music. Also, practices of listening as well as the physical and experiential aspects of different sonic environments may be evaluated, and new innovations may be proposed. Furthermore, new ways of developing our sonic culture may be proposed to better serve our bodies, aesthetic tendencies, and well-being.

The third dimension of somaesthetics is practical, and it concerns the actual practice of somatic methods and self-development through them. The practical dimension has been largely excluded from previous academic philosophy. (Shusterman, 1999b, p. 307; 2012c, p. 45) Somaesthetics differs from earlier philosophical approaches to the body, as the researcher or philosopher is encouraged to act bodily and put into practice and test the somatic methods and conventions he or she is exploring. In studies on sound and music, this can come very naturally, as many researchers already have a background in the field they are studying, such as music, theater, or sound design.

The somatic nature of sound and music may be self-evident to musicians. The embodiment of music is tangible, as Arnold Berleant (2002), a scholar of philosophy and music, highlights:

*Musical sounds are more than auditory sensations; they are produced in some way, executed by the bow of a stringed instrument, a person's breath into a woodwind or brass instrument, the movement of fingers on piano keys, or hands and feet on the organ.* (pp. 92–93)

In academic approaches to sound and music, this has not been so obvious. In the past, the embodiment of music has been largely ignored or seen only as a metaphorical phenomenon. It has been common to think of music as something located in a musical work and to approach it visually with the help of notation.

Music has also been seen as a direct communication from the composer's mind to the listener's mind, and the importance of the body in this communication has often been overlooked (Maus, 2010, pp. 15–16, see also Cusick, 1994, p. 16). Music historian and musicologist Suzanne Cusick (1994) writes,

*As a performer, I act on and with what we ordinarily call music with my body; as a musicologist I have been formed to act on (and with?) what we ordinarily call music with my mind, and only with my mind.* (p. 9)

According to Cusick, the body has been ignored in music. This is related to the mind/body problem that still deeply affects Western culture. According to her, this denial of the body has theological, moral, and class- and gender-related causes in our culture. (Cusick, 1994, p. 16)

Since then, musical sounds and the body have been taken into consideration in research. Often, though, sounds have been approached as an acoustic, measurable phenomenon and the

body has been approached as a physiological entity. The perception of sound and music has been explained by cognitive research and neuroscience. When examining the effects of music on body, physiological and measurable impacts on heart rate, breathing, blood flow, or brain function are often considered. These are fascinating approaches to the physicality of music and sound, but as I see it, it is necessary to consider the bodily experience, especially the aesthetic experience, to complement them. In the fields of phenomenological and feminist musicology, as well as sound and voice studies, embodied and aesthetic experiences have gained a foothold (e.g., Clifton, 1983; Eidsheim, 2015; Jankélévitch, 2003; Le Guin, 2005; Sudnow, 1993; Thomaidis & Macpherson, 2015). Some of these approaches have features that are comparable to somaesthetics, although they are not explicitly related to it. This comparison is relevant, given the strong link between somaesthetics and the traditions of phenomenology and sociology. These are some of the fields to which somaesthetic studies of sound and music could relate in the future.

I suggest that we rethink our established ideas of sound and music with the help of somaesthetics. For example, in Western thinking, some elements of music (e.g., rhythm) are traditionally understood as more bodily than others (e.g., harmony, melody). In formalist theories of music in particular, rhythm has traditionally been seen as less important than melody or harmony. Joel Rudinow (2010), a philosopher of music, wonders if this is because melody and harmony tend to contain “higher frequencies” and are therefore perceived to be more “mental,” while the rhythm is somehow perceived as more “bodily” (p. 110). With the help of somaesthetics, such generalizations in the traditions of music and philosophy can be challenged by examining sound and music in the body in more subtle and comprehensive ways. Rhythm is undoubtedly a bodily element, and it is always present in our bodies, for example, in the form of heartbeats and breathing. However, different pitches and timbres also manifest in our bodies in palpable ways. For example, a singer senses different vowels and pitches in different ways throughout the body; open vowels and lower pitches are felt more in larger cavities, such as the chest cavity, while closed vowels and higher pitches resonate more strongly in smaller cavities, such as the nose and forehead. Thus, it is not only rhythm, but various qualities of sounds, that are felt in the body.

### **Shusterman’s Observations on Music, Sound, and the Voice**

In Shusterman’s thinking, sound, especially music, has been a relevant theme for a long time. Unlike most other philosophers, he does not use music and sound only as metaphors, but writes about them as concrete practices, revealing their real bodily origins and consequences. His analyses cover not only individual bodies but also the somatic aspects of sound and music in regard to culture, society, values, and power. Shusterman’s philosophy offers a lot of intriguing entry points for researchers, philosophers, pedagogues, composers, musicians, and sound artists who want to increase their understanding of the embodied aspects of sound and music. He has written about music, especially to highlight the aesthetic value of popular art, which has long been recognized in popular music research but not in the fields of philosophy and aesthetics. Therefore, Shusterman’s mission to illuminate the aesthetic potential of popular music within the philosophical debate has been most welcome.

One of Shusterman’s most well-known texts is his article “The Fine Art of Rap,” which was first published as an essay in the journal *New Literary History* in 1991 (Shusterman, 1991). An expanded version of the article appeared later in his book *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Shusterman, 1992a), and again a few years later in his book *Performing Live:*

*Aesthetic Alternatives for the Ends of Arts* (Shusterman, 2000b). The latter book also contained an article on country music that was also published a year earlier in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (Shusterman, 1999a; 2000a). In the above texts, Shusterman provides insightful aesthetic analyses of these two genres of music. In one of his interviews, Shusterman said that he wanted to bring forth “the aesthetic qualities, values, and strategies of this [country] music” (Väkevä, 2000, p. 9). When talking about his analysis of rap music, he highlighted the embodied essence of the music in both its production and appreciation (Väkevä, 2000, p. 7).

Throughout his career, Shusterman has written numerous articles related to rap music (1992d; 1992e; 1995a; 1995b; 2005), including a two-part version of “The Fine Art of Rap” in the *Journal of Rap and Hip Hop Culture* (1992b, 1992c). Later, Shusterman’s discussion on rap music inspired other writers, like Robert Dobrowolski (2012), who wrote “Sampling (No)Body,” and Max Ryyänen (in press), whose article “Living Beauty, Rethinking Rap: Shusterman’s Philosophy of Hip Hop Revisited” will soon be published in the *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics*.

Shusterman has a solid pragmatist view of the value of art as embodied practices that are intertwined with our daily lives. According to him, by examining popular and world music, we can distance ourselves from the Western tradition, which sees music as “transcendental works of genius” (Väkevä 2000, p. 6). Instead, we should approach music from the perspectives of playing, performing, and listening—the actual practices of music (Väkevä, 2000, p. 6) In his article “Form and Funk: The Aesthetic Challenge of Popular Art,” Shusterman (2000d) argues, “my Deweyan pragmatism makes me not only critical of the alienating esoterism and totalizing claims of high art, but acutely suspicious of any essential and unbridgeable divide between its products and those of popular culture” (p. 169).

Shusterman also discusses the democratization of art in his 2002 article “From Natural Roots to Cultural Radicalism: Pragmatist Aesthetics in Alain Locke and John Dewey,” which was included in his book *Surface and Depth: Dialectics of Criticism and Culture*. In this article, which was written in the spirit of pragmatism, he addresses music from the perspective of its functional value. For example, music can have a “dance value” in contexts where it is used for dancing (Shusterman, 2002b, pp. 131, 134) Shusterman does not hold on to conventional forms of aesthetic appreciation in each musical genre. Instead, in his other article from 2002, “Home Alone? Self and Other in Somaesthetics and ‘Performing Live,’” he addresses how different kinds of music are used and experienced diversely in our everyday lives. For example, classical music can play in elevators, and rock can be listened to in an academic setting, in which listeners sit quietly and contemplatively (Shusterman, 2002c, p. 103).

What about the role of somaesthetics in the field of aesthetics? In his 1999 article introducing somaesthetics, Shusterman explains how somaesthetics, with its embodied insights, could complement the established aesthetics of different art forms:

*We can easily see, for example, how somaesthetics’ improvement of sensory acuity, muscular movement, and experiential awareness could fruitfully contribute to the understanding and practice of traditional arts like music, painting, and dance [...], and how it could also enhance our appreciation of the natural and constructed environments that we navigate and inhabit.* (Shusterman, 1999b, p. 308)

As mentioned earlier, somaesthetics can be seen as not only an analytic consideration of bodily practices but also as having constituent pragmatic and practical dimensions (Shusterman, 2012c, pp. 42–45). In addition to studying bodily–aesthetic actions and experiences, Shusterman (2008) emphasizes the need for their practical cultivation (2008, pp. 1, 6–7). In this sense, I believe that somaesthetics could have particular potential for the development of music pedagogies and music education.

In his 2012 article “Body and the Arts: The Need for Somaesthetics,” Shusterman argues that practicing music is not just about mechanically absorbing external bodily habits into the body. He highlights how sensing sound, especially rhythm, is a profound ability of our bodies that is related to our body rhythms, such as heart rate, respiratory rhythm, and muscle function: “Underlying such embodied musical phenomena is, I think, a more basic idea: our sense of timing and rhythm are based ultimately on somatic experiences such as the beating of our hearts, the rhythms of breathing and regular muscular contractions” (Shusterman, 2012b, p. 15).

Shusterman (2012b) points out that we need our bodies—our hands, feet, and voices—to produce music, just as we need our bodies to appreciate it (Shusterman, 2012b, p. 15). This may sound self-evident, but the academic research on music has not always noted this fact. In Western music culture, the body is still largely seen as an instrument. This view separates the body and mind and elevates the role of the mind as a “leader.” Shusterman’s somaesthetics, however, profoundly questions this simplification of the body as mere matter without agency (Shusterman, 2012c). Somaesthetics also offers opportunities for developing sound production so that such practices are healthier and less stressful for the body. In his article “Thinking through the Body, Educating for the Humanities: A Plea for Somaesthetics,” Shusterman (2006) wrote on the development of bodily habits, which are not simply mechanical repetitions but require cultivation of true somatic consciousness, among musicians.

Shusterman has written more about somatic methods than the voice or music themselves, although they have long been recurrent themes in his thinking. He has stated,

*If I devote less time to the somaesthetics of music than to disciplines of body awareness (such as Feldenkrais Method), it is not out of disrespect for music but because I believe that other philosophers will want to perform such work on music and can do so as well or better than I can.* (Shusterman, 2002c, p. 103)

Along with the texts mentioned here, Shusterman has written about music in the context of popular culture aesthetics (e.g., Shusterman, 2003, 2012a), and social action (Shusterman, 2014). He has also highlighted the significance of music in Confucian philosophy, which understands music as something that creates order and “purifies the inner mind” (Shusterman, 2012a, p. 112). His text on music in Confucian philosophy later inspired James Garrison (2015), who wrote more broadly about this subject in his article “Reconsidering Richard Shusterman’s Somaesthetics: The Confucian Debate Between Mèng Zǐ and Xún Zǐ.”

Of particular interest to researchers of music is Shusterman’s (2010) article in the special issue of *Action, Criticism & Theory for Music Education*, which focuses on somaesthetics and music. In this article, Shusterman comments on other articles on the same issue and discusses, among other things, the extent to which the performer’s and listener’s experiences of music are different or similar and whether there is some symmetry between them. He brings up the theory of mirror neurons and embodied empathy associated with listening, which would indicate some kind of symmetry. He also highlights how peoples’ experiences of the same work of art can differ

and still be equally accurate and authentic (Shusterman, 2010).

In addition to organized sound (i.e., music), Shusterman has also made innovative insights into less organized sounds and vocalizations. He points out that while vocality is an essential part of our embodiment and aesthetic perceptions, it is not limited to speech and singing; there are a wide variety of different bodily sounds that express our embodied style and bodily processes. Shusterman writes,

*Our auditory appreciation of somatic style goes beyond the voice of speech. There are styles of laughing – like the deep and easy full-bodied guffaw or the tense yet uncontrollably explosive and repetitive high-pitched giggle – and ways of crying or sighing that contribute to a person’s somatic style [...]. The sounds of somatic style include also ways of coughing, gasping, sneezing, grunting, burping, and snoring. (Shusterman, 2012c, p. 327)*

This insight opens a completely new set of visions and possibilities for researchers of the human voice. One does not have to focus only on certain vocal sounds used in speech or singing, but can expand his/her perspective to the whole spectrum of sounds that the human body can produce. And, most importantly, one does not have to focus only on the auditive aspects of these sounds. Instead, one can broaden investigations to the sensations that these sounds evoke and the aesthetic potential these experiences have. In addition to these approaches, somaesthetics offers a fertile theoretical frame for looking at the ways in which these sounds are controlled and cultured and how we deal with unwanted bodily sounds in our everyday lives. Such analyses on bodily sounds have been carried out before in the field of sound research (e.g., Connor, 2014; LaBelle, 2014), but I believe that somaesthetics could add something to this stream of literature, especially from the experiential point of view.

In his article “Somaesthetics and the Fine Art of Eating,” Shusterman (2016) develops an unconventional and fresh approach to embodied sounds. He examines sounds related to eating (i.e., the actual sounds of the eating body), and writes about eating noodles in Japanese culture:

*There is an enjoyable feeling of micro-muscular power and focused energy through the vigorous suction movement, a pleasure that may be related but cannot be reduced to its symbolic association with our initial infant sucking bliss nor to the amusing sound that noodle-sucking makes. (Shusterman, 2016, p. 268)*

In his 2012 book *Thinking Through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics*, Shusterman reminds us that culture, social power positions, and customs shape—and even create—our bodies just as much as our own will does. This is particularly evident in regard to the human voice. Shusterman writes about non-normative, difficult vocal situations in which our bodies and voices can deceive us as we become unable to vocalize what we intended, and instead end up shaking uncontrollably or crying. (Shusterman, 2012c, p. 32)

All in all, Shusterman’s observations on the human voice, its embodied nature, its vulnerability, and its cultural implications are worth reading for voice researchers who want to understand the experiential meanings of the human voice.

## Somaesthetics Applied by Scholars of Music, Sound, and the Voice

So far, it seems that researchers of music and music education have been the most eager to apply somaesthetics in their fields. The special issue of the journal *Action, Criticism & Theory for Music Education* (2010, issue 1) mentioned before includes articles on music and somaesthetics related to Shusterman's book *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*. This issue, which was edited by Wayne Bowman, a professor of music and music education, is a must-read for anyone interested in the somaesthetics of music. In addition to Bowman's introductory article, the journal includes seven articles, four of which explicitly deal with music. A researcher interested in the embodiment of music will find a number of good writings in this journal that may inspire him/her to approach somaesthetics.

In his article, music theory scholar Fred Everett Maus (2010) discusses the somaesthetics of music and its potential in the context of classical instrumental music. He provides examples of how embodiment has been addressed in previous studies of classical music, highlighting the somatic features of experiencing music and the fundamental importance of body movement for understanding musical gestures. Although listening to classical music does not put as much emphasis on the body as, for example, dance music, it may involve bodily sensations, such as chills and feelings of tension. Maus approaches the body from both the performer's and listener's point of view, and he argues that the listener's and performer's experiences do not necessarily have the same qualities. According to him, this topic is central to the somaesthetics of music. He writes,

*In general, whether one starts from the performer's or listener's perspective, an interesting question for musical somaesthetics is the extent to which, and ways in which, performers and listeners may share embodied responses to music, despite their very different bodily relations to the musical event. (Maus, 2010, p. 19)*

In his article, music education researcher Sven-Erik Holgersen (2010) discusses the importance of bodily awareness and somaesthetics in music education. He comprehensively presents the different levels of consciousness proposed by Shusterman and their significance in the musical experience and process of learning music. Holgersen also presents an in-depth discussion on musicians' bodily skills and how somaesthetic reflection can help develop them. According to him, musicians' motor habits—and the development of these habits—require conscious practice:

*Musicians not only memorize and learn music by heart, they literally incorporate the music. If they need to correct body habits in order to improve their musical performance, they often focus attention on the musical rather than on the somatic problem. So far, I agree with Shusterman that the correction of bad habits requires reflection: It cannot be approached solely as a motor problem, unconnected to deliberate reflection. (Holgersen, 2010, pp. 38–39)*

In her article, Roberta Lamb (2010) reflects on how Shusterman's book *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* speaks to her as a musician-teacher and scholar. Among other things, she wonders how somaesthetics could illuminate the embodiment of performance as well as talent, genius, and virtuosity—the ideals of Western music education culture. According to Lamb, all three branches of Shusterman's somaesthetics—analytic, pragmatic, and practical—are relevant for teaching music: "It seems to me that these three

branches of somaesthetics would never be completely isolated from each other in educational practice and thought, or thought and practice, precisely because education is in itself a process of movement and change” (Lamb, 2010, p. 51).

According to art education scholar Kimberly Powell (2010), discipline and training are central themes in music education. In her article, she asks what the roles of somatic training and experiences could be. She also discusses how sensory perceptions are culturally formed and writes about the embodied practices of music based on her ethnographic study of the Japanese-American practice of taiko drumming. Powell finds that the same practices that Shusterman has written about in regard to somaesthetics—breathing, bodily attunement, and mindfulness—are present among people learning taiko. In addition, she writes about elements specific to practicing taiko: repetition and slowed action. Powell (2010) describes the process of learning as follows: “In taiko drumming, repetition and slowed action helped to refine muscular action of hands and arms as well our sense of correct tone or pitch when the drumhead was struck in the right manner” (p. 81). She also writes about the importance of language and verbal reflection in music learning. According to her, language can be used to “facilitate somatic awareness” (Powell, 2010, p. 82). In conclusion, she argues that musical experiences have a transformative power that can even advance social justice (Powell, 2010, p. 89).

In 2007, Wayne Bowman and Kimberly Powell published “Body in a State of Music.” In this article, they point out that the role of the body in making and listening to music has only rarely been the subject of empirical research and has been widely ignored in philosophy (Bowman & Powell, 2007, p. 1088). In their article, they review previous studies of music and embodiment, including literature from the fields of philosophy, music education, and social sciences. They write about somatophobia and the role of the body in aesthetic theories and music education. They also present different bodily methods, such as the Dalcroze, Kodaly, and Orff methodologies. Bowman and Powell link their review to Merleau-Ponty’s and Dewey’s approaches as well as Shusterman’s somaesthetics. They consider not only the materiality of the body but also the social and cultural aspects and the situationality of the body, arguing, “music is distinctively, perhaps uniquely, a form of embodied agency; the unity of the body-mind is a fact that musical experience demonstrates vividly, compellingly, irrefutably. Not all modes of embodied experience are musical, but all musical experience is embodied” (Bowman & Powell, 2007, p. 1101). They also point out the significance of an embodied approach to the politics of music education. Understanding the embodied nature of music gives us insight into the controlling practices that shape the body in music education, an issue that has largely remained undiscussed to date (Bowman & Powell, 2007, p. 1101).

In his article “A Somaesthetic Approach to Rock Music: Some Observations and Remarks,” musicologist Stefano Marino (2018) looks at the reception of rock from a somaesthetic perspective. He points out that the importance and power of listening to rock music can be understood when we consider the somatic dimension of listening. He introduces Theodor W. Adorno’s thoughts on popular music and responds to them by arguing that we cannot put all popular music in the same category when it comes to aesthetic potential. According to Marino (2018), “somaesthetics [...] may provide a valuable contribution by amending some prejudices and thus arriving at a better understanding of the specific kind of aesthetic experience that popular music involves” (p. 115). He argues that the somatic and emotional aspects of the aesthetic experience highlighted by the somaesthetic approach can be mental and intellectual as well.

In his article, music researcher Simon McKerrell (2012) explores the concert audience of traditional Scottish music. His main point is that instead of the dualistic Cartesian approach,

listening practices in this music culture are based on somaesthetic experience and a bodily understanding of music. He believes that Shusterman's somaesthetics can provide a good theoretical basis for ethnographic research on proprioceptive and aesthetic experiences. He writes about the results of his study as follows:

*Significantly, almost none of the participants in these interviews could remember the semantic content of any of the songs within a week to two weeks after the gig. They could, however, remember the feelings that they had, and I would argue that this more affective reception has more lasting value.* (McKerrell, 2012, p. 86)

McKerrell puts forward the idea that somatic sensory perception of music is not referential, but actual and proprioceptive. The somatic essence of music carries with it cultural-aesthetic features and categories that are based on the body and are transmitted bodily.

Joel Rudinow, a philosopher of music, writes about rhythm as a somaesthetic element in his 2010 book *Soul Music: Tracking the Spiritual Roots of Pop from Plato to Motown*. He points out how, in the philosophy of music, the formalist view has emphasized the melody of the music while largely ignoring rhythm. This may be because rhythm has been interpreted as more of a bodily element than a mental element of music. He draws upon Susanne Langer's work, which views rhythm as an organic element that engages the human body and is not mechanical in its repetition but constantly changing and varied. Rudinow points out that rhythm is not only an aurally perceived element of music but also a factor that affects the whole body. He writes,

*From the point of view of somaesthetics, to say that the slow and measured rhythm of a funeral march mirrors the way sadness slows and measures our expressions of it is as good as to say that rhythm in music feels like emotions feel.* (Rudinow, 2010, p. 118)

He then emphasizes how such processes are related to the accumulation and release of somatic stress in the body and its muscles. Interestingly, Langer's thoughts, as described by Rudinow, are based on Dewey's philosophy and thus have the same philosophical root in pragmatism as Shusterman's somaesthetics.

Stephen Paparo (2016), a professor of music education and a choral conductor, explores the effect of the somatic Feldenkrais Method on singers' performance in his article "Embodying Singing in the Choral Classroom: A Somatic Approach to Teaching and Learning." In addition, he examines how singers' somaesthetic body awareness increases with this kind of facilitation. He concludes, "Through somaesthetic perception and reflection, participants began to understand how they embodied their singing" (Paparo, 2016, p. 496). Due to the enhanced body awareness achieved through this approach, the singers' physiological vocal performance improved. The results of the study include reduced muscle tension, improved coordination, better alignment, and freer movement of the vocal mechanism, leading to better coordination of singing and breathing as well as improved resonance of the vocal cords. (Paparo, 2016, p. 496)

In his article on rock drumming, drummer and researcher Gareth Dylan Smith (2017) explores drumming auto-ethnographically and phenomenologically. Based on his diaries, he addresses the bodily knowledge associated with playing drums. He bases his analysis on Shusterman's idea that aesthetic experience is valuable and enjoyable, vividly felt, and meaningful. Smith describes his own experience of playing drums as a contrast to present-day life, in which communication media scatters the everyday experience and breaks concentration. To Smith, playing drums is something that lifts him out of the nervousness and stress of everyday life:

“Perhaps this why I find rock drumming to be such a sanctuary – it is when I feel the most awake, the most *me*” (Smith, 2017, para. 8). Smith’s ideas are based on Shusterman’s somaesthetics, especially heightened somatic consciousness and the cultivation of bodily experience, which resonate well with his experiences as a musician.

In 2017, Helen Phelan, a professor of art practice and a singer, published the book *Singing the Rite to Belong: Ritual, Music, and the New Irish*. In her text on singing and belonging, she applies Shusterman’s somaesthetics as an approach. According to her, the belonging created by singing is physiological and emotional to a great extent, and “[t]he ability to communicate beneath cognitive and rational structures is proposed as one of the key ways in which song facilitates belonging” (Phelan, 2017, p. 9). According to Phelan, resonance, somatics, performance, temporality, and tacitness are the key elements that connect us as we sing. For her, the body is not only a passive representative of cultural values; instead, through bodily practices, we can change and create those values.

In his article “The Sound of Somaesthetics: Ken Ueno’s *Jericho Mouth*,” Martin Jay (2018) discusses the vocal work of the avant-garde composer and performer Ken Ueno from a somaesthetic point of view. Jay combines Roland Barthes’ thoughts on the geno-song and feno-song, looking at how Ueno uses his voice to vibrate an entire acoustic space and, through the disfigured character of his expression, questions traditional aesthetic ideals of harmony and order. In this regard, Jay writes about somaesthetic appreciation:

*Rather than contemplating objects from afar, assuming a position of elevated disinterestedness, somaesthetics involves an experiential unification of subject and object in a moment of bodily intensity, as often painful as pleasurable, in the place of an eternity of formal, cold beauty.* (Jay, 2018, p. 88)

In her articles, ethnomusicologist and researcher of singing Anne Tarvainen (2018a, 2018b, in press) develops vocal somaesthetics by exploring the bodily–aesthetic experiences of vocalizing and listening to the human voice. Particular attention is paid to the proprioceptive dimension of experience, which has been neglected in previous research on the voice. Tarvainen looks at the forms of vocalization that are challenging or differ from cultural aesthetic vocal norms. In her texts, she has discussed topics such as the voices of deaf singers and the experiences of singers with reflux disease. The aim of vocal somaesthetics is to analyze and challenge the musical and vocal ideals of our culture and, thereby, democratize the practices of singing and vocalizing. This area of research not only focuses on singing or speech but also enables study of all kinds of vocal activity and proposes new practices for developing vocal experiences. Tarvainen’s method of voicefulness, in which one’s own voice is used to enhance bodily awareness, is an example of such a practice.

In addition to the texts presented above, I would like to mention a few more writings that more or less discuss somaesthetics and the embodiment of music: Barbara Montero’s (2006) “Proprioception as an Aesthetic Sense,” Brandon Polite’s (2014) “The Varieties of Musical Experience,” Njörður Sigurjónsson’s (2009) “Variations on the Act of Listening: Twenty-One Orchestra Audience Events in Light of John Dewey’s ‘Art as Experience’ Metaphor,” and, of course, those that were mentioned above, including Robert Dobrowolski’s (2012) “Sampling (No)Body,” Max Ryyänen’s (in press) “Living Beauty, Rethinking Rap: Shusterman’s Philosophy of Hip Hop Revisited,” and James Garrison’s (2015) “Reconsidering Richard Shusterman’s Somaesthetics: The Confucian Debate between Mèng Zǐ and Xún Zǐ.”

It goes without saying that one should also explore the articles in this special issue of the *Journal of Somaesthetics*, “Somaesthetics and Sound” (2019, issue 2). In this issue, Stefano Marino (2019) writes about improvisation with jazz drums; Grace Han (2019) discusses playing cello in the Western classical music tradition; Salvatore Morra (2019) presents the embodied aspects of crafting and playing a Tunisian musical instrument, *‘ūd ‘arbī*; Charulatha Mani (2019) writes about singing Indian Karnatik music; Peter Bruun (2019) addresses experimental theatre performance with a choir; and Alexis B. Smith (2019) discusses sound figures and the human body in the writings of early German Romantics.

There are interesting approaches in the arts and design that apply somaesthetics to explore and modify sound, among other things (e.g., Feng, 2015; Höök, Jonsson, Ståhl, & Mercurio, 2016). Unfortunately, I cannot go into these in detail in this article. Also, it should be noted that Dewey’s philosophy has been used widely in the research on music education (e.g., Boon, 2009; Väkevä, 2012; Westerlund, 2003; Woodford, 2004). I will not go further into this topic either, but these studies may be of interest to researchers and pedagogues applying Shusterman’s somaesthetics based on Dewey’s pragmatism.

It is no wonder that researchers of music, sound, and the voice have increasingly begun to use the somaesthetic approach in their examinations. Somaesthetics provides concepts and a solid theoretical base for looking at the body and embodied experience from an aesthetic perspective. With this in mind, music, sound, and the voice, as embodied aesthetic phenomena, are fruitful targets for somaesthetic inspection. As this article has revealed, somaesthetics has been applied in a variety of contexts and by many different researchers, artists, and educators. People from the fields of musicology, music theory, the philosophy of music, ethnomusicology, music education, and art education as well as musicians, singers, and teachers have written some of the most interesting texts about embodiment, experience, and aesthetics.

In what kinds of contexts related to music, sound, and the voice could somaesthetics be applied in the future? As I see it, in addition to the fields of research and education that have already been mentioned, the fields of performance research, artistic research, voice studies, vocology, ergonomics for musicians, and soundscape studies could benefit from the somaesthetic approach to complement their own approaches. In addition, there is great potential for somaesthetic applications in arts, design, and technological innovations. I hope that increasingly more sound and music scholars, pedagogues, musicians, sound artists, designers, literary scholars, and philosophers will begin to consider sound, music, and the voice as somaesthetic phenomena.

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# Jazz Improvisation and Somatic Experience

*Stefano Marino*

For Emi, Ignazio, Lele, Luca, Net, Piero:  
for our beautiful way of improvising  
in music and life in our youth.

“All that’s sacred comes from youth”.  
Pearl Jam, *Not For You*.

**Abstract:** *In this article I investigate musical improvisation from a somaesthetic perspective. I first provide a sketch of somaesthetics’ relationship to music and explain why, in dealing with improvisation, I mostly focus on jazz. Then I connect the question of jazz improvisation to the pragmatist attempt to reconcile art and life, and focus on the dimension of somatic knowledge in improvisation. Finally, I exemplify my ideas by referring to jazz drumming and the improvisational capacities that it is able to display and that are of interest for theoretical, practical and pragmatic somaesthetics.*

**Keywords:** *somaesthetics, jazz, performance, improvisation, drumming.*

## 1.

Ever since its introduction in the philosophical discourse of contemporaneity in the tenth chapter of the second edition of *Pragmatist aesthetics*, somaesthetics has been defined as “the critical, meliorative study of the experience and use of one’s body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation (*aisthesis*) and creative self-fashioning” (Shusterman, 2000, p. 267).<sup>1</sup> According to some of the distinctions introduced by the founder of somaesthetics, Richard Shusterman, the latter represents “a systematic framework” (Shusterman, 2008, p. 19) that has

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<sup>1</sup> In one of his most recent contributions to this field Shusterman has slightly changed and also broadened his definition to some extent, speaking of somaesthetics as “the critical study and meliorative cultivation of the body as the site not only of experienced subjectivity and sensory appreciation (*aesthesis*) that guides our action and performance but also of our creative self-fashioning through the ways we use, groom, and adorn our physical bodies to express our values and stylize ourselves. To realize its aims of improving somatic experience and expression, somaesthetics advocates integrating theory and practice” (Shusterman, 2019, p. 15).

three fundamental branches (analytic, pragmatic and practical), which in turn include “three dimensions” (representational, experiential and performative), depending on “whether their major orientation is toward external appearance or inner experience of the body” (Shusterman, 2016a, pp. 102–105). From this point of view, somaesthetics may be understood as a somewhat general and also interdisciplinary philosophical approach that can be applied to a great variety of problems and phenomena, and that is both comparable to, and compatible with, other relevant and general approaches (such as, for example, Marxist aesthetics, phenomenological aesthetics, hermeneutical aesthetics, etc.).

According to Shusterman, “aesthetics can be more usefully pluralistic” than it has usually been, both with regard to a plurality of complementary approaches and to a plurality of objects of inquiry, for example neither excluding “the most elevated fine arts” nor devaluating “the most common-day everyday aesthetic practices and popular artistic forms” (Shusterman, 2012, p. 105).<sup>2</sup> More recently, in the introduction to a collection significantly entitled *Aesthetic experience and somaesthetics*, Shusterman has observed that somaesthetics’ “integration of theory and practice, along with its melioristic thrust to improve [...] somatic experience and practice,” reflects this discipline’s “roots in pragmatist experience which puts aesthetic experience at the center of its philosophy of art,” and that the lived body or soma “clearly seems to be at the core of aesthetic experience both in the creation and appreciation of art” (Shusterman, 2018, p. 2).

On the basis of both the conceptual and thematic breadth of somaesthetics and of its variety, openness, plurality and flexibility, I will focus in this article on musical practice and experience, and I will especially investigate jazz improvisation from a somaesthetic perspective. Pragmatist aesthetics and somaesthetics have already been applied to the understanding of music, and especially of certain forms of popular music (like rock, rap and funk) by Shusterman himself in some important and indeed pioneering contributions to this field (Shusterman, 1999; Shusterman, 2000, pp. 169–235), which can be drawn close and compared to other significant works on popular music in contemporary aesthetics.<sup>3</sup> Following Shusterman’s model, and further developing his intuitions and insights, other relevant contributions to a somaesthetics of musical practices and experiences were subsequently provided by other scholars in this field. For example, in a recent contribution on vocal somaesthetics it has been convincingly remarked that, “[i]n contrast to the traditional research of human vocality, vocal somaesthetics [is] interested in the bodily sensations of what it feels like to vocalize and to listen to another person vocalizing:” it can be described as “an approach that focuses on the bodily and experiential dimensions of producing vocal sounds and listening to them,” and it is aimed at creating “a comprehensive understanding of human being as a bodily, sentient and vocal being” which considers “human vocal behavior as somatic experience in all its manifestations” (Tarvainen, 2018, pp. 120–121, 136–138).<sup>4</sup>

With its focus on the need to “put experience at the heart of philosophy and [to] celebrate the living, sentient body as the organizing core of experience” (Shusterman, 2008, p. XII), somaesthetics can also be successfully applied to jazz music, and can make it possible to arrive at an original understanding of some of its aspects, such as improvisation. An aim of this article is thus to add pragmatist aesthetics and somaesthetics to the list of the philosophical approaches

<sup>2</sup> On the somaesthetics of fashion, for example, see Shusterman, 2016a. On somaesthetics and the fine art of eating, see Shusterman, 2016b.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Theodore Gracyk’s important trilogy of books on this topic: *Rhythm and noise: An aesthetics of rock* (1996); *I wanna be me: Rock music and the politics of identity* (2001); *Listening to popular music: Or, how I learned to stop worrying and love Led Zeppelin* (2007).

<sup>4</sup> In her essay, Tarvainen also refers to the works on musical somaesthetics by Holgersen (2010) and Maus (2010). For a somaesthetic approach to contemporary rock music, see also Marino (2018).

capable of shedding light on jazz music, on the basis of the particular contribution that it can offer with regard to the role played by the body in musical practice.

## 2.

Musical improvisation is by no means limited only to jazz, but rather represents a fundamental component and element of music as such, at all levels and during the entire history of Western and non-Western musical traditions. All improvised music, not only jazz, calls for performance values that are different from those that are considered important in that part of so-called classical music based on what Lydia Goehr has called the *Werktreue* paradigm or ideal (see Goehr, 1992). It is therefore not surprising that a philosopher like Hans-Georg Gadamer, for example, in outlining his hermeneutical ontology of art based on the notion of “transformation into structure,” indeed uses the example of improvisation but, in doing so, does not refer to jazz but rather to pre-Bachian “organ improvisation” (Gadamer, 2007, p. 202; see also Gadamer, 2004, pp. 110, 580).<sup>5</sup>

Although improvisation has played a constitutive role in the development of music as such throughout the world in all ages, and although there are surely other important traditions of improvisation in contemporary music, *if we focus on contemporary music* it is probably jazz that “involves the most highly developed improvisation” (Davies, 2005, p. 490), which is most often and quite spontaneously associated with improvisation by a vast number of listeners, and that not by chance is emphatically defined as “the infinite art of improvisation” (Berliner, 1994). As has been noted, “improvisation and swing are [...] the most important elements of jazz,” although sometimes “defining them has proved elusive” (Monson, 2002, p. 114).

Given the obvious existence of many different and sometimes opposite perspectives on both jazz and improvisation, it is important to add that, in my view, this argument can be valid and can be applied to jazz music in general, that is to the entire repertoire that, for a hundred years or more,<sup>6</sup> we have been used to considering and classifying as “jazz.” However, certain kinds of jazz (like big-band swing or so-called pop fusion and smooth jazz, for example) may fall prey to some extent to the objection of only being able to practice “pseudo-improvisation” rather than genuine and real improvisation, because of their tendency to reduce the role of improvisation to a limited, merely patterned and, as it were, pre-digested embellishment of details in so-called “breaks” whose function remains completely determined by the underlying harmonic and metric schemes.<sup>7</sup> Other kinds or forms of jazz (such as be-bop or free jazz, for example) seem to justify the fact that for many listeners today jazz represents “the paradigm example of improvisation” in a more convincing way (Brown, 2011, p. 59). In fact, notwithstanding the presence of established and style-compliant constraints, structures, schemata and habits also in be-bop improvisation and in some early forms of free jazz, the latter do not confine the practice of improvisation to a mere substitution and embellishment of details in pre-determined parts of

5 As has been noted, musical improvisation “has long been a common—indeed, perhaps basic—feature of music throughout the world” and, with regard to the European tradition, “[i]mprovisation in concert music [only] declined in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (Brown, 2011, p. 59).

6 As is well-known, the very first jazz recording commercially released, “Livery Stable Blues” by The Original Dixieland Jazz Band, dates back to 1917, but the origins of this genre are definitely older and rooted in Afro-American musical traditions including blues and ragtime.

7 I employ the concept of “pseudo-improvisation, deriving it from Adorno’s seminal essays on jazz and popular music from the 1930s-1940s, re-published now in English translation in his collection *Essays on music* (Adorno, 2002). While acknowledging that Adorno’s investigation of music, with his unique capacity to deduce philosophical and social implications from the musical material itself, remains of invaluable importance today, I disagree with his tendency to *sometimes* propose “totalizing claims” (such as the claim that *all jazz* is standardized and pseudo-individualized) instead of “a more fine-grained and concrete analysis of the various arts and the differing forms of their appropriation” (Shusterman, 2000, p. 170). On Adorno’s aesthetics of popular music, see Campbell, Gandesha and Marino, 2019.

the song, such as the “breaks,” but rather let improvisation profoundly influence and modify the structure of the song itself and thus determine its development and its meaning.

To be precise, not all jazz takes the specificities of improvised music to the extreme, however, while it is surely important to pay attention to the discontinuities between the different phases and stages of development of the history of jazz, from my perspective, in a somehow hermeneutical fashion, it is even more important to emphasize its continuity and to precisely ground it in the practice of improvisation.<sup>8</sup> As the Italian scholar of jazz, Gildo De Stefano, has claimed, “there is just one chain connecting the different styles in jazz,” and it is specifically improvisation: “improvisation [in jazz] is spontaneous but at the same time every note must always sound as inevitable and right, and must always let emerge a sense of wonder [...]. Imagination still remains the greatest gift that a jazz player can be equipped with” (De Stefano, 2014, pp. 146–148).

While some theorists and musicians have urged the importance of differentiating jazz sharply from so-called “non-idiomatic improvisation” or “free radical improvisation,” and thus of avoiding to classify the latter as “jazz” (see, for instance, Arena, 2018), in my view there is not a complete discontinuity between these forms of improvised music but rather a certain continuity. On this basis, I tend to consider “non-idiomatic improvisation” or “free radical improvisation” as a radicalization of a spirit and an attitude that has probably characterized all jazz music at least since the bebop era (although in various ways and with different degrees of freedom, of course), rather than as something totally different from jazz and incommensurable to it. In much the same way, for example, in my view there is also more continuity than discontinuity between the kind of improvisation that is usually practiced in jazz and the sometimes radical, spontaneous, dissonant and free improvisation that we can find traces of in the performances of some musicians that are usually classified as “rock” but that, due to their originality, freshness, energy, experimental and emancipatory attitude, destabilizing musical power, and also improvisational freedom, undoubtedly belong to the great figures of contemporary music. Just to name a few examples, we may mention Jimi Hendrix, Frank Zappa, The Velvet Underground, Tim Buckley, Led Zeppelin, King Crimson, Einstürzende Neubauten, Sonic Youth, Tortoise, and to some extent also a more mainstream-oriented band like Radiohead.

### 3.

In addition to what has been said before, the abovementioned idea that improvised music calls for values that are different from those that are considered important in other musical forms can be also applied to other aspects of this problem. For example, it can be applied to the different ways in which the bodies of both the musician and the listener (who, in many forms of music that call for higher or lower degrees of improvisation, is sometimes a listener and at the same time a dancer) are involved in the performance.

In his rich, interesting and very well-documented survey of the field entitled *The body in music*, the Italian musicologist Luca Marconi has explained that “every sound (either vocal or instrumental) is necessarily perceived in more or less direct connection to body attitudes and behaviors that are potentially able to produce an equivalent sound” (Marconi, 2009, p. 49). So, “a presence of somatic phenomena” is always implied by music as such (Marconi, 2010, p. 177). At the same time, however, following intuitions and insights provided by Davide Sparti and Vincenzo Caporaletti in their theories of “the unheard-of sound” and “the audiotactile principle,” but also

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<sup>8</sup> I borrow this general conception, and apply it freely here to the particular phenomenon of jazz music, from Gadamer’s (2004, p. 83). idea of “the hermeneutic continuity of human existence [that] constitutes our being” philosophical hermeneutics.

softening some of their conclusions that appear to him too radical or extreme, Marconi adds that certain forms of music definitely emphasize “the bodily adhesion to the sound dimension” more than others: for example, “all ‘African-derived genres’ (*above all jazz*, but also blues and rock) promote and appreciate listening and paying attention to the bodily gestures through which every performer develops his/her personal way of playing music,” whereas other musical styles tend to reduce the importance of the role of the body in the performance and hence, as it were, “desomatize the sound” (Marconi, 2009, pp. 51, 60).

As examples of the different features and values that are called for in different musical traditions, in his article Marconi mentions, for instance, some ritual forms of music in Ghana, Tanzania and Latin America, which explicitly provide for “improvised variations on codified repeated musical patterns” and that “generate in the participants to the musical and dance rituals [...] a sense of *communitas*, a shared feeling of fraternity and equality perceived through different body attitudes” (Marconi, 2010, pp. 163, 168). As I have said, however, “African-derived genres” (all implying a more or less pronounced component of improvisation) and, in occasional cases, even such forms of “European serious music” as “the performances of collective improvisations in avant-garde music” (Marconi, 2010, p. 170), may also call for very different bodily attitudes and interactions than those that we are more frequently used to associating with music on the basis of certain traditions that we have become familiar with, and that, as it were, have become commonsense for us.

Connecting these examples to those provided by Shusterman (taken from contemporary popular music but referring anyway to “African-derived genres,” inasmuch as he mostly focuses on rock, rap and funky music), we can then see that the experience of this music (which often requires a high degree of improvisation, in turn):

*...can be so intensely absorbing and powerful that it is likened to spiritual possession. [...] Rock songs are typically enjoyed through moving, dancing, and singing along with the music, often with such vigorous efforts that we break a sweat and eventually exhaust ourselves. [...] Clearly, on the somatic level, there is much more effortful activity in the appreciation of rock than in that of high-brow music, whose concerts compel us to sit in a motionless silence which often induces not mere torpid passivity but snoring sleep. [...] The much more energetic and kinesthetic response evoked by rock exposes the fundamental passivity of the traditional aesthetic attitude of disinterested, distanced contemplation – a contemplative attitude that has its roots in the quest for philosophical and theological knowledge rather than pleasure (Shusterman, 2000, pp. 178–184).*

#### 4.

Some recent philosophical contributions on musical improvisation, with a special focus on jazz, have proposed that we “solve the puzzle” concerning this particular practice with conceptual tools provided by, for example, contemporary philosophers like Wittgenstein and Derrida, with a particular emphasis on the role of mistakes as surprising experiences of creativity, and the capacity to face the unknown and to freely decide how to proceed, in jazz (see, for instance, Bertinetto, 2018b and 2018c; and Goldoni, 2018a and 2018b). Other recent contributions on this topic have tried to investigate jazz improvisation, and especially Ornette Coleman’s free jazz, by bringing it into conversation with Husserl’s phenomenological analysis of time consciousness and retention-protection scheme (Angelino, 2019). As I have already said, in this article I would

like to add pragmatist aesthetics and somaesthetics to this list, on the basis of the particular contribution that this approach can offer, especially with regard to the role played by the body in all musical practice and experience, and in improvised music in particular.

A passage from Shusterman's book *Body consciousness* can be of help in explaining why a pragmatist and somaesthetic perspective in this specific field can be interesting and useful. In Chapter Four of his book Shusterman quotes a long passage from Wittgenstein's *Vermischte Bemerkungen* on the body's crucial role in music, and then adds that this recognition would need "to be taken a step further in a pragmatic direction:" in fact, "if one's body [...] is capable of being more finely tuned to perceive, respond, and perform aesthetically," then it is probably reasonable to try "to learn and train this 'instrument of instruments' by more careful attention to somaesthetic feelings" (Shusterman, 2008, p. 126). For Shusterman, "[m]ore than guitars or violins or pianos or even drums, our bodies are the primary instrument for the making of music," and also "more than records, radios, tapes, or CDs, bodies are the basic, irreplaceable medium for its appreciation:" in general, "our bodies are the ultimate and necessary instrument for music" at all levels, both in theory and practice, both for musical creation and enjoyment (Shusterman, 2008, p. 126).

Now, such a *seemingly* easy and, as it were, obvious remark such as "our bodies are the primary instrument for the making of music" is actually very powerful, and even radical in emphasizing something that, in my opinion, other philosophical and also scientific approaches to music sometimes tend to forget and don't pay adequate attention to: namely, the unavoidable somatic component that is present in all music-making and that certain forms of musical performance take to the extreme. This is something that, conversely, pragmatist and somaesthetic approaches to music can help us to remember, to pay attention to, and thus to investigate in its various dimensions (representational, experiential and performative). This is also something that, although of great value and importance for all kinds of music (including the repertoire of classical music with its rigorous distinction between the composer and the performer, with its *Werktreue* ideal of performance, with its very precise postures prescribed to the musicians and also to the listeners, etc.), is especially important in the particular case of improvised music. In addition, it must also be noted that in the scientific investigation of music the body has often been referred to "as an instrument" in a somehow reductionist way, whereas the somaesthetics of music, "instead of focusing on the acoustic or physiological facts" in making music, prioritizes the study and cultivation of bodily-musical experiences, i.e. what we may also call "the inside perspective" (Tarvainen, 2018, p. 122).

At this point, I would like to add a few remarks on the concept of improvisation as such, not only limited to music, in order to develop a sufficiently broad idea of improvisation that may also be of help for the pragmatist aim to reconnect art and life. In fact, just as musical improvisation is by no means limited only to jazz music, so improvisation in general is by no means limited only to music, or even only to the performance arts in general. In Alessandro Bertinetto's recent and indeed ambitious theorization, which explicitly recalls in its very title Nietzsche's famous formula about the birth of Greek tragedy from the spirit of music, the birth of art can be traced back to the spirit of improvisation. This is true because improvisation, in turn, is such a fundamental part of human life in general that it may be well conceived of as "the link between human practices and art:" for Bertinetto, "improvisation *incorporates* and genetically shows the specificity of autonomous art as well as [...] the link between human practices [of all kinds] and art as a *specific* human practice" (Bertinetto 2018a, p. 119). Other relevant insights into this fundamental connection between the particular human practice of art and the global

realm of human practices and experiences that always include an improvisational component, can be found in recent important works on improvisation in life and art, with a specific focus on “the body that improvises” (see Amoroso and De Fazio, 2018, and in general the contributions collected in Pelgrefi, 2018).

Improvisation must be thus understood as a human practice by no means limited to music, or, more in general, to art, but rather must be understood in a broad way, with a broad meaning, as a part (and, indeed, a fundamental and unavoidable one) of the human world-experience in general, as a cultural practice that is connected to a specific expertise or competence and that displays itself at various levels in all dimensions of life. As a matter of fact, there is a certain and often indefinable degree of improvisation in most everything we do: we improvise to some extent at work, in our personal relationships, during a conversation, while having sex, when taking an exam, when riding our bicycle or driving our car, in many aspects of our everyday life in general, and then of course in art and music. From this point of view, it surely makes sense to emphasize the links between improvisation in everyday life and artistic improvisation, while at the same time recognizing the differences between them, and thus distinguishing them: in fact, if the performance of *all* actions involves certain improvisational elements and components, then in the specific case of the artistic field improvisation must be understood as a kind of development of creativity and rearrangement of forms, materials and techniques in real time.

If improvisation is a genuinely human practice, a genuine component of human life experience in general and not only in art, it is nevertheless in art, and particularly in music, that the specific features of improvisation manifest themselves in perhaps the clearest way, and become fully explicit, thus also facilitating a philosophical understanding of this capacity. In other words, improvisation in art, and in particular in music, highlights, emphasizes, strengthens and increases in value the characteristics of improvisation in general, and thus makes it easier for theorists to grasp its essence, to identify its basic features and distinctive characters. If so, then “improvisation in the performing arts shows at a micro level what happens, at a macro level, in artistic practices in general,” and the latter, in turn, shows what happens at a still greater macro level in life in general (Bertinetto, 2018a, pp. 129, 131–132).

## 5.

On the basis of these presuppositions, placing an inquiry into jazz improvisation into a somaesthetic context of investigation can prove to be useful and important so as to deepen, enrich and refashion our understanding of improvisation in both life and art. As noted by Davide Sparti (2005, p. 135), improvisation is also a genuine source of knowledge, and more precisely a kind of knowledge that is more a “knowing-how” than a “knowing-that,” and a kind of knowledge that can be described in terms of “embodied skills”. This is already clear on the many occasions in which we must face the unknown and the unexpected in everyday life—the very term “improvisation” deriving from the Latin *ex improvviso* (Bertinetto, 2016, pp. 189–220). This becomes even clearer and more explicit in performance art and especially in music and dance: namely, in forms of art in which the body plays a very fundamental and special role (also in comparison to other art forms or genres), both in itself and in its tight and sometimes inseparable relationship with the musical instrument.

The kind of knowledge and skill that is required to be a musician can be also indeed be considered an embodied knowledge. This is true in general, and thus at all levels and in all musical styles or genres, but it is especially true in the case of good, prepared and well-trained

musicians, and in the case of improvised music, since in improvised music the musician, in order to be able to face the challenge of the unknown and the unexpected on stage in the free interplay with their musical partners, with the audience and with the surrounding environment, must be really in sync with their instrument as if it was a part of their body. As explained by Bill Bruford (2018, pp. 12, 18–19, 199)—a legendary rock and jazz drummer but also a PhD scholar and the author of an academic book on creativity that, among other things, is also based on the precepts of John Dewey’s philosophical theory of art as experience, as far as its theoretical background is concerned—, the unforeseen is a “foundational construct of creativity:” as showed by the Latin etymology, it is also linked to the notion of improvisation, “a key skill of the jazz performer as she or he deals literally with the unforeseen in real time” during a process or activity that can be described as an embodied performance.<sup>9</sup>

Ever since Pythagoras, Plato and St. Augustine, up to Medieval and early-modern conceptions of the so-called “music of the spheres” or “harmony of the spheres,” and arriving at the present age with Adorno’s idea of “music as knowledge” (Adorno, 2006, pp. 96–99) and still other theorists, music has often been associated with truth and knowledge.<sup>10</sup> If music has been understood as a form of knowledge from many different philosophical and also religious or mystical perspectives, from a pragmatist and especially somaesthetic point of view it can be said that musical knowledge represents a form of embodied knowledge that can be also of great importance to broaden and deepen one’s “body consciousness,” to adapt a famous expression by Shusterman for my purposes. according to Sparti, however, if we ask ourselves the question: “How can one become able to play improvised jazz?,” then in trying to answer it we find ourselves compelled, as it were, to develop

*...a theory of practical knowledge that stresses the embedded and embodied aspect of musical knowledge and skill, namely that required to be able to play an instrument and especially to show the kind of performative capacity that improvising is. [...] [I]t is crucial to differentiate between knowledge mediated by mental representations and knowledge-in-action, immediately embodied in acting. [...] When we start from the observation of an expert improviser and try to trace back his/her ability to a complete catalogue of codified and explicit instructions, then we understand how difficult our task is. Moreover, what has been learned are not only and not so much the rules but rather a sort of sensitivity or touch, namely the sensitivity or touch required to realize a flow of coordinated and generative actions, a sort of dynamic circuit between the musician [scil. with his/her body: SM], the instrument, the co-players and the sound event. [...] It is necessary to clarify the practical features of the particular form of creation of the new that improvising is. Many music critics and musicologists have developed their analyses at a level that is [intellectually] too high, thus omitting precisely the embodied practices that have generated the music that one aims to report on: the history of jazz, the songs, but already and also the actions of the musician, presuppose the existence of arms and hands, of a resonating voice, of a selectively listening ear, of a sight directed in certain directions: in other words, they presuppose aspects of perception and human embodiment that cannot be overcome or taken for granted. One must thus develop a*

9 On the underlying Deweyan presuppositions of Bruford’s investigation of creativity, based on his academic study of this topic but also grounded in his 41-year career as a drummer that led him to actively collaborate with, among others, Yes, King Crimson, Genesis, UK, Earthworks, Michiel Borstlap, Patrick Moraz, Ralph Towner and Eddie Gomez, David Torn and many more, see Bruford, 2018, pp. 20–37.

10 In Frank Zappa’s well-known and funny, but at the same time serious view, music is even more important than knowledge: “information is not knowledge, knowledge is not wisdom, wisdom is not truth, truth is not beauty, beauty is not love, love is not music, music is the best” (Zappa and Occhiogrosso, 1989, p. 79).

*carnal sociology [scil. and philosophy: SM] of music, not one of the body but, more radically, one from the body* (Sparti, 2005, pp. 136–137; my emphasis).

Following Shusterman's original intuitions, "if we put aside traditional philosophical prejudice against the body and simply recall philosophy's central aims of knowledge, self-knowledge, right action, and its quest for the good life, then the philosophical value of somaesthetics should become clear in several ways:" if "knowledge is largely based on sensory perception" but the latter's "reliability often proves questionable," then the route offered by somaesthetics is "to correct the actual functional performance of our senses by an improved direction of one's body, since the senses belong to and are conditioned by the soma" (Shusterman, 2000, p. 267). From a somaesthetic perspective, knowledge of the world and also self-knowledge are not only important as such but also improvable, and can be improved "not by denying our bodily senses but by perfecting them" through specific methods, experiences, practices and arts (Shusterman, 2000, p. 268).

## 6.

On the basis of what has been said above, jazz improvisation can be understood: (1) as an artistic practice that promotes, in a Deweyan pragmatist spirit, the attempt to reconcile and reconnect art and life; (2) as an artistic practice that, like all music and all performance art, is based among other things on a strong, indeed unavoidable somatic component, i.e. on a fundamental role played by the body during the performance, with the musician's body completely involved and "immersed" in the performance: in the specific case of jazz, let us think of the particular and often inimitable postures and uses of their bodies by such different jazz musicians as Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Charles Mingus, John Coltrane, Albert Ayler, Wayne Shorter, Keith Jarrett, John Scofield, Pat Metheny, Brad Mehldau, and many more; (3) as an artistic practice that, precisely due to the level of somatic involvement by the musician in the playing of music that is (partially or totally, depending on the kind of musical improvisation) "instantly composed" during the performance, requires a great competence and mastery of the musical instrument. Namely, it requires a relationship with the instrument that arrives at understanding it, and above all at feeling it, as something like an appendage of one's own limbs (please consider, as a somewhat typical example, the drummer's relationship with drums, percussions and cymbals forming the "drum kit" as almost appendages of their own arms and legs).<sup>11</sup>

On the one hand, the capacity to arrive at a good level of improvisation in music thus requires a great deal of musical knowledge<sup>12</sup> and also somatic knowledge, a progressively increased knowledge of one's own body, of its potentialities and also of its limits. On the other hand, in a somaesthetic spirit of pragmatic meliorism, this may also prove to be a genuine

11 As noted by Bill Bruford in his book on creativity in performance explained through the example of drumming, "it is important to highlight [that] the instrument is played with some combination of all four limbs in play. [...] Assuming a four-limbed drummer is playing a standard seven-piece drum set of bass drum, snare drum, hi-hat, high tom, low tom, ride, and crash cymbals, she or he may strike any combination of seven instruments with any combination of up to four limbs" (Bruford, 2018, p. 106)—that which clearly requires a great mastery not only of the instrument, i.e. the drum kit, but also of the drummer's body, with a high level of bodily coordination and somatic consciousness.

12 Of course, this musical knowledge can be, but must not necessarily be, an academic one, as in the case of many excellent self-taught jazz musicians. It must also be added that learning to play an instrument fluently is not in itself a sufficient condition for original, brilliant improvising and, in general, for creativity. To again quote Bill Bruford (2018, pp. 68, 209), "[t]he importance of technical control in music invention lies in its affordance of possible options from which to select", but there is "no direct linear connection between technical dexterity (or the amount of deliberate practice needed to achieve it) and creativity" which, in turn, is defined by Bruford in his academic inquiry into "creative performance" as "sociocultural, intersubjective and interactive" (and embodied, I add), as "embedded within a meaningful shared experience around collaboration and community", and as "an action in between actors and their environment rather than a psychological phenomenon entirely located within the individual mind".

source of improvement of one's capacities to use one's body in new, unexpected, creative ways. For this reason, *not only* can be music compared to a form of knowledge that also includes a component of somatic knowledge, as argued before; and *not only* can be musical improvisation be understood as one of the varieties of music that mostly testify this fact:<sup>13</sup> *in addition*, it is *also* remarkable that musical improvisation can be approached from a somaesthetic perspective from the analytic, the pragmatic and the practical dimension of somaesthetics, and also from both the representational and the experiential side of this discipline (Shusterman, 2000, pp. 271–276).

In using the term “discipline,” it can be interestingly observed that this term has characteristically “[a] double meaning,” indicating both “*a branch of learning or instruction and [...] a corporal form of training or exercise*,” and that this perfectly applies to somaesthetics as “a discipline of theory and practice” (Shusterman, 2000, pp. 271, 276) but also perfectly applies to music. As a matter of fact, to express the concept by using the “discipline/indiscipline” terminological pair that also gives the title to two masterpieces in Robert Fripp's catalogue with King Crimson,<sup>14</sup> the development of musical capacities at all levels undoubtedly requires a great deal of “discipline” (both theoretical-technical and somatic-practical) in order to arrive at a significant, expressive and aesthetically rich level of musical “indiscipline.” This is exemplified in a perfect way, once again, by what happens during a jazz improvisation, if we simply think of how much “disciplined” and at the same time “undisciplined” all great performers in the history of jazz have always been, and of how much their postures and the uses of their body are connected to their capacity to “express the inexpressible” through their voices and their instruments<sup>15</sup>—where the pair “discipline/indiscipline” does not completely overlap, but can nevertheless be fruitfully connected with, other pairs such as “structure/expression,” “convention/innovation,” “habit/changes,” “style and commonality/liberty and individuality,” “order/chaos” etc.

## 7.

At this point, I would like to exemplify the previous interpretations and argumentations by referring to the abovementioned (and, in my view, really exemplary) case of the drummer's explicitly and emphatically somatic relationship with their musical instrument. As a matter of fact, although the same phenomenon can be observed in jazz in the cases of saxophone players, trumpet players, guitar players, bass players, piano players and of course also singers, then due to the perhaps higher level of somatic involvement that an activity like drumming requires

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13 Learning to play an instrument so fluently as to be able to “instantly compose” a musical piece, as happens during real improvisations, requires what Robert Fripp has so described with reference to his development of particular guitar techniques in his Guitar Craft students' group: “There was a *knowing in the hand through doing it* for years which I consulted. [...] *My body knew what was involved*, but I didn't know about it” (quoted in Tamm, 1991, p. 15; my emphasis). See also Tamm, 1991, p. 78, on the somatic component involved in Fripp's guitar methods as a teacher: “Many of [George Ivanovich] Gurdjieff's exercises involved or began with some sort of gradual relaxation of the muscles, starting with the muscles of the face and working downward through the body. Fripp has said that we can do nothing when not relaxed, and since his time at Sherborne [*scil.* where Fripp attended courses of John G. Bennett, a former student of Gurdjieff] has practiced a regular routine of relaxation in the morning before breakfast; such a ritual, led by a qualified instructor, has been worked into the Guitar Craft seminars. Along with relaxation there is a type of exercise for sensing the different parts of the body ‘from the inside.’ In these and analogous experiences, the somatic component of musical practice interestingly appears to be inextricably connected and interlaced with mental and sometimes quasi-mystical components that are nevertheless not autonomous, as it were, but indeed inseparable from the physical, somatic dimension of music playing, and actually grounded in it.

14 Quite interestingly, in a recent description of the present “incarnation” of King Crimson as an eight-piece band that has been quoted in the booklet of their double CD *Live in Chicago 2017*, the music of the band has been defined as characterized, among other things, by extraordinary capacities for improvisation: “The precision of an orchestra, the freedom of a jazz band, and the power of a rock band”.

15 I borrow this description from Adorno. In his view, we fail to do justice to the essence of all genuine philosophizing if we do not grasp “the philosophical urge to express the inexpressible. The more anxiously a philosophy resists that urge, which is its peculiarity, the greater the temptation to tackle the inexpressible directly, without the labor of Sisyphus – which, by the way, would not be the worst definition of philosophy and does so much to bring ridicule upon it. [...] Philosophy is neither a science nor the ‘cogitative poetry’ to which positivists would degrade it in a stupid oxymoron. It is a form transmitted to those which differ from it as well as distinguished from them. Its suspended state is nothing but the expression of its inexpressibility. In this respect it is a true sister of music” (Adorno, 2004, pp. 108–109).

because of its very nature, the latter may prove to be more useful for our purposes (with all the limbs of the body being simultaneously and in coordination active in beating drums, cymbals, cowbells and so on, so that the role of the body as agent to create music becomes especially tangible in drumming). Different musical styles in jazz drumming, as exhibited and displayed especially in improvisations, are indeed not only revealing of different technical skills, different aesthetic choices and taste preferences in the use of certain cymbals or drums, different shades and nuances in the application of single- or double-stroke rolls, paradiddles, single- or double-bass drum pedal techniques, and all other “rudiments” for drumming, but are also revealing of different “somatic styles” (borrowing the concept of somatic style from Shusterman, (2011)).

Just to name a few examples of leading figures in modern jazz drumming from the 1970s onwards, please consider how inseparable Jack DeJohnette’s, Joey Baron’s or Brian Blade’s passionate and overwhelming drum style is from their tumultuous and at times even somewhat “uncoordinated” (due to an unrestrained musical enthusiasm and expressiveness, especially in Baron’s or Blade’s cases) physical approach to the instrument.<sup>16</sup> Or, vice-versa, consider how inseparable Steve Gadd’s, Vinnie Colaiuta’s or Dave Weckl’s extraordinarily precise, calculated and metronomic drum style is from the accurately controlled and “hyper-coordinated” movements of all their limbs and parts of their bodies during the performance.<sup>17</sup> Consider how inseparable Peter Erskine’s, Manu Katche’s or Bill Bruford’s impeccable class, sensitivity and touch is from their relaxed, non-ostentatious and “disciplined” somatic style, even when playing very “undisciplined” and ferociously improvised tunes (still using the “discipline/indiscipline” conceptual pair, given Bruford’s long-time involvement with at least three “incarnations” of King Crimson).<sup>18</sup> Consider how inseparable Billy Cobham’s, Dennis Chambers’ or Omar Hakim’s energetic, powerful and, so-to-speak, muscular drum style is from a posture that immediately shows, at the very level of their bodies’ movements, the capacity to connect a high level of fluency and mastery of their instrument to a unique feeling for funky rhythms and the primordial function of drums for dancing.<sup>19</sup> Consider also how much the distinct drum styles of various drummers enrolled in a certain band in different years are also connected to, and reflected by, their dissimilar somatic styles; and how much, this, in turn, can influence the entire band’s practices of musical composition and performance at various levels. Useful examples in contemporary jazz may be those of the different musical and somatic styles provided by Danny Gottlieb, Paul Wertico and Antonio Sanchez in the Pat Metheny Group, or by Marvin “Smitty” Smith, Billy Kilson, Nate Smith and Eric Harland in the Dave Holland Quartets, Quintets, Sextets, Octets and Big Bands. Finally, consider how relevant and striking, eye-catching, impossible-to-pass-unnoticed is the connection between the purely musical dimension of drumming and its somatic dimension on the occasion of drum duets starring musicians characterized by heterogeneous styles. Just to mention a few well-known examples, let me remind the reader of such exciting drum duets as those between Bill Stewart and Gregory Hutchinson,<sup>20</sup> or between

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16 For example, respectively: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lj26nzEM-Gs>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwlyJRPFXU>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8VdtC9WhnKg>.

17 For example, these three great drummers soloing together and having a beautiful improvised conversation with drums, cymbals and percussions: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czOjnlvHrQU>.

18 For example, respectively: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B2qlsrfuAO8>; [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XP\\_iWAtU4A8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XP_iWAtU4A8); <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yQHkjYewJoU>.

19 For example, respectively: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ljin1RLYEtE>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJkzNnUx7BY>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5AO0aeuR6Q>.

20 For example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lhDjMsSsfD0>.

Terry Bozzio and Chad Wackerman,<sup>21</sup> two of Frank Zappa's favorite drummers, with their very different musical and somatic styles, and with their unique capacity to provide different but equally valid interpretations of *The black page*.<sup>22</sup>

Interestingly, an account of musical creativity that, as already hinted at above, understands it on the basis of a Deweyan background, that also pays attention to the dimension of surprise, of the unforeseen and unexpected and thus of improvisation (with a special focus on jazz), and that precisely exemplifies through drumming its conception of creativity and performance as a meditated, common and diffused (instead than individual or "person-centric", as in "the 'lone genius' paradigm posited by the Romantic conception"), embedded and also embodied "action in context," has been offered by Bill Bruford, one of most famous rock-jazz drummers of recent decades and the author of the academic study *Uncharted: Creativity and the expert drummer* (Bruford 2018, pp. 3–14, 45–52, 199–201). Although Bruford's book is not specifically dedicated to trying to answer such questions as, for example, how embodied knowledge is present, needed and learned/developed in the case of improvisation in jazz drumming, or what the embodied knowledge here entails in specific or concrete terms, or how embodied knowledge and experience are connected in improvisation in jazz drumming, or what the lack of such knowledge might reveal and how would it be revealed, in some chapters it nevertheless pays close attention to the somatic dimension of music (with a focus also on jazz and improvisation). This is the case, for example, in his intriguing observations on the way in which musical activities (in the matter in question, those of jazz and rock drummers) "are governed by a cultural tradition that regulates and shapes the experience of creative practice, and take place within a community that mediates and promotes the psychological behavior and meaning-making of the individual. [...] Embracing a particularly corrosive ideology, however, the broader drum culture (that enfolds the community) is something of an extreme case," as testified by a few "sets of issue" among which, for Bruford, prominently figures a deep-rooted anti-somatic prejudice deriving from no less than "the impact of the Cartesian mind/body split" (Bruford, 2018, pp. 16–17).

As a matter of fact, according to Bruford "the link between creativity and the drum culture" (that especially manifests itself during jazz improvisations<sup>23</sup>) is problematically "mediated by the corrosive influence of the culture's organizing ideology," defined as "the articulated system of meanings, values, and beliefs that can be abstracted as the 'worldview' of the drum community," and that, at least to some extent, seems to reinforce "distinctions between the culture of drummers and other instrumentalists," which can be connected to "Western music culture's perceived predisposition against the 'rhythmatist'" (Bruford, 2018, p. 133). In a genuinely pragmatist and even somaesthetic fashion, Bruford indeed criticizes a certain "historical insistence that notions of aesthetics, mind, harmony, and the intellect are superior to hedonism, body, rhythm" which "has become embedded" in a widespread but mistaken "drum ideology" that, in a philosophically ambitious way, he even dares to trace back "to René Descartes and the seventeenth century dualist notion of the 'mind/body split.'" Referring to Simon Frith's sociological analysis of popular music, which can be intriguingly compared to Shusterman's philosophical critique of the high

21 For example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xRiZNOvC5J8>.

22 Frank Zappa's composition *The black page* has been emphatically defined as "the most complex rhythmic composition humanly performable" (Salvatore, 2000, pp. 136–137). It is "a written piece of music that, while simulating improvisation" (i.e. sounding as if it was an improvised piece played by the drummer), "reveals instead its real character of written musical score," "a sound experience that has to do with the possibility of impossibility" (Montecchi, 2000, p. 191).

23 "Jazz performance", according to Bruford (2018, p. 87), can be understood as "an ongoing interaction between person, product, and environment, one which an audience is invited to observe. It is expected that the product (the performed outcomes of these interactions) will change frequently and in response to multiple environmental conditions. The emphasis is on the process, not the product."

culture/popular culture dichotomy in *Pragmatist aesthetics* and elsewhere, Bruford observes that “the equation of ‘serious’ with the mind and high culture, and ‘fun’ with the body and thus low culture, became established in the United States and Europe in the mid-nineteenth century,” and that characteristically, while “a good classical performance [is] measured by the stillness it commands, [...] a good rock concert [is] measured by the audience’s physical response and bodily movement” (Bruford, 2018, p. 133).

Starting from these presuppositions, if we shift our attention to the specific case of drumming, and in particular of jazz performances based on improvisation,<sup>24</sup> we can see some effects of “[t]his musical dichotomy of aesthetic/mind versus hedonistic/body” grounded in “the falsity of the mind/split [and] the separation of thought from feeling” (Bruford, 2018, pp. 134, 136). That is, we can understand – and, on the basis of this understanding, reasonably criticize—the still quite common but wrong idea of “bodily responses [as] mindless” and, as a consequence of the high level of somatic involvement that drumming requires, “[t]he conception of drumming as ‘mindless’” and the fact that “the Western kit drummer [has] become imbued with the primitive, the sexual, and the mindless” (Bruford, 2018, pp. 134–135). With regard to this, the experience and practice of drumming can offer a good example to support the efforts of pragmatist aesthetics and somaesthetics to put aside traditional prejudices against the body and reevaluate its central role in art and performance, while the somaesthetics’ critique of the sad somatic neglect that has been characteristic of a great part of Western philosophy and culture, in turn, can provide a suitable theoretical framework for a reevaluation of improvisation in drumming, not in spite of its pronounced somatic character, but precisely because of the latter and the importance of the body that it displays.

Last but not least, jazz improvisation may be of interest to a philosophical discipline like somaesthetics not only from an artistic point of view, but also from a more practical point of view that can be connected to the pragmatic/practical dimension of somaesthetics interested in “proposing specific methods of somatic improvement” and in “practicing such care through intelligently disciplined body work aimed at somatic self-improvement,” that is, “concerned not with saying but with *doing*” (Shusterman, 2000, pp. 272, 276). Based on my own experience as a musician and indeed as a drummer, after almost three decades I can still exactly remember the very first lesson I attended with my teacher, a very well-trained professional drummer named Enzo Augello, who (to my surprise and partial disappointment, as a teenager who unrealistically expected to be able to play like John Bonham or Stewart Copeland after one or two drum lessons!), before even teaching me how to play a single-stroke roll or how to alternate hi-hat, bass drum and snare drum in very a simple 4/4 rhythm, devoted almost three hours to teaching me how to sit on the stool, how to correctly place my body in front of the drum kit, how to correctly hold the drumsticks, at which height I should correctly place the cymbals on the basis of the dimensions of my body, and so on. This is exactly what a good music teacher will immediately pay attention to with their pupils from the very first lesson: purely somatic teaching, in a sense, before even hitting the snare drum or the floor tom for the first time with the drumsticks. This is exactly what proved to be essential, in my modest experience as an amateur and non-professional drummer, in order to prevent the bodily problems that can otherwise occur in such a physically demanding activity as playing drums (inflammations, muscular spasms, tendinitis, etc.) and that can even evolve into more serious problems concerning one’s somaesthetic feelings with music. As observed by Shusterman,

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24 As noted by Bruford, improvisation, as a partially or totally “instant composition” with a particularly important role assigned to the performer in comparison to the composer, has also been subject for decades to negative prejudices and devaluation (Bruford, 2018, pp. 9–13).

*...the body deserves humanistic study to improve its use in the various artistic and scholarly pursuits that it underlies and serves. Musicians, actors, dancers, and other artists can perform better and longer with less attendant pain and fatigue when they learn the proper somatic comportment for their arts, how to handle their instruments and themselves so as to avoid unwanted, unnecessary muscle contractions that result from unreflective habits of effort, detract from efficiency and ease of movement, and ultimately generate pain and disability. A famous case in point concerns the somatic theorist-therapist F. M. Alexander, who first developed his acclaimed technique to address his own problems of hoarseness and loss of voice in theatrical acting that were generated by faulty positioning of his head and neck. Such learning of intelligent somatic self-use is not a matter of blind drill in mechanical techniques but requires a careful cultivation of somatic awareness (Shusterman, 2006, p. 10; my emphasis).*

I would thus like to conclude with another example taken from modern jazz drumming, and indeed a prominent and famous one, namely Roy Haynes. I consider Hayne's example as a good and indeed fitting one to make reference to because it proves useful to exemplify and, as it were, to embody the interest of somaesthetics in a vast plurality of different aesthetic practices and experiences not only from a purely theoretical point of view but also from a practical one, including their potential health benefits and help in improving the use of our body and our general well-being. As a matter of fact, Haynes, who is now 94 years old and can be proud of an outstanding 70 year long career that has led him to collaborate as drummer and group leader with (among others) Lester Young, Charlie Parker, Bud Powell, Sonny Rollins, Thelonious Monk, Stan Getz, Miles Davis, Eric Dolphy, John Coltrane, Chick Corea and Michel Petrucciani, still continues to perform worldwide and to generously delight audiences from all over the world with his expressive, inimitable style ("Snap Crackle" was a nickname given him in the 1950s).<sup>25</sup>

The example of Haynes can be compared to many other analogous cases of extraordinarily healthy old musicians in jazz but also in other genres from classical music to heavy metal, but at the same time he definitely stands out because of his uncommon age, his still-excellent level of musical skills at 94 and the particularly demanding physical effort required by his instrument. What this example shows is that, if viewed from a certain perspective, some forms of musical practice can perhaps also be included in the list of the "pragmatic disciplines [...] recommended to improve our experience and use of the body" that pragmatic/practical somaesthetics is interested in, such as "diverse diets, body piercing and scarification, forms of dance and martial arts, yoga, massage, aerobics, bodybuilding, various erotic arts [...], and such modern psychosomatic therapies as the Alexander Technique, the Feldenkrais Method, Bioenergetics, Roling, etc." (Shusterman, 2000, p. 272). The somehow unique example of a musician like Roy Haynes shows how, in a pragmatist melioristic spirit, the continual, repeated, well-balanced and adequate practice of jazz can lead to what Shusterman correctly defines as the "learning of intelligent somatic self-use," "careful cultivation of somatic awareness" and "improved use of the body:" jazz drumming as a form of somaesthetic knowledge comparable to yoga meditation and practice, in a way.

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<sup>25</sup> "Haynes extracted the rhythmic qualities from melodies and created unique new drum and cymbal patterns in an idiosyncratic, now instantly recognizable style. Rather than using cymbals strictly for effect, Haynes brought them to the forefront of his unique rhythmic approach. He also established a distinctively crisp and rapid-fire sound on the snare; this was the inspiration for his nickname, 'Snap Crackle'" (Roy Haynes, n.d.).

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## The Somaesthetics of Musicians: Rethinking the Body in Musical Practice

*Jungmin Grace Han*

**Abstract:** *Motor skill acquisition is a key element of playing Western classical music. Musicians' repetitive practice demands instrument-specific skilled movement that results in automatic and habitual routines after achieving a certain level of techniques. Professional musicians as a consequence tend to shift their attention to cultivating abstract musical ideas, less thinking about their performing body. This narrative study explores through two musicians' somaesthetic reflections how the awareness of the sentient body influences their lifelong musical development. It demonstrates that the body itself becomes a malleable musical entity, in which technique and musicality are simultaneously achieved. The study challenges the conventional division between "low" bodily technique and "high" artistic thinking which has been pervaded in the current theory and practice of musical performance, enlivening the somaesthetic concepts through lived musical experience.*

**Keywords:** *body awareness, instrumental education, lifelong learning, mind-body, musical capacity, music education, music performance, musical practice, self-awareness, somaesthetics, transformation.*

### Prologue

The idea of body-mind dualism has been pervasive in Western philosophy. In dominant strands of Ancient Greek and Cartesian dualism, the body is conceived as being physical and ephemeral, and the mind as a permanent entity. As a result, the mind has often been valued over and above the body (Merleau-Ponty, 1964; Johnson, 1987). Richard Shusterman (1999), who first coined the term "somaesthetics", challenged a key issue permeating philosophy and aesthetics. He argued that despite our embodied nature, the notion of the body is mostly neglected, and the body itself is considered to be "a mere physical object for artistic representation or a mere instrument for artistic production" (Shusterman, 2012, p. 1). This notion applies to more than just philosophy and aesthetics. Despite the idea that the body is an essential element in the creation of music and art, Western classical music performance has long been influenced by this dichotomized concept of body and mind, which involves the binary conceptions of bodily technique and musical thinking in the theory and practice of music performance.

Professional musicians, as a consequence, tend to shift their attention to cultivating abstract musicality, as if they do not need to concentrate on their skilled movements after achieving a certain level of technical skill which most likely results in the habitual unconscious routines of performance. John Toner and others (2016) have similarly discussed the notion of habitual routines in performing arts, saying, “We are told that skilled performers do not need to think about their actions” (p. 50). This elucidates the corollary myth that outstanding musicians are born talented, as if there is a predetermined level *not* attainable by every musician. This misguided conception hinders the true musical potential of individuals and overlooks the essential role of the body as a transformative subject, that is capable of creating and actualizing an artistic ideal into living sound. Conversely, rediscovering one’s bodily capacity allows the enlargement and rediscovery of one’s musical capacity.

Shusterman (1999; 2004; 2009; 2012) have developed an understanding of the body as the key to understanding oneself and the world. He has discussed how experiential bodily awareness helps us re-educate and expand ourselves. He suggested that “from this somaesthetic perspective, knowledge of the world is improved, not by denying our bodily senses, but by perfecting them” (1999, p. 302). He also argued how our bodies exist as the essential agent of lived experience, for example, by improving awareness of our bodily states and feelings beyond the body’s external representation. Shusterman (2008), in his book, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*, described how four different levels of consciousness are involved in the practice of *somaesthetics* (pp.53–56). The four levels are:

*Level 1: Corporeal intentionality* – Sleep; a primitive mode of grasping without conscious awareness

*Level 2: Primary consciousness* – Emotion invoked by background music, a reaction of the body to dancing, but not being explicitly aware of our actions: conscious perception without explicit awareness

*Level 3: Somaesthetic perception* – Explicit bodily awareness; playing an instrument involving a focus on the activity, rather than the consciousness of the situation without analytic reflection

*Level 4: Somaesthetic reflection or self-consciousness* – A focus on self-awareness; an analytical reflection requiring awareness of one’s own awareness

While professional musicians have undoubtedly reached the third of these four levels of consciousness: the somaesthetic perception of the specific motor skill acquisition necessary to play an instrument, the level beyond the somaesthetic perception—what Shusterman calls somaesthetic reflection *or* self-consciousness—has often been overlooked in conventional musical practice. Such a tendency has hindered potential of musicians to transform and grow.

Based on my own transformative experience as a musician, I specifically conceptualize how increased experiential awareness of the performing body enables musicians to renew their capacity for the sound emanating from their instruments. The recovered sound ultimately enhances the capacity for musical expression, eventually restoring musical capacity and capability, as per the sequential phases herein described:

*Phase 1:* Newly discovered performing body

*Phase 2:* Rebuilt relationship between the musician and the instrument

*Phase 3:* Expanded sound capacity

*Phase 4:* Recovered freedom of musical expression

*Phase 5:* Restored malleable musical capacity and capability

In this narrative study, I explore the perspectives and knowledge of the performing body as an essential element for musical transformation and growth. Based on the narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Clandinin, 2013), this article explores the experience of two musician-teachers, with the aim of discovering the meaning of somaesthetics beyond the theoretical perspective. It directs attention to the potential influence of the lived experience by understanding the musical growth and transformation rendered through the voices of musicians. I have borrowed Shusterman's term "somaesthetics," which refers to the "sentient lived body, rather than merely to the physical body in appreciation of aesthetics" (2012, p. 5).

For this study, I developed the semi-structured interview protocol with the three themes: the performing body-mind, musical performance, and education. The interview questions included "What is your daily practice like?", "If there is a true or ultimate level of performance, what would it be like in your mind?" and "Do you have any memories of becoming aware of your body?" The criterion for participation in the study was that musicians and educators must have had experience of musical and educational growth through *bodily awareness* as musicians and teachers at the time of the study. Two college professors of the cello in musical performance were recruited; David and Julia (pseudonyms) have respectively 46- and 25-years' experience in performing and teaching in the United States.

Two separate initial interviews with David and Julia took two hours and one hour, respectively. After 25 hours of work transcribing the interviews, a one-hour follow-up interview with David was further conducted to revisit some of his ideas from the initial meeting. Their somaesthetic narratives were all analyzed and reconstructed in their first-person voice to call forth their experiences as the fundamental source of knowledge about the body in the context of music performance. I then reinterpreted their narratives according to two categories; body in the musical self and body in musical practice.

## **The Narratives**

### **David's Narratives**

"In 1994, I did not know I would reach a turning point in my life until I went to see my chiropractor to release my back pain as usual. Surprisingly, after the treatment, my neck began to hurt, and even worse, I ended up not being able to move my left arm for eight months due to the neck injury. My doctor kept insisting that there was no option but a major operation to my neck. He told me I would be paralyzed otherwise. Instead, I chose to heal myself by adopting new bodily habits. Not only am I now in much better shape than I was before, but I also became a better musician and teacher.

Every morning, I reacquaint myself with the cello, recreating the relationship between the cello and myself; myself and the cello. I do this in many different ways, letting me feel, for

instance, how I am experiencing my weight today; how I must organize myself to get ready to play what I'm about to play; how fluid and fluent things are within me. I believe the cello also feels different every day. The relationship between us therefore needs to be rebuilt daily. I get back to basics to find out how we (the cello and I) are doing today before starting to work on different things.

For example, when I get up and my lower back feels stiff or my left shoulder blade is stuck for some reason compared to yesterday, the outcome on the fingerboard of the instrument will be audible. My entire approach to the cello depends on my daily feelings and finding out how we (the cello and I) relate to each other at that present moment. This requires consistent, ongoing awareness of how I feel every time. I therefore relate to the cello and search for fluency and fluidity in my body. The fluency and fluidity are then directed to the music that I'm creating. I cannot separate the music I'm creating from what I'm feeling within my own body. If I look for fluidity or phrases in the music *without* feeling it in my body, I sense a conflict between my body and the music that I want to create. When I play musical phrases, the musically sensitive audience is especially able to sense whether I am struggling with something in my body that makes me feel uncomfortable. Even though I manage to play the phrase well, despite the discomfort in my body, I cannot fully express my musical ideal in sounds because of the battle between my body and the instrument. All the musically sensitive ears listen to every little struggle that I go through.

For me, musical phrases always start *within my own body*. I have an image of a phrase in my head, and then through my movements, the image is translated and transferred into my movements with the cello and into the sound at the end. If you want these things to flow, your body needs to organize itself appropriately to anticipate the change in movement. For example, for a bow change on a string instrument, your upper arm is already in a new direction, and then it takes over before you get to the tip of the bow; not only your arm but also the rest of your body needs to know what is happening in your arm. The fluency and fluidity can easily be blocked somewhere in your body unless you pay attention and open channels and create new sensations with your bodily sensitivity. This is something that I always learn and develop every time I play music. You play, not to maintain what you have already learned, but to discover new things. We can learn as long as we live. The primary catalyst for this somatic journey is the music I am creating. I am always looking for better music. The ultimate goal of exploring my performing body is to achieve sound and music, which will then lead to the mellifluous freedom of creating and phrasing certain sounds that I ultimately want to express.

In general, Western society values the intelligent cognition functioning at the front of the brain highly. The sensory part, the other part *in* us, is widely neglected in our society. However, the sensory, kinesthetic component in us can teach us much more than the intellectual, cognitive part, providing we learn how to become open to our sensual perceptivity and pay attention to what it is telling us. I believe this should be cultivated more in our education. Our body tells us so many different things, distinct from a cognitive way of thinking, which entails monolithic and mechanical guidance of certain rules in a linear, sequential, and abstract mode. For example, your teacher tells you what to do: 'Play an open G string with a down-bow. Anticipate the bow change and then put your second finger on E flat on the G string.'

The sensuality, in contrast, guides you to *feel* how this open string feels to you when it is just open; how my arm feels when it's on the down-bow, and how it feels different from the up-bow, and so on. Once you're open and aware of all these subtle mixed feelings in relation to the movement, you can guide yourself by getting immersed in those bodily sensations in response

to your music. I want my students to experience all those different little sensations with their bodies, as this will immensely enrich their music.

I learned that *exploration* is key to true learning and teaching, rather than dictating what should be done and how it should be done. Exploration, in contrast to the end result, offers the opportunity for learners to embark on their own journey in search of their own musical ideals, and their own answers about what is best for them. I am not there to provide them with the facts. I am there to facilitate an environment for their musical and personal growth by encouraging them to keep on exploring and looking for things. I'm there to challenge them to open up and see where they are, and what else is there of which they're not yet aware. The world does not need another me. The world needs someone unique. You stay unique if you understand yourself more. We all have habitual routines when using our bodies. Once you realize what your habits are, you're then exposed to other ways of applying yourself. And you will then provide the system with fresh ideas. This sequence enhances your ability to move, leading to increased possibilities for the creation of different sounds within your body and from the instrument."

### **Julia's Narratives**

"When I became older, I could feel I was in a place where I wasn't free. I felt that my playing had become dull and painful. And then I was hungry to be free. Somehow, I had never quite got into the very fundamental technique of the cello, especially the right path of my arm over the whole bow. My college teacher opened up my experience. He was able to get me to play more freely than I could on my own. Yet, I could not do it again when I went back to the practice room by myself. I then realized the importance of knowing how my performing body was working with the instrument and how it was engaging with the mental side of my body. It was indeed a humbling experience to refigure the path of my arm on the bow. It shifted my whole paradigm. I believe that nothing is complicated now. The power is returning to the beginning levels of music, and I can play it more freely.

In both my music practicing and teaching, I explore what it means to balance and be aware of all the elements of playing. For example, there is a lot going on when breathing between the tension and release of our energy; regular contraction and expansion. Awareness of what we're doing *liberates* us in a way that unfolds the complexity of what we're doing in music playing.

In elements of playing, I consider integrating and balancing the left and right sides of my body, both the physical and mental release of tension in any place on both sides and full expression. My awareness of my performing body is interconnected with these elements of playing. For example, I ask myself, "Is this issue related to what's happening in my left side?" "What is happening in my right arm?" and "Does it cross strings or change bow?" My consciousness in integrating and balancing my two sides ultimately helps me experience the full expression of music. For example, one of my practice routines of slurring with every note offers me a sense of whether I should shift what's happening in my right arm and left hand.

I also experience sounds in relation to my pulse. Sounds are always connected to what is happening in my pulse. I started to move my feet back and forth while I'm playing, thus forming a new habit. Therefore, my musical capacity is still a work in progress without limitations.

To me, love really matters in my playing. I sang my 12-year-old son a lullaby for seven years because he couldn't go to sleep without me singing to him, despite my terrible voice. If you listen to a recording of my singing, you would think, 'How could a baby fall asleep to that kind of voice?' But what was there, every time, was love. I've thought about how I can bring the intimacy

of playing the cello more directly to love since I have realized the power of love as a mother. It is not about how impressive my playing is. You aren't trying to impress when you sing a lullaby to soothe a four-year-old with fever. It is impossible to let your ego govern you when you are in this kind of situation. Music isn't about me. Music speaks most powerfully when my ego fades away. My definition of true performance is when the musician is out of the picture and the piece of music has a life on its own."

## **The Somaesthetics of Musicians**

### **The Body in the Musical Self**

David interchangeably used "my body" and "myself" or "me" quite frequently. For example, he said, "Every morning, I reacquaint myself with the cello ... how fluid and fluent things are within me ... search for fluency and fluidity in my body ... if I look for fluidity or phrases in the music *without* feeling it in my body, I sense a conflict between my body and the music that I want to create."

David also mentioned, "knowing how to apply oneself" a considerable number of times during the interview, as the equivalent of being aware of how to use and apply one's body. His notion of the body as *the musical self* indicates that bodily awareness is a pathway to self-improvement, and self-improvement is achieved through the exploration of different sensations and feelings embedded in bodily movement. In other words, David believes that the process of developing bodily awareness enables an inward gaze and awareness of the self.

David's perception of the body as "a large system that constitutes emotional and physical parts with different layers," is indicative of possible preexisting "layers" in the body's system, which can be rediscovered through the elimination of former bodily habits and the exploration of new bodily movements. He views the body as a system within which layers are latent and can continue to be *cultivated*. The system of the body is, in other words, the retainer of thoughts and feelings beyond its interconnection with the mental state. Thus, David's concepts of "feelings" and "thoughts" appear to be indispensable to attaining a holistic experience of the body. He suggests that deepening bodily sensitivity or a sensory/kinesthetic experience leads to new sensations that ultimately create a new system. In other words, musical transformation and growth can be achieved and completed by changing the state of bodily movement, so that the understanding of bodily awareness becomes an ongoing process that leads to the achievement of self-rediscovery.

Based on David's experiential knowledge, I developed a visual conceptualization, depicted in Figure 1. As you can see from the picture below, David's experiential knowledge tells us that the system of the body can be renewed by heightening bodily sensitivity through the exploration of bodily movements and feelings, ultimately leading to self-rediscovery.

Julia's account provides further evidence that increased bodily awareness during a musical performance is a pathway to physical, mental, and emotional liberation. According to her experiential knowledge and practice, "full expression" is actualized by performing bodily awareness, with optimal integration and balancing of the body in particular. It seems that bodily awareness in her practice has been developed through a process of becoming aware of contraction and expansion, or the tension and release of power in the body.

Based on her principal knowledge of bodily awareness, she advocates that musical capacity is a work in progress, "as bodily sensitivity has no ultimate end," she said. Her reflection comes from her belief that the 'ideal' sound is first created from your 'inner ear,' or imagination. Imagining sounds that are based on the "inner ear" cultivates bodily sensitivity in order to meet

the musical ideal of living sound. Julia's understanding of bodily awareness as a work in progress is depicted in Figure 2, in which experiential knowledge points to a specific suggestion about the use of the body that ultimately leads to the full expression and freedom in performing music.

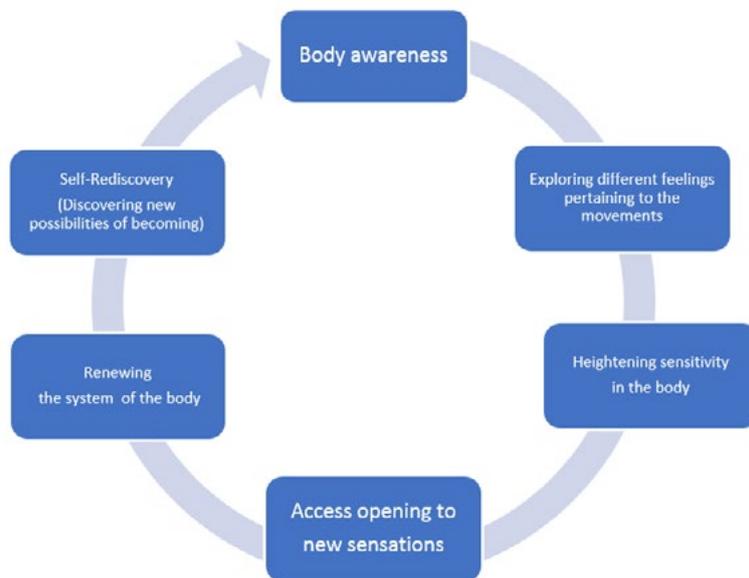


Figure 1: From bodily awareness to self-rediscovery

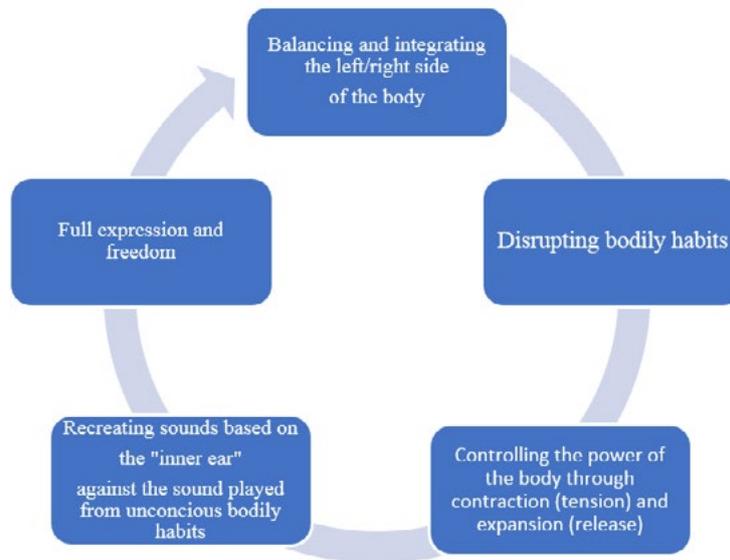


Figure 2: From disruption of “entangled” bodily habits to full expression and freedom

### The Body in Musical Practice

David's perspective on musical practice indicates that the way in which a musician organizes and coordinates their body with the instrument actively crafts certain sounds as the outcome. He said, “the sound, phrasing, and everything that we channel directly into the instrument relies on our freedom of movement because our movement is what elicits the sound.” He viewed

musical sounds as another agent of the self, and what it genuinely wishes to communicate to others: “The more genuine you are to yourself, the more your music touches others’ souls ... It is dangerous to impress or please others with fast fingers because you don’t know what you’re sacrificing.”

David frequently used the term “exploration” when referring to his musical and teaching practice. His notion of exploration speaks to *searching and improving* oneself, a concept that relates to his educational philosophy that the sheer value of music is closely tied with self-awareness. His statement that “We can improve *legato* (‘smooth’) as long as we live,” powerfully informs us that the development of bodily sensory experiences leads to new daily discoveries.

His musical practice is in line with his perspective that the process of cultivating lived sounds depends on his understanding of his performing body (Figure 3). This finding turns out to elaborate my own understanding of enhancing musical capacity through body awareness, as previously described.

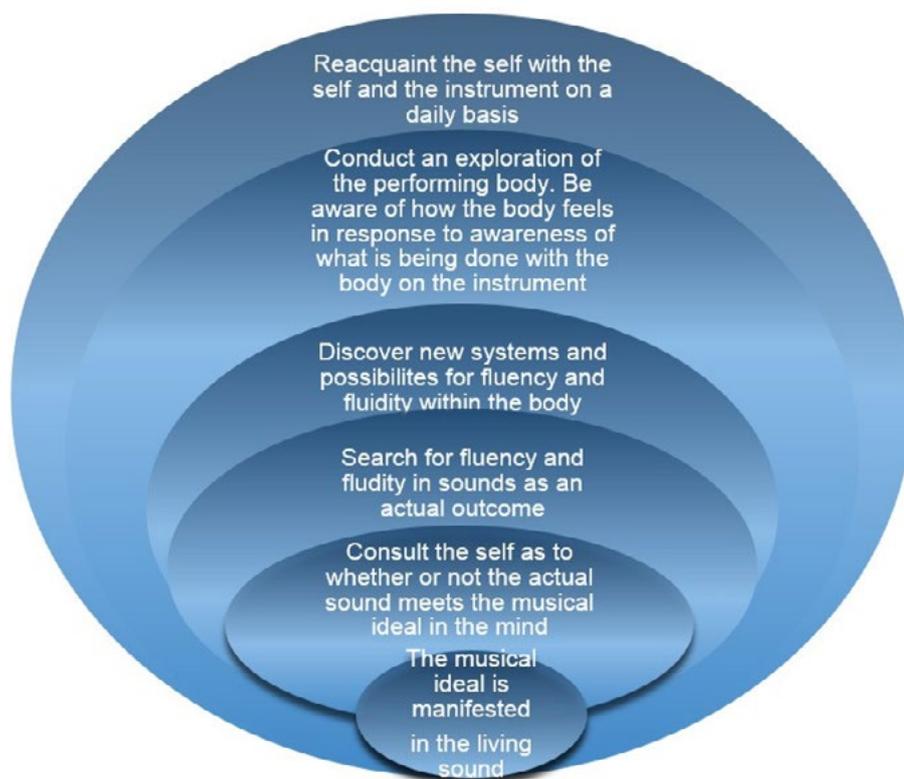


Figure 3: The process of sound cultivation within the performing body

The process can be summed up as David:

- Reacquainting himself with himself and his cello every day (he explained that they both felt different every morning);
- Exploring fluency and fluidity in his body at a “sensory” and “kinesthetic” level;
- Gaining access to the “new system” in his body;
- Searching for fluency and fluidity in sounds as an actual outcome;
- Consulting himself as to whether or not the actual musical sounds were the ones

he had sought in his imagination and/or whether the musical ideal had been reflected, and therefore achieved, in the sounds; and

- Reverting to the beginning and repeating the sequential process until he was able to discover a new system in his body and the sound possibilities that met his musical ideal of living sounds.

Julia's approach to bodily awareness as a musician and as a teacher is somewhat more explicit:

- Release the left side of the body,
- Release the right side of the body,
- Integrate and balance the two sides of the body
- Leads to full expression of music

Julia's ultimate goal as a teacher, similar to David's, was to help her students to become aware of themselves and understand what they are capable of and who they are. What remains distinctive about her approach, in comparison to David's, is her idea that self-awareness is tied to the concepts of loving others, creating music that is connected to the heart, and releasing ego. She supported this idea by providing an example of her personal experience singing lullabies to her child. Loving others decentralizes the innate power of the ego, rendering it unnecessary, and results in a connection to the heart of others.

## Epilogue

The most predominant theme identified in the two musicians' narratives was the value of "self-awareness" as the ultimate purpose of musical performance and education. They both also believed that music is a vehicle to self-understanding and a belief in the world, and that the sole purpose of playing music should not be pleasing others but rather be expressing what it truly means to oneself.

The role of imagination in musical expression was also revealed in David and Julia's somaesthetic reflections. In relation to what they perceived to be ideal musical phrases and sounds, imagination was essential to challenging habitual musical thoughts and movements and to recovering the bodily sensitivities of their musical practices. Their somaesthetic reflections, what Shusterman considers to be the highest level of consciousness, were distinctive in that the idea of *bodily* exploration was key to David's somaesthetics, while Julia focused on the *mind* of the musician.

David believed that heightening bodily awareness through feeling and exploring bodily movements was an important means of achieving self-awareness as a musician and educator. David's *exploration* of his bodily knowledge and practice as a musician and teacher was evident. In other words, his exploration and cultivation of different feelings in his body informed his lifelong learning as a musician.

The concept of exploration in David's musical practice transferred to his pedagogy, in that he guides learners in exploring themselves by posing them questions, rather than providing the definite "how-to" answers that he has acquired from his own musical practice. The idea of exploration in his musical and educational practices recalls Shusterman's (2004) argument that "[e]ducation is not so much a matter of working on particular emotions or movements, but of reorganizing or retraining *habits* of feeling and movement and habits of conduct to which

feeling and movement contribute” (p. 57). This is compatible with David’s belief that bodily awareness leads to lifelong musical learning and growth.

By contrast, Julia contemplated self-awareness in the abstract, particularly the relationship between ego and love, based on her dual identity as a mother and professional musician. She believes that one can obtain liberation from integrating performing bodily movements and increasing bodily awareness. Conversely, from David’s perspective, freedom principally means the ownership that he had come to possess as a musician and teacher rather than musical playing itself. His concept of freedom as ownership is also manifested in his teaching practice of giving his students choices by which to explore different ways of playing music, either as independent musicians or, possibly, as teachers later in their development.

While the approaches that these two musicians take to somaesthetic reflections are distinctive, their experiential knowledge is lived through Maxine Greene’s (1975) contemplation of the true meaning of education:

*The chain of daily gestures must be broken. The habitual rhythm of experience must be interrupted ... Freedom may indeed be thought of in terms of beginnings and interruptions, even as it is thought of in connection with being reflective and self-aware. The person chooses to break the chain of causes and effects, of probabilities, in which he normally feels himself to be entangled. He breaks it in part by asking “Why?”, by perceiving the habitual itself to be an obstacle to his growing, his pursuit of meaning, his interpreting and naming of his world ... The individual, aware of being blocked in some way, must posit the situation as one in which there are alternatives, as well as obstacles, to be overcome. To do this, he must have the capacity—or enabled to gain the capacity—to reflect upon the situation in its concreteness (p. 7).*

Self-awareness is key to self-transformation. The somaesthetic reflections of the two musicians demonstrate that the performing body itself can be a pathway to a malleable musical capacity if we can break, what Maxine Greene calls “the chain of daily gestures” in musical practice. Through this recovered musical capacity, the ideal technique and musicality are *simultaneously* achieved, leading to a musician’s lifelong learning and growth. By bridging theory into the practice of somaesthetics, this study advocates the potential influence of the lived musical experience on academic studies. It is essential for future studies, to continue exploring lived experiences as foundational knowledge of the body and musical practice.

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## The Sound of the ‘*Ūd* ‘*Arbī*: Evocations Through Senses

*Salvatore Morra*

**Abstract:** *This article investigates the possibility of assessing sound and music in terms of somatic values, norms and practices. I discuss ways in which the Tunisian musical instrument ‘ūd ‘arbī is connected to its sound and the player’s body. I explore the reflexive dynamic by which the intersensorial experience (Connor, 2004) of ‘ūd ‘arbī roots the instrument’s sound in Tunisian society. Qualities, the effects of the plectrum’s special position and touches, hands movements, resonances and stroking gestures, recall the intimate sense of crafting the instrument, the shaping of its organic matter and the potential relationships between the player’s body, the instrument, and its maker.*

**Keywords:** ‘ūd ‘arbī, musical instrument, body, intersensorial experience, somaesthetics, Tunisian culture.

In line with the development of studies in the body-centered discipline of somaesthetics (Shusterman, 1999), we are currently witnessing a growth in research into music in terms of experiences of embodiment, for example in McCartney (2004), Vitale (2010), Tarvainen (2018). For Shusterman (1999, p. 308), the body is now viewed not only as an object of aesthetic value but also as a crucial sensory medium for enhancing our understanding and practice of arts, music and sound. After all, the body is the essential tool through which cultural values are transmitted, inscribed, and preserved in society. Provocative developments in the social sciences argue for the re-cognition of human body interactions with raw matter, including work of craftsmanship (Sennett, 2009).

Taking up the challenge of such voices, this article will consider the relationship between body and sound, focusing on the reflexive dynamic by which the intersensorial body experiences (Connor, 2004) involved in musical instruments (both making and playing them) root the instrument’s sound in society. My article turns to the traditional Tunisian musical instrument, ‘ūd ‘arbī, with which people perform contemporary *mālūf*, one of urban Tunisia’s foremost musical genres.

Steven Connor and others have highlighted the idea that the senses are inseparable from one another (Connor, 2004, p. 153). This intersensoriality opens a field of cultural possibilities, a range of forms, images and dreams in relation to the wood, strings and plectrum of the ‘ūd

‘arbī, that I explore through body sensory perception. How do we experience sound through the senses? How can our body consciousness inform cultural identity through music and the sound of musical instruments? In other words, I will explore how the ‘ūd ‘arbī’s cultural identity is also shaped by the ways of experiencing the sound through the interaction of other senses: sight and touch. I will demonstrate how the very sound of the ‘ūd ‘arbī is iconic in the same way that the instrument is felt, touched, made and experienced through the body, and that it is invested with culturally constructed meanings. I report players’ accounts and interweave data from my own research (doctoral thesis) and interviews with people who recounted memories of particular sounds, and instruments or who described how they perceived the legacies of the instrument and the way it "sounds Tunisian".

### The Tunisian ‘Ūd ‘Arbī

The ‘ūd, a plucked instrument, is the most prominent musical instrument in the Arab-Islamic world. It developed an unusually large following throughout the twentieth century, in both the Arab world and outside, capturing the imagination of musicians more than many other Middle Eastern traditional instruments. The recognized standard Arab/Egyptian model (‘ūd *sharqī*, oriental ‘ūd, also called ‘ūd *miṣrī*, Egyptian) is the most commonly used type, along with the Turkish model, and there are also various models from Iran, Greece, Iraq and Syria. Several practices and styles of ‘ūd co-exist in Tunisia, as well as a unique type recognized as indigenous and genuinely Tunisian, named ‘ūd ‘arbī, today also known as ‘ūd *tunsi*.



Figure 1: ‘ūd ‘arbī (1867). Courtesy Horniman Museum & Gardens (Photo. David San Milan del Rio).

Ethnomusicologically speaking, the ‘ūd ‘arbī’s case is one of patrimonialization and revival. This can be traced in the artistic, pedagogical, political and symbolic meanings given to the instrument, as well as in its varying material qualities over time. The mutating course of the ‘ūd ‘arbī’s public life throughout the twentieth century situates the instrument’s changing performance practices, meanings and values within a heterogeneous cluster of sociocultural currents that interact with individual and national actors. In my master’s research (Morra, 2013), I agree with the widely held view that the Tunisian ‘ūd school owes its formation to the legendary player *sheykh* Khamaīs Tarnān for the ‘ūd ‘arbī, but argue that it was also largely created by ‘Alī Srīti and Aḥmad al-Qala‘ī for the ‘ūd *sharqī*. The dominance of the standard oriental ‘ūd in Tunisia distinguishes the Tunisian model from a range of social, musical and identity features in the twentieth first century, where the Tunisian instrument has not had the lion’s share of political policy, upper class society or players’ encouragement. The ‘ūd ‘arbī in the 1960s had, like the oriental *sharqī*, many performance possibilities; this was a market associated and marketed with Tunisian music supported by the Bourghiba government through the figure

of Ṣālah al-Mahdī.

In her extensive research into the Tunisian *mālūf*, Davis reminds us that this music had been linked in the twentieth century to an ideology of national identity and nostalgia for a past golden age. As Davis pointed out, this explanation was supported by drawing on the myth of the *mālūf*'s Andalusian origins to justify the authority of the canon of *mālūf* published notations (1960s) after independence: *al-turāth al-mūsīqī al-Tūnisi* (Tunisian Musical Heritage) (Davis, 2002). Similarly, nostalgia creates a space where performing the 'ūd 'arbī is encouraged as an instrumental means of increasing authenticity. It also serves to generate and sustain bonds of national consciousness, however, between and among the players and public.

Today, of the 'ūd-s of North African type, it is the 'ūd 'arbī that is played throughout urban Tunisian centers (Tunis, Sfax, Soussa, Monastir), parts of North Africa (Algeria and Morocco), and in a range of diasporic communities from France to Italy. In Tunisia, there are three makers of this instrument: the Bēlaṣfar family and 'Abdelatif Bēlaṣfar (Tunis), Ridhā Jandoubī (Menzel Temīn), and Faīṣal Ṭwīrī (Bardo). Their work with crafts sets out crucial information regarding the construction of the instrument, that is the result of body-hands procedures transmitted orally through generations. The 'ūd 'arbī also coalesces in a variety of sites: concert halls such as the *Masrah al-Baladī*, *Acropolium Chartage*, Rashīdīa Institute of Tunis, Sfax, Monastir, Kairouan; the practice rooms of the Institut Supérieur de Musique; *mālūf* clubs such as Conservatoire al-Farabi; teaching studios, one example being *Les Jeunes du Maluf Tunisien*; private homes; museum collections in London, Brussels and Tunis; online Facebook groups, such as: Le Malouf Tunisien, al-Malūf club de Chant Arabe, Rashīdīa -Monastir; YouTube channels such as Jalēl Benna with 1,647 followers and 'Alī Sayarī with 9,431 followers; instrument makers' workshops (Tunis, Sidi Bou Said, Hammamet); websites ([oudmigrations.com](http://oudmigrations.com), [chikioud.com](http://chikioud.com), [christianrault.com](http://christianrault.com)), outdoors spaces (Ennejma Ezzahra), and recording studios, to give only a partial list.

Today, there are three prominent players of 'ūd 'arbī in Tunisia. Zīād Gharsa is the son of the *sheykh* Ṭāhar Ghara, who was pupil of the legendary *sheykh* Khamaīs Tarnān, and therefore in a direct lineage of transmission with the musical heritage. He is in his forties and lives in the capital. Like his father, since the age of four, Zīād has lived in a music culture context centered on the Rashīdīa Music Institute<sup>1</sup> and various private *mālūf* associations. His knowledge of *mālūf* and technical skills on the instrument are recognized and widely appreciated. 'Abīr 'Ayādī is a young 'ūd 'arbī player from Sfax, who, like Zīād, has considerable experience performing and composing for the instrument, as well as institutional involvement; she is one of the 'ūd teachers of the ISM of Sfax; and she has also served in the *mālūf* orchestra of Sfax and Tunis and organizes summer schools. Finally, Zīēd Mehdī is a young Tunisian accountant who lives in Paris, and a passionate and prolific 'ūd player. Zīēd trained as a player with Kamel Gharbī, and his brother and sister, who are settled in Tunis, are amateur musicians too. Zīēd owns several different construction of 'ūd-s 'arbī, and he is obsessed by the sound this traditional instrument makes. He lives most of the time in Paris, where he attends the *Mālouf Tunisien*'s association directed by Aḥmad Ridhā 'Abbēs and performs with his ensemble *Ambar*.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, and today the Tunisian 'ūd 'arbī, is still experiencing musical changes and different positions in Tunisian society. Within the last fifty to seventy years, its transmission has moved back and forth from national institution to private association, from *sheykh* oral tradition to one with a more modern structured, recreating its identity, appeal and diffusion in many diverse situations. This musical instrument, therefore, is

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1 The Rashīdīa Institute of Tunis was founded in 1935 and devoted to the education and promotion of Tunisian music.

entangled in a web of complex relationships and situations between human, socio-historical and cultural contexts (Bates, 2012, p. 364).

### ‘ūd ‘arbī, Crafting Wood by Hand

Various aspects of body sensory perception involve the role of the craftsman and their work, exploring whether there is a relationship between the way of making ‘ūd ‘arbī and the sound the instruments produce. As William James noted, everything circles round the body, and is felt from its point of view (Shusterman, 2006, p. 7). My observations of instrument construction by the luthier Hedī Bēlaṣfar at the workshop of the Centre of Arab and Mediterranean Music (CMAM) in Sidi Bou Said, Tunisia, in June 2015, led me to believe that there was a relationship between the maker’s hand movements and how the instrument sounded “Tunisian”. It is not a matter of abstract quality: Hedī Bēlaṣfar’s technical skills are considered cultural merits rather than mere procedures, embedded in Tunisian national craftsmanship. They are transmitted orally and come from a past from which few examples survive today.<sup>2</sup>

Through the months of May and June 2015, I observed Hedī Bēlaṣfar making an ‘ūd ‘arbī that I had commissioned at the start of my doctorate. The various stages and order of working are flexible, but the basic process involves creating the mould, “qālib al-qaṣ‘a”, a model for the body. Luthiers have several moulds for several models of ‘ūd, and as Hedī Bēlaṣfar’s son, Muḥammad -Islām, told me they have the “old” and “authentic” mould for ‘ūd ‘arbī in Tunisia. Ribs are attached to the mold, which form the base for the case of the instrument. The *al-k‘ab* is important in this phase, a small cubic block that is placed on both the upper and lower part of the body (*al-qaṣ‘a*), where the ribs are attached.

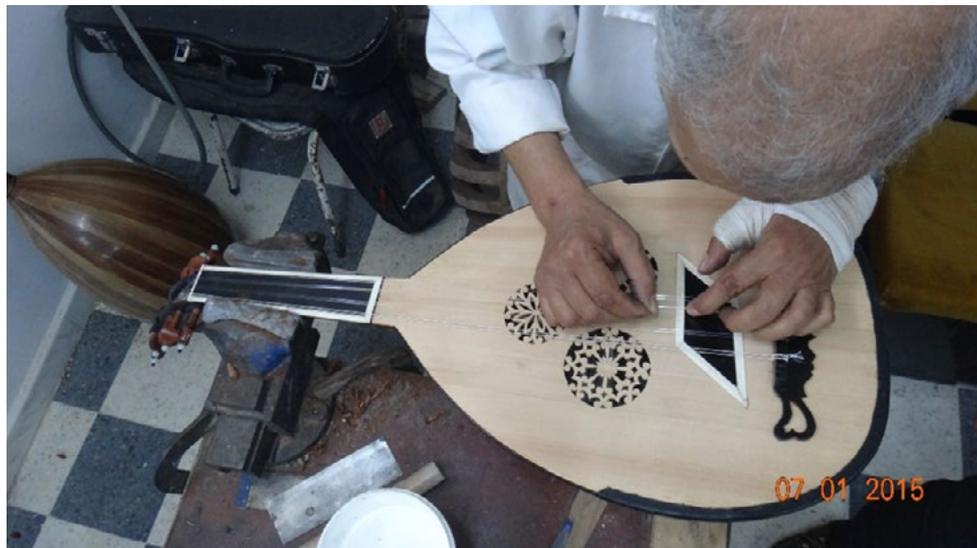


Figure 2: Hedī Bēlaṣfar crafting the instrument, 2015.

The ribs, called *aḍlā‘a* and literally meaning "sides", are between 2 and 3 cm long, and 3 mm thick that are reduced to 1.5 mm after cleaning and smoothing. Their shaping is achieved using a saw (*munshār*). After cutting the ribs, Bēlaṣfar bows them, literally "arch" or "arcade",

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RbegbO2DWkk&t=16s>. "The Making of the Tunisian ‘ūd". Written and directed by Salvatore Morra, Assistant Claudia Liccardi, Camera Operator Muḥammad Azziddin, Post Production Coordinator and Editor David San Milan, Subtitles Ikbāl Hamzaoui and Stephen Conway. Morra© 2015

dipping them in water and adjusting them on a hot surface. The last part of this stage is the manufacturing and fastening of the ribs. The aim is to provide support, what he calls *al-‘amūd al-faqrī*—literally meaning the "backbone" or "spine"—to the body starting with placing the ribs from the middle of the *qālib*. The direction of placing the ribs is from the right hand side—then left and again right and so on—from top down, to be welded by adding a sharpened spike. Then it is left to dry.

When they are dried, a fine strip of paper is added between them to keep them accurately joined together with an organic glue. The glue, called *ghīra*, and made from the legs of calves, is dried, treated and then dissolved in water under heat (in the interview, Bēlaṣfar highlights the quality of this glue and its property to let the sound propagate through the wood). I have seen Hedī Bēlaṣfar using this and other organic material with "natural movements" as if every touch on the instrument, even the most careful for precise gluing, is to be conducted without overdoing it. Bēlaṣfar knows the results he wants on the basis of his years of experience with sight and touch. As Sennett (2009, p. 9) reminds us, the intimate connection between head and hand, the thinking and the real putting into practice, are the focus of the craftsman. The use of glues between the rib papers, for instance, is the result of Hedī Bēlaṣfar's hand movements. It is entirely a conscious movement, a consciousness transmitted from the mind to the hands after years of work. Up to this point, all the crafting is done by hand.

Crafting the rosettes (*al-qamrāt*), literally "moons", is a work of artistic manufacturing. The *‘ūd ‘arbī* has three rosettes. They are placed towards the chest of the soundboard. Reinforcement using another wood, often spruce, is placed underneath the rosette (the reverse side of the surface). The idea of reinforcing under the face of the instrument goes against the principles of lightness and sound propagation, as the luthier Ṭwīrī likes to highlight. The reinforcement inevitably makes the instrument heavier, he says. The weight of an *‘ūd ‘arbī*, approximately one kilogram, is above the average of other models of *‘ūd*.

The lower bridge "*al-fars*", literally "horse", or "*kursa*" chair, is glued on the lower part of the surface, measuring 36 cm from the *musāfa* (end of the body and beginning of the neck). On the *fars* there are eight grooves in which to insert the strings. A membrane made of wood (rosewood or mahogany and decorated with mother of pearl), *al-wiqāya*, literally "protection" or *raqma*, is placed below the two roses to protect the surface from the strokes of the plectrum. In the *‘ūd ‘arbī*, a piece of leather is placed around the edge of the body to keep it securely fastened and protect it against high temperatures. Thick bone inlays and mother of pearl, for instance, render the instrument heavier, particularly towards the neck side. The neck is made of red pine, covered with ebony wood on the top and decorated with several patterns of black ebony and white cow bones. The neck is attached to the body by a piece of wood that ends at the other extremity, with a *dhīl khuṭāf* (Tunisian expression) *ba‘abūs al-kharīfa*, a "swallow tail" or "dovetail" (*rondinelle*) with four angles inserted into the neck. Makers do not need to glue this, as this feature slots into both parts and fastens securely. The headstock, called *al-bunjuq*, is normally made of walnut (*al-jūz*), and carved from only one piece of wood. It is standard practice to paint it black.

In this description of crafting the *‘ūd ‘arbī*, two features of the instrument are important for the point I wish to make here. The first concerns the fact that the instrument is very much a robust plucked instrument. It is constructed to be heavy and sturdy. Consequently, in some ways, especially due to the thickness of the neck and the tension of the strings, it is also hard to play. This difficulty is a principle characteristic of the *‘ūd ‘arbī*, and results in the unique resonance for the instrument. This feature also renders the instrument distinctive from other *‘ūd* types, and even among North African models. In the Bēlaṣfar instrument, this is a matter

of the overall amount of material, the wooden reinforcements, the amount of glue and how everything is assembled.

What is characteristic of Belaşfar's 'ūd making initially seemed a rather casual approach towards the accuracy of details and the lack of personal design innovations: wood, bone ornamentations, rosette carving, overall design shape, and materials all fall within an imagined, idealized Tunisian crafting tradition. This idealized tradition has come from the numerous 'ūd 'arbī that Belaşfar has seen, repaired and constructed in his life. Crafting is a physical hands-on practice for Belaşfar, involving hands-on contact with the instrument, of touch and movement rather than an imaginative process or an activity following a theoretical acoustic principle. It is experienced through the body, which is the center of vision, the center of action. In turn, Belaşfar's 'ūd-s 'arbī can be considered genuine and rustic, almost rural, earthy. He encompasses 'ūd 'arbī nature, evoking the instrument's rhythmic attitude. These values regarding how the instrument looks are also reflected in the sound the instrument produces, a sound that prominent players such as Zīād Gharsa and Zīēd Mehdī have said imitates characteristics of Tunisian identity, as we are going to further explore, connecting with sentiments of both its African and Arab/Tunisian sources.

### Hearing and Touching the Instrument, Experiences of 'Ūd 'Arbī's Sound

For Connor "with sight we achieve balance and understanding", instead, "touch performs sound" and it is directly related to the material of the object (Connor, 2004, p. 154). He further argues that "we hear the event of the thing not the thing itself" (2004, p. 157), and to think of a sound as the "voice" of what sounds, is to think of the sound as emanating from its material source. Many players, including myself, believe that those organic materials, unique to this type of 'ūd, contribute to the sound of the instrument as "Tunisian" and are also experienced through the sight of it. For example, when I asked Yasin, a Mehdī's student of 'ūd 'arbī, about the first approach he took with the instrument, he replied:

*The first approach was visual (to the 'ūd 'arbī). The template and the decorations on it are peculiar and have something medieval and hypnotic about them. At the sight of the instrument we are already projected into Andalusia or to Andalusian Tunisia. It is therefore the testimony to an era. (Yasin, Interview, November 24, 2017).*

The 'ūd 'arbī decorative materials, as we are going to see, sometimes intersect sight with sound, thereby shaping images and ideas about the instrument's identity.

During my fieldwork in Tunisia in November 2018, I decided to move to Sfax in search of other 'ūd 'arbī players who would help me explore the issue of sounds not through the medium of recordings but rather through sight, by touching and playing. At dusk one Saturday that month, I had an appointment made through Facebook with Muḥammad Dammāk, who had continuously posted photos of himself with his Tunisian 'ūd in earlier months. Muḥammad is a Sfax-based 'ūd player, teacher and doctoral student at the ISM of Sfax. Although Muḥammad was a little wary of me that evening, a foreigner looking so hard to find an instrument, he brought his 'ūd to show me and played an *istikhbār*<sup>3</sup> in mode *dhīl*, going on to tell me about his idea of the sound of this Tunisian instrument.

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<sup>3</sup> *Istikhbār* is an improvisation, a word and a musical form that not only refers to an improvisatory prelude to a song and combination of melodic patterns, but also to the special Tunisian modes.

Muḥammad owns a fine *‘ūd* made by the maker Ridha Jandoubī in the same year as his examination recital. This instrument, he says, "has something different, it sounds different". After playing an improvisation, Muḥammad focused on the difference between the two Oriental and Tunisian instruments, although he did not have the first one with him, as if the standard starting point must be the former without which the latter could not have existed or at least be understood. Muḥammad places the power of his experience with this instrument in the playing and listening to sound and the sonority it produces, in contrast with the everyday Oriental, Iraqi and Turkish ones:

*The timbre (ṭab‘, saūt) of the Tunisian ‘ūd is special, what’s beautiful is that its register is very high due to its smaller body. Sol yakāh and do raṣd, for example, played on the fifth string, important for every player who ends a phrase in the lower register, do not exist. This is what is difficult and at the same time interesting and fascinating. The fact that in the raṣd dhīl, or dhīl mode, when playing the tetrachord mḥair ‘irāq on the note sol yakāh you have to go higher playing sol nawā instead, because you don’t have that string, it forces you to constantly transpose your phrasing. An odd practice initially, which seems unnatural to the ear. (M. Dammāk, Interview, November 20, 2016)*

The resulting sound from this higher pitch phrasing, the continuous combinations and apparently sudden shifts from one register to another, is what attracted him most, especially the fact that it is very different from what we are used to with other *‘ūd*-s styles.



Figure 3: Muḥammad Dammāk, Sfax, 2018

One of the most important features of the *‘ūd ‘arbī* is the tuning. North African *‘ūd*-s, similarly consists of a fourth interval between the first and second strings, either C–G as a practice in Tunisia, G–D used in Algeria (Constantine) or D–A in Morocco, and a fifth, between the third and fourth strings (Guettat, 2000, p. 334). Several Algerian players have confirmed to me that the note C is often tuned into A, forming an octave between the 3rd and 4th strings, which is a constant and uniquely Tunisian feature (d 3rd, D 4th) among those Maghrebian tuning patterns.

This octave interval is central to my argument about the 'ūd 'arbī's intersensorial experience which touches on other local factors embedded in its African context.

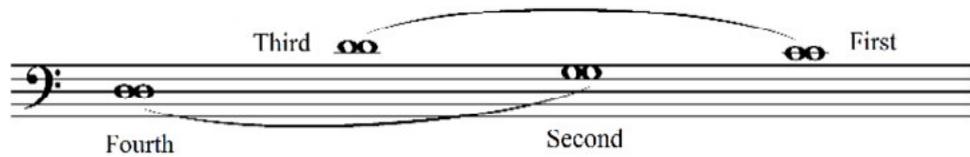


Figure 4: The Tuning of the Tunisian 'ūd 'arbī

On the basis of this feature, players argue that the tuning affects the style, body and hands movements, and musical phrasing, notwithstanding the repertory performed. Dammāk introduced me to the idea of cultural differences between old and new, traditional and modern perceived through the body experiences of the materiality and sound of a musical instrument. Its timbre is affected by tunings, combinations of materials and ways of production by hand, all of which characterize the sound.

In *al-Aghānī al-Tūnisiyya*, in describing the Tunisian 'ūd, Rezgui (1989, p. 58) specifies that it is different in *timbre* from the Oriental 'ūd. In defining timbre, Dammāk uses variously the word *ṭab'a* (sing.), which also refers to the mode of the Tunisian modal system, and to the expression *saūt*, which means sound. The North African modes system *ṭubū'a* (plur.) defines Tunisian as "Maghrebian". Guettat (1980, p. 278) interprets it as the recalling of identity, a modal system, and a form of improvisation. This term, *ṭab'a*, is traditionally also used for timbre by players, or when indicating a special sound effect. Timbre is therefore one aspect of the 'ūd 'arbī's sound as being identifiably Tunisian—soon recognized as specific to a culture and a territory—and it is obtained through certain hand movements governed by the instrument's tuning.

The constant transposing of phrasing and shifts of registers that Muḥammad Dammāk highlights characterize the right hand strokes, up and down along the octave strings, as well as the left hand movements along the neck to give a high pitch sound to the phrasing line. Those body gestures generate the sound that is enhanced by the sense of "sight" in musical performance. Dammāk affirms that those awkward gestures "seem unnatural to the ear", and that therefore the relationship between hearing and sight correspond and result in a unique sound. The octave tuning of the 'ūd 'arbī, in particular, forces the gesture that is in turn imprinted in the sound. Perhaps one of the most important features of the 'ūd 'arbī's sound is that it embodies the possibilities of two dimensions concerning right and left hand movements: the manner of strokes production with the plectrum and the position of hands on the neck due to the inverse tuning. The former gives an image of an unusual timbre effect; the latter is an image of the sound almost compressed into set gestures. The 'ūd 'arbī can therefore also be defined by the position of the hands when played.

Similarly, when I met Muḥammad Bouzguenda, the 'ūd player of the Rashīdīa of Monastir, he also underlined the importance of the *timbre* in understanding the Tunisian 'ūd 'arbī sound. He introduced me to the term that is a metaphor for *timbre*, namely *lahja*, which is rendered by the resonating octave tuning, and is mostly limited to a Tunisian repertory, indicating its rhythmical African beating strokes. *Lahja* is a linguistic term which denotes the nuances of dialect pronunciations. Obtaining the *lahja* on the 'ūd 'arbī is what often makes this instrument difficult to play for players of a standard 'ūd. "To achieve the *lahja*, if we play a Tunisian song, we do it directly with the Tunisian 'ūd", its "dialectic sound" already exists in the tuning, but the left

hand shifts and right hand strokes you make are also crucial, Bouzguenda told me. To distinguish the *lahja* requires careful listening and the player must pay attention to the relationship between phrase listening and view fingering. As Bouzguenda showed me, the most common fingering mistake of *'ūd sharqī* players who are playing the *'ūd 'arbī*, is playing the note D first position on the string C *kerdēn*, instead of using the open D third string. In this way, he explained, the octaves tuning loses its effect and the *lahja* is lost.



Figure 5: Muḥammad Bouzguenda, Monastir, 2016

The way that something sounds also depends on what touches or comes into contact with the hands to generate the sound (Connor, 2004). The *rīsha* (a plectrum) presents a particularly complex and fascinating "tactile landscape" (see Connor, 2004, p. 165) in terms of the different shapes, material and texture that combine to produce sound. It functions complementarily to the body gestures. There are *rīsha*-s made of tortoise shell, bull-horn and original eagle feathers. The ones used to play the *'ūd 'arbī* in both Tunisia and Algeria, are usually longer than standard Oriental *'ūd* plectra, because the right hand up and down strokes are different in terms of plectrum position and tremolo techniques. The role of notions such as traditional and authentic types of plectrum are also particularly striking. Plastic *rīsha*-s seem alien among *'ūd 'arbī* players, and the example below of the player Gargourī can be seen as an exception. The hardness of the bull-horn plectrum, for instance, its durability and the more sensitive final portion of these long *rīsha*-s, make them seem older and closer to authentic "sound" and *lahja*. Zīād Gharsa, for instance, is always seen (in videos) playing official concerts with an original long eagle feather.

The choice of *rīsha*-s for *'ūd 'arbī* players is connected to understanding its elasticity in relation to the length and hand position. The *rīsha* dramatizes the contrast between the robust materiality of the *'ūd 'arbī* and the hard touch used to stroke the strings. The hard stroke of *'ūd 'arbī* players has often been associated with the materiality and weight of the instrument, the heavy body and rural "voice" adapting well to open-air performance (Guettat, 2000). There is also a crafting dimension: the hardened "voice" is intrinsic to the material, whereas the form and length of the *rīsha* are shaped by the player. According to 'Ayādī, Mehdī and Gharsa, *rīsha*-s

should be rounded on the playing edge and two and half times longer than the palm of one's hand. The *rīsha* is not involved in producing all the timbre and nuances, but the stopping and stroking of all courses together and the hard rhythmical accents up and down along the strings always seems to involve what many players define as the "joyful, harmonious" touch, that is a quality of 'ūd 'arbī's sound. For many players, this is obtained by a long *rīsha* held between the index and middle finger, which is positioned to face the strings. Importantly, this style of touch on the strings is not lateral or smoothly done, but rather it is frontal to them and therefore heavy, earthy. In this case, there is much more material for the *rīsha* to pass on to the next stroked string.



Figure 6: Ḥassen Gargourī playing the 'ūd 'arbī with his *rīsha*.

In terms of cultural meanings rather than the object's quality, Ḥassen Gargourī, a Sfaxian amateur 'ūd 'arbī player, is not particularly concerned about the instrument he plays, and Gharsa's authentic touch does not interest him at all. Ḥassen uses a long piece of plastic as *rīsha*, a sort of elastic strip. This strip is unique in its genre, and no one else that I know plays any 'ūd-s with such an object in Tunisia. It is a compromise between having a long thin piece, which imitates the form of the traditional bone/feather *rīsha* used everywhere by Constantine players, but at the same time less is expensive and readily available. However, Ḥassen is adamant about the right hand movement he has to make with such a plectrum, not the actual sound the object makes or helps to make. The technical concerns about the *rīsha* analyzed so far, such as its length, for example, tend to become something more abstract, sometimes for aesthetic reasons.

While the material of the plectrum lies within the sound-touch relationship highlighted by Connor (2004, p. 154), a long *rīsha* and hearing a good 'ūd 'arbī sound are central to the sound-sight relationship instead, where the evidence of sight in this case acts to fix, characterize and complete the evidence of sound. These applications of the *rīsha* may be seen as both a primary way to the medium of touch in 'ūd 'arbī sound identification—because it is the most proximate, medium of sensory contact between the instrument and players' hands—and as a refining of the body's hearing-touching circuitry that distinguishes the 'ūd 'arbī's sound from that of other 'ūd-s.

In this respect, it seems that the knowledge 'ūd 'arbī players have of other 'ūd types becomes crucial to understanding the instrument's sound. When I asked Basēm 'Affēs, a young 'ūd

virtuoso and teacher based in the town of Soussa, about playing Tunisian music on the oriental *'ūd*, he explained "it is possible to play the notes of the Tunisian mode *mazmūm* on the oriental *'ūd*, but to get the Tunisian sound you have to imitate the *'ūd 'arbī* technique of playing as close as possible". The emphasis on the technique of playing is important here. While hearing the F note of the *mazmūm* mode provides the intensity of the sound rather than its specificity, the hearing seems incomplete and questionable without the determination of the sense of touch (Connor, 2004). As we have seen, the "touch" is a consequence of many elements, body form, hand movements, and use of the plectrum, that coalesce into a specific *'ūd 'arbī*'s timbre-sound.

This sense of touch was described in a conference paper entitled "The struggle of teaching Tunisian music with the *'ūd sharqī*", which Basēm presented at the music conference "La Musique du Maghreb entre apprentissage et transmission" held at the ISM of Soussa in March 2017. He asked two main questions: can we apply *'ūd 'arbī* techniques to the *'ūd sharqī*? How can we use the *'ūd sharqī* to play Tunisian music in the *'ūd 'arbī* style? During the session, Basēm played some examples with his oriental *'ūd*. He compared the two instruments, playing *'ūd 'arbī* right hand techniques with the oriental *'ūd*. He used the example of playing the different stroke types of the plectrum, and the effects of moving between high and low registers according to the octave tuning of the Tunisian *'ūd*. Although I felt a change in the sonority of the instrument, he concluded the performance by playing similar sound effects that can be obtained on the oriental *'ūd*. Those effects imitate the *lahja*, that special linguistic dialect or musical sound effect of Tunisian styles. In an interview with me some days after the conference Basēm discussed what most Tunisian oriental *'ūd* players agree about the *'ūd 'arbī*, namely, that the *'ūd sharqī* has greater technical potential than the *'ūd 'arbī*, but different sound effects. Hence, "you can play all that is performed on the *'ūd 'arbī* with it, but not the other way around", he concluded at the conference. The obvious question was why use the *'ūd 'arbī*? "Because the sound is different", he answered. Basēm admitted that applying *'ūd 'arbī* techniques is not a definitive solution, that in truth the oriental *'ūd* cannot really equal the sound of the Tunisian, but that it is rather a mere "imitation" of it.

I am further interested here in narratives that help us understand the meaning of the *'ūd 'arbī*'s sound as a "Tunisian sound" through the body of the player. As Regula Qureshi (1997, p. 2) has demonstrated, instruments can *mean*. Their sound can immediately evoke specific experiences, and the instrument may turn out to be a potent icon of both social practice and personal experience. Cornelia Fales (Fales, 2002, p. 91) goes further in proposing the notion of "timbre" as a "double medium", "a place holder for some absent entity": as in other contexts it may represent a sound of the ancestors, a sound of nature etc. The *'ūd 'arbī*'s sound, for instance, is an expression of "Tunisian/African sound", its identity, which makes sense of the relationship between the instrument, human body and society.

Not only does the *'ūd 'arbī*'s sound evoke a Tunisian identity, but it enriches its complexity through narratives of places, sites and itineraries. It recalls Labelle's (2010, p. xxv) notion of "acoustic territories" in which sound creates a relational geography that is most often emotional, fluid and "that moves in and out the body providing intimacy". Ziēd Mehdi is obsessed by the sound this instrument makes, talking about it as "sounding Tunisian", about the way its sound evokes and identifies his culture. The first time Ziēd talked about sound to me, it was in Tunis at his house in the summer of 2015. He played a chord on the *'ūd 'arbī* and said, "listen to how it sounds Tunisian". That night I did not fully grasp what he meant, I was focused on the music and staring at his hands on the instrument, but I have spent as much time in Paris as in Tunisia with

Ziēd, and sound appears to be an overt theme in Ziēd's attitude to music with the 'ūd. For Ziēd:

*Listening to the oud arbi's sound you feel an amazing commotion that carries you away to another time and place. You feel like you are traveling back in time and space, strolling far away in the old medina of Tunis and Sidi Bou Said, probably because for me they are my favorite places in Tunisia and they are a kind of anchorage to where I want to be, and they make me feel a sensation of freshness and joy. (Z. Mehdī, Interview, 18 June 2017).*

The interpretation of the *khatam ramal*, the incipit *Yā 'Ashiqīn dhāka al-sh'ar*, for instance, that he performed for me in his apartment in Paris, points to a specific intimacy. Like many of his feelings, it was richly embedded in homeland memories, incorporating sounds that seemed to be moods in the timbre, and were expressed in structural intervals of the melodic line of the song. It all suggests that Ziēd demonstrates that playing the 'ūd 'arbī prompts mutable forms of evocating Tunisian culture.



Figure 7: Ziēd Mehdī, Paris, 2015.

One day in the winter of 2015 we went to his home after a rehearsal session of the group, *Mālouf Tunisien Paris*, at the Tunisian Cultural Center of Paris, because I wanted to learn to play some pieces. That evening, Ziēd's attitude to sound matched the musical structure inherent in the piece well. He played it slowly, in a more melancholy manner, discerning its nuances of sound carefully. His sound functioned as a central cross-sensory metaphor for connecting words, sound and body, yielding insights into the 'ūd's felt relationship with its Tunisianness.

I was not entirely convinced, so that evening I asked what he really meant by "sounding Tunisian". Ziēd said, "the sound of the Tunisian 'ūd is round, bewitching and sparkling", highlighting the third string pitch of note D. He played all four courses of strings together as a guitar chord type of effect, positioning the third finger on the note B half-flat on the second string. "You see, when Gharsa takes a Tunisian 'ūd, this is the first thing he plays, I have seen him doing it many times". The open strings, generally, create a "bright" sound effect, what Mehdī

indicates as the "sparkling" sound. "This is the sound of *sheykh* Ṭahār Gharsa's voice, which is the "voice" of *mālūf*." A particular plectrum touch, for example, which consists of a long light tremolo *ferdēsh* in standard *'ūd* practices, is rendered instead on the *'ūd 'arbī* by energetic, fast triplet (down-up-down) strokes interrupted by a pause between each of them.

This type of *ferdēsh* is unique to the *'ūd 'arbī* and "it works well with its robust strings action and accentuated rhythmical style of Tunisian music," Zīēd explained. Furthermore, "with the *rīsha*, literally, you have to rotate between high and low pitches," he added. This means that you must often change register to complete a melodic line, due to the absence of the lower C note (*raṣd*). Both the movement of the plectrum and the phrasing between the registers is important. "The movements must be harmonious so the sound is pure," he said. "By pure I mean that the sound has to recreate Tunisian situations, for me it evokes smell, *rāiḥa*—the smell of the Tunis Medina, of *shīsha*-s and jasmine," he concluded.

Within this sound world of the Tunisian *'ūd 'arbī*, evocation is mediated through the body, which is invested with culturally and intimate constructed meanings. They are embedded in the Tunisian mode system and the way they are rendered on the *'ūd 'arbī* through the body's movements endows its sound with an association of longing and nostalgia, lost memories, various aspects of Tunisian life: from joyful sentiments to a harmonious state of mind. The same sound permeates the rich and different intimate worlds of everyone who encounters it, deeply anchored in places that are the very medium of Tunisian-Arab identity.

According to Connor's (2004, p. 153) idea of the "predominating sense", where close inspection reveals that this predominating sense is in fact being shadowed and interpreted by other, what he defines as "dormant senses", like touch and sight in this case, it is possible to argue that experiencing *'ūd 'arbī*'s sound consists of multiple intersensorial actions and that it establishes strong bonds of identity with those senses and associated organs. The more we concentrate on hearing its sound, the more it will implicate other senses and their complexity. As we have seen, hearing the *'ūd 'arbī* sound becomes less and less "pure", where touching the instrument also accompanies, doubles and performs the sound of it (2004, p. 154). To look intently at the instrument is to grasp the timbre of an era, or the *lahja* of a language. To be surrounded by its sound is to be moved by its *rīsha*-s' touches; to hear the stroke is to see the long plectrums. I argue that the *'ūd 'arbī* is an object whose apparatus (decorations, strings, plectrums, weights), implicates a complex sense and body introspection to support and supply a notion of sound, where each sense threads through all the other modes of sensory apprehension.

I have explored the notion of Tunisian sound in relation to the touches and bodies of *'ūd 'arbī* players and the meanings they construct. The experience of senses reveals interlinked sonic qualities which further disclose meanings of Tunisian identity. I have explored how the application of a multiple intersensorial analysis of touch, sight and hearing (Connor, 2004) to the *'ūd 'arbī*, enhances the idea of its sound. Whereas some decorative materials evoke the sound of an ancient time, others deploy heavy and robust feelings, mainly in connection with touch and sight. Such experiences of senses, I have suggested, are contingent upon how the apparatuses of the instrument (decorations, strings, plectrums, weights) support the notion of a "Tunisian sound". I have argued that in spite of certain exceptions and variations, it is one way in which the sound of the *'ūd 'arbī* enacts its "Tunisianness", becoming distinct and defining a limited metaphorical territory of Tunisian society.

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## **CompoSing Awareness: Approaching Somaesthetics Through Voice and Yoga**

*Charulatha Mani*

**Abstract:** *This paper aligns the fundamental principles of somaesthetics with pressing issues in the field of voice in Karnatik music, the music of Southern India. In doing so, it unpacks both compositional and singing processes from a bodily perspective, weaving together the philosophies of yoga and body awareness into the pragmatic paradigm of vocalized and perceived sound. By embodying raga-based music, the author interrogates established convention in relation to movement and gesture in Karnatik music. The creative processes in the composition and embodiment of the context of the musical composition, “Sonic River,” are unpacked in conjunction with yogic poses that align with the composition’s melodic contour, and accounts of lived experience as journal entries. A critical analysis of these informants yields a four-pronged framework to aid in the understanding of the crucial role of body awareness in achieving and inspiring a fulfilling and free artistic expression, particularly in the context of voice.*

**Keywords:** *soma, Karnatik music, voice, composition, yoga.*

### **Background: Ways to Acknowledge the Body**

According to Merleau-Ponty’s (2013) established theories of phenomenology, understanding at an embodied, pre-reflective level prefigures the cognition and intellectualization that follows. Such an approach challenges the Cartesian body-mind duality dictum that is predicated on the mind’s independent capacity to analyze, strategize and learn/understand even experienced phenomena such as abstractions (Descartes, 1975). The theories of phenomenology have assumed primacy in the burgeoning disciplines of artistic research in music and voice studies over the last few decades, not least in paving the way to a better understanding of how music is listened to, perceived, understood, expressed and conceptualized. The fields of cognitive science and neuroscience have been inundated over the last few decades with definitive theories that privilege the body as the site of knowing, including Lakoff and Johnson’s (1999) “embodied mind” and Antonio Damasio’s (1994) “body minded brain.” Laterally, the materiality of a “socio-semiotic body” whose awareness and pre-conditioned perceptions derive from, on the one hand, its cultural encrustations, and on the other, its signification and communication with its

immediate society and environment, has emerged as a key node of study (Waskul & Vannini, 2006) in the field of embodiment.

A refreshing strand of embodied philosophy in action that has emerged fairly recently is Richard Shusterman's somaesthetics. He describes it very simply: "it means putting one's body where one's mouth is; to really walk the walk, not just talk the talk" (Shusterman, 2012, p. 4). Somaesthetics, in essence, is a philosophy in action that transcends theory and sustains itself through self-improving, culturally contingent, and practical approaches to unpack the aesthetics created and perceived by the body (Shusterman, 2012, p. 4). Shusterman's terminology and theory of somaesthetics draws on a foundation of around two decades, and has looked to bodily conditioning, bodily awareness and reflective/corrective processes of iterative self-improvement, as overarching ways to adopt a body-centric lived philosophy of life; a way to achieve processes and outcomes across contexts in a better manner.

A somaesthetics approach notably aligns with body shaping and mental conditioning not as silos but as a reconfigured whole. Further, for participating individuals, somaesthetics is a pragmatic philosophy that also engenders a self-refining socio-cultural feedback loop with the phenomenological world. Such a philosophy is rhizomatically imagined by Shusterman trans-contextually, using tools such as yoga, the Feldenkrais Method, and the Alexander Technique, and has found wide application in fields as varied as learning, dancing and, recently, singing (Tarvainen, 2018a, 2018b). Artistic Research theorist Darla Crispin (2013, p. 59) uses the word "rhizomatically" to describe the expansive way in which the tentacles of artistic practice reach out into the realm of artistic research, and vice versa. When I use this word in the current context, it is intended to communicate that the propagation of ideas in a somaesthetics approach is often irregular, interesting, and lattice-like, while also providing a supportive framework that is dynamically evolving and readjusting.

According to Shusterman (2012, p. 42), somatic perception notably concerns itself with the importance of consciousness of a person's bodily movements in and as action—the discipline is directed to developing movement consciousness as a tool to explore the body's shaping by socio-cultural forces and habits, and the body's paradoxical functions as both a keeper and a destabilizer of these socio-cultural values. As Heinrich (2018, p. 6) notes: "the vocabulary of somaesthetics seems to be able to embrace and facilitate this novel demand for aesthetics and knowledge," the novelty being led by the pragmatic philosophical underpinnings of the field of somaesthetics. Such a novelty invites exploration through sound and the body, as creative compositional practice led by the voice wherein knowledge construction emerges from being aesthetically attuned to the body. I call this exploration *CompoSing*, a state of creating music through vocal practice that is in synchrony with a *composed* (as in, calm and attuned to one's bodily state) mode of awareness.

### **Contextualizing Soma in an Intercultural Vocal Paradigm**

The privileging of the body as the first receiver, processor and the producer of cultural knowledge in performative contexts has been invaluable in the field of voice and sound studies, with influential scholars from Barthes (1977) through Cavarero (2005) and Dolar (2006) to Järviö (2006) and Thomaidis (2013) (to name but a few), exploring newer pathways to yoke the voice, its modes of manifestation and meaning, and its significance, to the living body that is inextricably linked to it. The pathway that linked bodily awareness to sound for Pauline Oliveros was listening (Bell & Oliveros, 2017). For Thomaidis (2013), it was his physio-vocal practice,

which he repurposed as a tool in his actor/singer training. For Järviö (2006), it was the felt connection of the singing body to the moving vocal apparatus as well as to the function of being a pedagogue. It would therefore be safe to construe that body consciousness is relational; likewise, sound is relational—the act of sounding is physically impossible without a physical environment supporting its propagation as longitudinal waves.

The body senses the ecologies of practices and ontologies around it; it also senses itself, as Merleau-Ponty's (2013, pp. 130–55) *reversibility thesis* establishes. In producing sound, the voice rightly described by Dolar (2006) as “the flesh of the soul, its ineradicable materiality,” senses itself, standing-in as both the first messenger and primary recipient of sonic stimulus in relation to the body. It reports to the body, it receives from the body, and is that “truncated body” that Dolar (2006) refers to. The aesthetic of the sound of the voice is thus inextricably linked to the aesthetic of the body, *soma*. As a female singer of Karnatik music of South India, I have gradually come to understand that my vocal sound and the sounds that I listen to are mirrors that both reflect the pains and pleasures experienced by my body—to the world as voice and back to my body itself, to be inscribed in it as an indelible “somatic marker” of sound (Hunter, 2013).

### **Sonic River: Content, Rationale and Interrogations**

This article describes the process of body–sound linkage as witnessed through the lens of somaesthetics. I draw on literature and philosophies across cultures and disciplines, my own experiences as a composer/vocal practitioner. I use a piece of music for two voices that I have recently composed and recorded, “Sonic River,” (May 2019) as the focal point for this study. For the text in “Sonic River,” I drew on the well-known *Shanti mantra* (chant for peace) from the oldest *Upanishad* (vedic scripture) in Sanskrit, the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (canto 1.2.28). The text is as follows:

*Asatoma sadgamaya*

*Tamasoma jyotirgamaya*

*Mrityorma amritam gamaya*

*Om Shanti, Shanti, Shantihi.*

[From the unreal lead me to real,

From darkness lead me to light,

From death lead me to immortality,

Peace, Peace, Peace].

The recording for this has been vocalized in a Karnatik style by myself and my sister, Srimathumitha Mani, a professional singer in the Karnatik fold who is also a certified yoga instructor. Through this article, I identify and share certain highlights from the conception and delivery phases of this work by adopting somaesthetics as the lens, tool and rationale.

Throughout this exposition, I draw on the role of the *soma* in the context of the voice in Karnatik music, the Classical music of South India. The linking of a philosophy of bodily awareness and of acknowledgement with a practice of singing that has traditional constraints poses problems, particularly in relation to the political and social situatedness of the female voice in Karnatik singing practice. In order for the reader to come to terms with the gravity of

embodied approaches in Karnatik music, I offer some context here. When considering Karnatik music, one must consider the status of the form across three very distinct periods in history—pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial.

To outline briefly, a community of female singer-dancers known as the *devadasis* were historically the pioneers of the art form, and spread their embodied style of music-making far and wide across the world as early as the eighteenth century. The singing body was central to Karnatik music and dance in their practice, specifically in the context of female temple performers. With the wave of British colonization of India, on the one hand, a Victorian sense of propriety and modesty came to be imposed upon the Indian woman, and on the other, a nationalist movement spearheaded by the educated upper classes (*brahmins*) took it upon itself to actively seek out a cultural medium to propagate the nationalist spirit which was by then laced with patriarchy—both from an Indian and British perspective. Karnatik music became the medium through which *brahmin* women (and men) would symbolize Indian culture, values and morals. In the case of women, these values were instated by the males, as the singer/activist T. M. Krishna (2013) explains.

In the mid-twentieth century, following a complex legislative process, the *devadasis* were robbed of their rights to sing and dance at temples, and their earlier temple dedication rituals were abolished. While this legislation did put an end to certain undesirable institutions in *devadasi* practice, such as the dedication of children to temples and their abuse by powerful men in the community, it also obliterated the role of the performing body in the context of the Karnatik music of the feminine. In summary, in the post-colonial era, a purging of corporeality continued in the garb of stage decorum, and Karnatik music was sanitized of any earlier somatic practices. Acknowledging the bodily senses, according to those involved in the nationalist revival of the art form, meant allowing for the weakness of the flesh to manifest (Weidman, 2006). This was not ideal, given that the performers of this revised Karnatik music belonged to the upper caste and had to be *respectable*—heightened respectability being directly linked to a distancing of the voice from the body. The Karnatik voice, from this point in history, became emblematic of the virginal—it was to be pure, untouched by the rather corruptible soma. A notion of purity became all-important (and therefore problematic), specifically in the context of women performers.

In the current Karnatik *kaccheri* construct, the singer is seated on a platform erected on the stage, centrally and cross-legged. The microphone is placed in front of the singer on a stand, and the singer sings into it from this seated position. The accompanists are seated on either side of the singer, and overall there is little room for movement and gesture, except from the hands and head. Further, the facial expressions that are usually observed are related more to the effort of singing rather than to the expressivity inhered in the soundings. For performers of the younger generation, such as myself, who wish to move and express themselves while singing, who wish to fully sensorially enjoy the sound, there is really no avenue to do so. While I do acknowledge that bodily awareness is not merely related to overtly perceived movement or gesture and can span those minutiae of internal movements that happen during singing as well as those moments of stillness, I do find that a negation of the corporeal has become a problem in Karnatik music, and that it closely ties in with the classist and elitist framework that sadly sustains it. This issue of gestural freedom and women performers' lack of this freedom is one of few pressing issues that I have raised in my doctoral thesis, and addressed through the artmaking itself—from an embodied, intercultural perspective (Mani, 2019a).

## Sensing the Organic Body: A Case of Karnatik Voice

I expand on the context further, only to situate the importance and advocacy that an acknowledgement of bodily pain and pleasure in Karnatik singing brings to this article. The spiritual nature of Karnatik music was overemphasized during the nationalist rebranding of Karnatik music, and the impersonal purity of the voice as the divine vehicle to attain godhead was played up, as if to compensate for the loss of the bodily involvement. The body was dubbed as a lesser, rather surface-level phenomenon, compared to the deeper truth of the *brahman* (the soul).

However, it would be parsimonious to suggest that bodily involvement is lacking in Karnatik music. On the contrary, the role of voice, in and as movement of the vocal apparatus, including the glottis and larynx, is strikingly apparent in the way the various Ragas (Karnatik melody types) and ornaments typical of them (*gamakas*) are delivered (Durga, 1983). For instance, in case of the *brigha*, a characteristic ornamentation of Karnatik music known for its lightning fast quality, vocal diminutions fall into fractional note values and scatter brilliantly like an inflorescence of sound, exemplifying the effective integration of *prana* (life force as breath) on the one hand, with the rapidly moving larynx and accompanying glottal closures on the other (Mani, 2019a, pp. 170–179). Likewise, in Karnatik voice, a resonant sound is normative, and the larynx rises when the pitch increases, unlike Western operatic voice culture in the Romantic era and afterwards.<sup>1</sup> These movements that reside behind the veneer of the outward-facing singing body are seldom mentioned, however, in music classes with a *guru* or in performance. A student of Karnatik music is therefore left to undertake a lonely personal journey into perceiving the activities in their body, and often such a conscious “tuning into” one’s body is regarded as the nemesis of spontaneous performance. Performance is considered by many a *guru* as one that is at the service of a greater musical tradition and technique; as one that needs to transcend the distracting body.

The place of the body in current discourses on Karnatik voice is arguably limited to mapping the emergence of the voice to the various *yogic chakras* (energy centers) in the body. The *vishuddhi chakra* located at the throat, known popularly in the West as the “throat chakra” is associated with the voice, and well-known Karnatik compositions such as *Sobillu Saptaswara* of Thyagaraja serve to reinstate in the minds of listeners and performers that the body is a receptacle that allows for the flow of divine sonic energy through its *chakras* (and therefore must not be regarded as a vessel of enjoyment and sensorial awareness). For instance, Thyagaraja in this line from *Sobillu* maps vocal sound to anatomy:

*Nabhi, hrd, kantha, rasana, nasadula entho, sobhillu saptaswara*

[From the navel, to the throat, the nasal cavity, and through the mouth emanate the seven primary notes of music].

Upon close reading and examination of the trends in vocal studies in Karnatik music, and based on three decades’ worth of guru-led learning, conditioning, and performance in the field, I have come to understand that bodily awareness and body focus in the context of Karnatik singing are barely mentioned in pedagogical, performative or academic contexts. When they are, it is discussed with a veneration, sometimes through the media of transcendence (proximate to

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Wistreich (2000) unpacks this aspect of laryngeal motion as a key difference between the pre-romantic and Romantic styles of Western vocal training. See also Mani (2019b, pp. 410–417) for a comparative analysis of Western voice and the Karnatik voice, relating both also to movement.

Järviö's (2006, p. 69) classification of the “subjective singing body”), and at other times through the lenses of vocal health and physiognomy (i.e., in terms of what Järviö (2006, p. 69) refers to as the “objective body”) —*seldom* in its irrefutable role as the single most powerful bearer of corporeally experienced sensory feeling in a performer (proximate to Järviö's (2006, p. 69) classification of “organic body”). I have come to realize that approaches to keeping the vocal sound impersonal, in any way possible, are the only ones that are embraced and propagated in the current patriarchally-driven system. Lived bodily experiences of participation in music-making are seldom acknowledged or shared in Karnatik music, let alone written about in an academic context. This could partly be because the “organic singing body” is side-lined in preference to the pre-eminent, “disembodied” voice, as cultural anthropologist Amanda Weidman (2006) observes, particularly in the context of the feminine Karnatik singing body. Such a pointed ignoring of felt bodily experience is symptomatic of a greater issue—a sense of shame associated with the female performing body, as the rather limited but powerful niche of critical Karnatik literature affirms (Krishna, 2013; Weidman, 2006).

In approaches such as those of Jacques Dalcroze, however, bodily experiences are an aggregate of both the sound and bodily movements, and eminently pre-empt musical understanding— affectively and as motion (Juntunen & Hyvönen, 2004). In this line of approach, kinaesthetics are given a pride of place in feeling and communicating sound. In my earlier study of 2018, I demonstrated a connection between the aural, visual and kinesthetic in communicating Karnatik Raga using a customized tool, the “RagaCurve,” and effectively combining it with hand gesture (Mani, 2018a). As part of my doctoral study (2016–2019), across two different case studies, I harnessed the role of the singing *soma* as the fulcrum of reference in intercultural music-making between early Opera and Karnatik music (Mani, 2018b; 2018c; 2019a). Upon reflection on these projects, I now realize that I may have conferred on somaesthetics the power of activism by instating it as a tool to illustrate one means through which a feminist approach to Karnatik voice may be undertaken.

I worked on intercultural opera from the premise that my voice is very much rooted in my bodily connection to the world—as a colored woman and embodied performer. The affects induced in me and my bodily responses to these affects linked to my vocal expression. The outside temperature and the way my skin felt linked to my voice. The contour traced by my fingertips in the air as I processed the raga linked to my vocal awareness—as breath, as rasps, as sounds, and microtonal inflections typical of Karnatik music ornamentation processes (*gamakas*). I would argue that my vocal sound became the ephemeral instantiation of the intensity of my *soma* in this world. I strove consciously to not regard my body as a conduit to the divine through the voice. Further, I ensured that I did not attribute the sound to any yogic practice or to the belief that it may be linked to the divine energy, *kundalini*, rising as *nada* (sound). All these may very well be true of the voice—but for me, as an affective performer interested in the cross-modal potential of sound (Küssner & Leech-Wilkinson, 2014), the vocal sound began and ended with my body, as it embraced it and allowed it to ripple through, to teach, and to learn; as it remained rooted in this world of sensory pleasure and pain. Within this bodily embrace, the vital energy, the breath of life encircles—as *prana*, as Järviö (2006, p. 70) rightly alludes to in referring to the *vedic* context of vocal sound.

Interestingly, Thyagaraja, the famed Karnatik composer-saint, wrote:

*prana anala samyogamu valla*

*pranava nadamu sapta swaramulai bhava*

[The fire of vital energy as breath

Gives rise to the primordial sound (nada) – forming seven notes and associated emotions.]

The operative word that invites comment in the above line of text is *bhava*, meaning emotion. This text acknowledges that a deeper psychophysical factor that is felt, processed and reflected as sound by the singer's body, is at play in the context of "sounding," and inevitably enfolds the sound in a primarily body-sphere.

### **Etymology: Soma**

A brief discussion and clarification of the meaning of the word *soma* is warranted here, not least due to the intercultural nature of this article's subject matter. While *soma* in its Greek *avatar* refers to the living corporeal body that is very much rooted in the world, *soma* in Sanskrit is a *vedic* term that pertains to a few different things. Firstly, the *Soma Mandala* section in the *Rig Veda* (regarded as the oldest of the *vedas*, over 4000 years old) refers to *soma* as a ritual drink. The plant from which the *soma* is extracted is also referred to as *soma* itself. *Soma* also refers to the moon, and other Hindu deities, including Shiva (*someshwara* / *somanatha*). There seem to be, on the surface, no etymological links between the Greek notion of *soma*, the body, and its Sanskrit connotation, however, a deeper study might be warranted in this issue, given the history of proximity between the two ancient civilizations. For instance, the plant and the juice yielded from the plant are both *soma*—the cause and the resultant effect. A parallel may be drawn between the body and the sound—the yelder and the yield—*soma*. By this logic, the sound is the juice of the body, and is the essence in itself; a tangible *soma*, brewed to be felt and experienced cyclically by the body, as the source and product of being aware.

A socio-semiotic understanding of the *soma* is also called for here, particularly in the context of a singing body steeped in the cultural traditions of Karnatik music, now venturing into the domain of intercultural music-making. As Waskul and Vannini (2006, p. 10) note: "despite its essential biological nature, as soon as the body becomes an object of discourse it is invested with symbolic meaning and symbolic value – use-value, sign-value, exchange-value... through the functioning of a discursive and material order." The sound made, felt and processed by this cultural signifier *soma* is embossed in such a *soma* with its own socio-semiotic signature. In an interactionist paradigm of intercultural music-making, a combination of socio-culturally contingent bodily responses to the sound and sonic responses to the body consciousness cascade through one another—creating ripples which, I believed, established an ecosystem of "philosophy of intercultural music-making" for me in dialogue with a "philosophy of embodied singing" (Montero, 2006, p. 976).

### **Bodily Habit, Voice, and Mapping Models for Vocal Somaesthetics**

Recent publications in the field of cultural musicology that draw on the nexus between sound, bodily senses, materiality and signification include those by Eidsheim (2015) and Neumark (2010). Adding to this very valuable corpus is the emerging work of Anne Tarvainen, one of the few researchers currently working at the unique junction of singing and somaesthetics. Tarvainen (2018a, p. 121) attempts to define the context for voice and the somaesthetics principles that jointly reside here; she notes: "Vocal somaesthetics will be interested in the bodily sensations of what it feels like to vocalize."

In proposing a direction for vocal somaesthetics, Tarvainen (2018a, p. 122) observes “instead of focusing on the acoustic or physiological facts in vocalizing, I suggest that vocal somaesthetics will prioritize the study and cultivation of the bodily-vocal experiences instead – the inside perspective to human vocality.” She proposes that both affective and motional dimensions of vocalizing are activated when turning one’s focus to the bodily feelings in the “act of singing.” She goes on to note: “Becoming aware of these shifts [in bodily focus while singing] and learning to use them consciously is one of the lessons somaesthetics can teach us.” (2018a, p. 134). Drawing on Anne Tarvainen’s (2018b, p. 105) call for a “diversity of experiences and bodies” as a means of “broadening and democratizing” singing, I may be offering one approach to answer the following question, which has been a contentious issue in Karnatik voice for over a century now: How can we democratize Karnatik singing so that it is a form of aesthetic expression that is evolving, equitable, non-gendered, and embodied—for both affective and motional dimensions of voicing to thrive?

In cultivating a bodily habit of linking vocalizing to gesture and unified bodily movement, I looked to the vast body of literature on embodiment, singing and its intersections with Shusterman’s ideas of body awareness. I wished to attune to my bodily feelings—pre-physiovocality as somatic perception—to work on them, thereby resisting the pre-formed restrictive habits and patterns which I felt have hitherto hampered my free singing. Shusterman (2012, pp. 66, 189) argues that even racial hostility is an encrusted phenomenon that builds over time due to bodily experience and not necessarily practical reasoning. Singing for me, in my mind, has always been a dynamic process, however, I was shaped by a controlling patriarchal social construct in the field of Karnatik music, and my body was habituated to those socio-cultural regulations—a sense of disembodied voice was ingrained in me as I have unpacked in Mani (2017). These regulations have restricted women performers from acknowledging and feeling comfortable with their bodies in the field of Indian music. To interrogate these encrusted habits and further, to acquire a sense of reconciliation and peace with my singerly body, and to explore the implications of body-mind dimensions of yogic practice on singing, I turned to somaesthetics as an approach to the piece “Sonic River”. The primary aim of this study is to apply somaesthetics as a tool to access the bodily sensations related to vocalizing, and further as a key to unlock an awareness of yoga–music connection in being thus aware of the body. The study also aims to instate gestural and sensorial freedom in Karnatik singing, and to demonstrate the intercultural and cross-modal correspondences afforded by somaesthetics as a discipline. For, as Eidsheim (2015, p. 124) calls for: “There is another way of thinking about signification [of the sounding body] in relation to the body’s actions,” and through somaesthetics, I sought to explore this way.

## Methodology

Drawing on Tarvainen (2018a, 2018b), in this, the latter part of this essay, I share both the affective and motional body sensations that I felt in composing and co-singing “Sonic River”. In doing so, I describe to the reader, how these realizations derived from the body became loci of learning and self-improvement in my life as a singer. Also, as I explained earlier, the very act of acknowledging and sharing these bodily sensations in singing was therapeutic and liberating for me as a female Karnatik singer, and makes a strong point to the broader scholarly and performance community—a way of engaging with feminist activism using vocal somaesthetics as the tool.

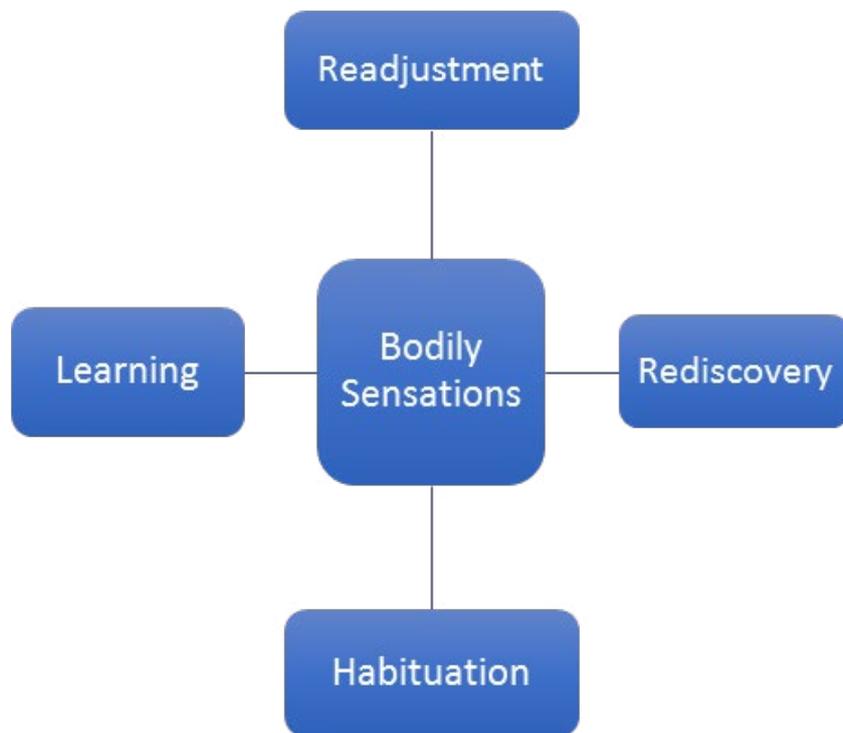
For the methodology to unpack the creation and singing process of “Sonic River,” I referred to the various ideas adumbrated in the recently available Somatic Toolkit materials from Spatz (2019). I was increasingly attuning to my body and had developed a habit of journaling my bodily feelings through my immersion in the somatic processes. I employed this method to record my impressions—through the processes of composition and recording. I also drew on an experiential free-flowing writing style as my signature form of expression in the journals. I had reflective conversations with Srimathumitha on her yoga-based interpretation of the perception of sound, I referred to her journal entries and analyzed them for key themes based on their resonances with my own perceived reflections. She had also begun journaling regularly and shared her ideas with me over a period of a few months, as we awaited the joint recording. I composed the piece between January and February 2019, and along with Srimathumitha, I sang and recorded the work in May 2019. My journal entries would often unfold as autoethnographic stories of my body coming face to face with sonic reality (Bartleet & Ellis, 2009). The sung sound and the received impulse, in juxtaposition, would feedback to one another like an overlapping dialogic exchange between two kindred spirits. As Shusterman (2013, p. 8) observes:

*The advocacy of somatic training for wisdom and virtue is even more striking in Asian philosophical traditions, where self-cultivation includes a distinctive bodily dimension developed through ritual and artistic practice (both conceived in highly embodied terms) and through specifically somatic training (such as disciplines of breathing, yoga, Zen meditation, and martial arts) that aim at instilling proper body-mind harmony, proper demeanor, and superior skill for appropriate action.*

Srimathumitha’s yoga immersion and my embodied Karnatik styled composition both fall into the categories identified in Shusterman (2013), however, this article is not only about vindicating the good aspects of such tradition, but interrogating and thwarting the controlling aspects of such tradition, as expressed in the earlier section about the prevailing attitudes towards the Karnatik singing body. In relation to certain key narration points in the analysis that follows, I have referenced a time-pointer from the recording. Listening to the clip at these specified times while reading the narrative/reflection that speaks to it might help the reader orient themselves to our worlds of bodily sensation, readjustment, rediscovery, habituation and learning.

### **Analysis: Reflections and Realizations in and from the Creative Process**

Using bodily sensations as the central lens, I present my analysis across four themes: readjustment, rediscovery, habituation and learning (see Figure 1). These themes naturally unfolded as Srimathumitha and I journeyed towards the realization of “Sonic River,” in tandem, and accessed our hitherto untapped sonic and somatic worlds. They have been derived from a thematic analysis of the reflective journal entries that resulted from examining the self during the “arriving” (into the body through breath, body scan, and awareness) and “yielding” (allowing the self to sensitize to the ecologies) processes, as understood from the Somatics Toolkit (Spatz, 2019; Ashley, 2019), and of reflections of various stages of body scanning. By situating them within relevant literature, I could gain a three-dimensional view of the process-product-senses prism in the analysis section across the four key themes that have been identified here as readjustment, rediscovery, habituation, and learning. I observed a chronological order in their unfolding, however, it must be noted that several micro-elements that formed the processual framework underwent these stages of maturity in a staged manner that rendered the macro-effect cascading rather than monotonously linear.



**Figure 1:** Analysis framework for “Sonic River” across musical composition, vocal delivery, and yogic flow

## 1. Readjustment

Shusterman (2012, pp. 327–330) proposes the idea of conscious proprioception (in the context of dance), the cultivation of an ability to inform oneself of one’s movements and an awareness of how various practices—such as body scan and reflective corporeal practice—can improve one’s ability to focus on one’s body. I found that when I focused on my body and its responses to what I was experiencing as sound, the singing became freer. I was no longer a slave to my vocal limitations, to the conventional rules of the Karnatik *kacceri* system that rendered me rooted to the ground in a sitting position, and to those doubts in my mind that questioned my physio-vocal fitness to execute a complex passage. My journal entry dated February 2, 2019, demonstrates my frame of mind at the time of composing.

*I found, in many instances, that the complexity of the passage became trivial in comparison to the joyful fluidity that being conscious of my body’s musical movement afforded me. While, for Pauline Oliveros the listening of sounds and sonic minutiae became a source of bodily comfort, for me, awareness and relaxation through bodily awareness and proprioception translated into a comparable sense of comfort and flow in the singing. In my two decades of traditional Karnatik singing practice I had not experienced such a sense of comfort and effortlessness in singing.*

My journal entry made during the time of CompoSing, (a term that I have coined and explained earlier as a form of *composing through singing and bodily awareness as the tools*) yields an operative phrase: “mindless,” in the following entry from my journal dated February 13, 2019:

*Where am I in the raga contour?—I am unaware.*

*What is the ornament blossoming?—I am unaware.*

*I am blissfully and mindlessly unaware of anything except my good old body. The torso and the arms are the heralds, the hands that rise up as if they are drawing on the very depths of the universe to gather with love, a visceral energy, are a receptacle of 'nada' - the divine sound championed by the body.*

*It's ok... It's fine to just be the music. To allow, give, yield, feel, embrace, flow, fall, surrender, and then take control without force. With only effortless intent born from being aware.*

It felt to me that CompoSing became a way to approach creativity through voice, embodied understanding of melody, and a composure through bodily and sensorial awareness. Somaesthetics was the key that unlocked this holistic experience, a sense of composing not only the music and being aware of the text, but also composing and conditioning the body in tune with the sound. In the journaled passage above, I also reference the notion of “yielding” in somatic practice, drawing on Tamara Ashley’s (2019) work with the Somatics Toolkit. In all my years as a Karnatik singer, I was longing to break with tradition, yet hadn’t quite calculated the pathway to it. Through this practice, I found that I was allowing myself to experience that redrawing of the horizons of freeness of state from the interstices of effort, yielding, and readjustment.

## **2. Rediscovery**

The rediscovery, for me, happened across two levels: my discovering my musical idiom again, using my body consciousness as a tool, and my understanding the deeper relationships that I nurtured unacknowledged to myself until then, with my voice. During the composition phase, I would begin my sessions by extending my arms as wide as possible, and embrace the warrior poses—extending my torso while energizing my legs and spine. I would then regroup, and go into the reverse warrior; as I flowed from one mode of being into another, I would imagine the raga under consideration, *Saramati*, as space (Mani, 2014). The minor third and the minor sixth notes of the raga carve out the fundamental gamut. I would think of these as my twin nodes as I warmed-up to the space that they metaphorically enfolded. In translationally imagining this space as my bodily extension I would become aware of the raga contour as gesture and the rise and fall of the Sanskrit syllables in their long (*dirgha*) and short (*hrsva*) forms as key postures that connect the raga trajectory, in line with Godøy’s (2017) study of the gestural qualities of music.

I imagined and composed the harmonies for the vocal line as a canon. I would feel them as ripples of warmth and light coursing through my body. The intercultural nature of the work unfolded in this dimension. As I ventured into the Western domains of harmony, counterpoint, contrary motion and a “rounds” styled form, I realized that who I had become—a migrant music researcher in an Australian conservatoire—had habituated me to newer approaches to my own music. I nominate the journal entry dated February 23, 2019, as an effective example of the cross-modal correspondence that ensued between my body, my imagined sound and my voice, in this intercultural paradigm:

*I feel music as space, as depth, as texture, as mutable gelatinous substance, as the surf in the ocean and as photons of light. I swim in this sea of song. My soma is one with the ephemeral.*

*How can I explain the intimacy of feelings of music in my heart. I give way to tears in sheer abandon. I cry unhindered. As tears flow, I think of the elusive beauty of music. As I sing my vision is blurry with tears. I think, ‘if only I could grasp this beauty through the film of tears!’ But I cannot—not through words, not as tears, not through the musical symbols. Only through action, through feeling it as motion, as space, as particles of conscious energy, can I try.*

The essentially monodic (a single line of sound at a time) nature of the human voice has its advantages and limitations. The advantage is that it allows for a listening of the produced sound and an imagining of such sound as a layer in a greater musical landscape that a single musicking body can only imagine. The limitation is that the materiality of the other sonic layers cannot be produced *in-situ* by the same body. The body then relies solely on embodied cognition to “mirror” the other layers, in itself (Cox, 2011). This way of looking at harmonized western music was new to me, owing to my essentially monody-based Karnatik background (Krishna, 2013), but I regarded this as an opportunity to evoke a cross-modal awareness in my sounding and listening abilities. I would sometimes use a piano accompaniment to create a vertical sonic space—a variety of tonal color. A combined awareness of the body, the raga and the effects that the singing and harmonizing produced across the affective and motional dimensions of my existence at the time, together informed the composition ([available here](#)).

### 3. Habituation

A key theme that emerged as a critical product of the analysis was habituation, particularly for Srimathumitha, who was forging those mind-body-music connections through yoga. Before the recording of the piece, I shared my vocal interpretation and a score with her. I provided my vocal sketch as a home recording made with a *tanpura*<sup>2</sup> in the background. I was keen to learn how she perceived the sound, given her yoga expertise and embodied sonic practice. While I turned to my body to help me fathom the sonic potential of the combination of the ancient Sanskrit text (*shabda*) and its relationship to the raga *Saramati* and harmony, she had noted that she would “approach the work firstly through her bodily listening and movements, as yogic poses, and then realize it” through her voice. In the initial weeks of engaging with the composition, Srimathumitha reflected in her journal entry dated March 4, 2019:

*Yoga itself means yuj or a bind. It is a state of being. Not being scattered but streamlined. I listen to my body, I go into a state of Pratyahara (tuning the senses inward rather than outward). When I do so, the noise is very less and what remains for me is the music and my singerly state of being.*

In parallel, I had tuned into my senses—tactile, kinesthetic, even olfactory—to awaken my relationship to the Raga contour (Harrison, 2019). As Shusterman (2012, p. 4) notes, it was a case of attuning to “one’s philosophy through one’s own bodily example, expressing it through one’s manner of living.” Until then music and singing had been separate from my lifestyle and bodily identity. Through this experiential engagement, I may have found a way to link these spheres of personal and professional identity. Srimathumitha then writes of the process that she undertook in unpacking Sonic River (entry dated March 10, 2019):

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<sup>2</sup> The *tanpura* is a drone characteristic of Indian music. The tonic, fifth and the octave notes (*swaras*) sound in succession to one another through this plucked instrument and give rise to a substrate-cum-zone for music-making.

*When I listened to Sonic River being sung out with the harmonies I initially felt peace and flow. I then imagined it as a sonic embodiment of my bodily awareness and composed a yogic flow for it. As I did that, my body sang.*

In the same entry, she continues to share the correspondences of her yogic practice with the opening of the piece as “Om Shreem,” audible in the time bracket 2” to 22”:

*I kept going back to chest opening Asanas (poses). For me, this piece facilitated opening of the Anahata (Heart Chakra). The piece opens with "Om Shreem." Traditionally, Shreem directly addresses Goddess Lakshmi who is seated on a pink lotus flower. It symbolizes feminine power and a very powerful flow of the feminine energy. The blooming of lotus is associated with the opening of the heart and this is exactly what came to my mind when I flowed bodily for Sonic River. I became the lotus in a sea of sound.*

Mantras (Sanskrit chants) such as *Shreem* are specifically designed ancient sounds constituting syllables that act on specific bodily *chakras*. They create vibrations that act upon and strengthen the *prana* (life force) at that particular site in the body. *Shreem* is one such mantra referring to abundance, grace, beauty, however, its sonic activation (for Srimathumitha) is linked to bodily exploration.

Srimathumitha maps certain *asanas* (yogic postures) to the flow of music. A yogic *vinyasa* flow is here being likened to the flow of musical contour (journal entry dated March 12, 2019):

*Chest opening poses like Anjaneyasana (Figure 2), Eka Pada Vyagarasana (Figure 3), Bhujangasana and Natrajasana (Figure 4) automatically found their way into my body. Instead of just my mind being immersed in the singing, now my body was actively engaging with and expressing the notes, sounds and all the different emotions that I felt. I think this is a very sacred and visceral space to get into for singers.*



**Figure 2:** Upward gliding through octave inspires *Anjaneyasana* for Srimathumitha



**Figure 3:** *Eka paada vyaagrasana* (one-legged tiger pose)



**Figure 4:** *Natrajasana* (the dancer's pose) is an uprising of the body in tune with the sound

#### 4. Learning

Through the trope of learning, I analyzed those moments when Srimathumitha and I both felt settled and centered, exuding a feeling of having assimilated the key outcomes from our journey with “Sonic River” thus far. For my part, I felt a great sense of wellness and emotional stability while composing this piece, as well as while recording the final version of it in the voices of Srimathumitha and myself. During composition, the harmonies between the second and fifth scale degrees used to give me horripilation. I recall feeling the rush of warmth in my skin in those moments of arousal during the composition phase. The sessions of composing sometimes took place in my garden. It was the rainy season here in Brisbane, and this journal entry dated February 24, 2019, contextualizes my heightened sensorial awareness:

*I feel cool earth as I touch the mud. The lower fifth seeps into my being like a root taking form. It is indeed the harmony of the body-earth. I bend forward. I am emboldened by the texture of the earth. I am aware of its wetness in my fingers. I steady myself and embrace the lower fifth, travelling with my spine turning upwards. My feet dig deep into the soil. I am rooted, and I grow.*

The section that sonically captures the moments described in the above journal entry occurs between 47” and 1’05”. These moments in the recording are followed by 30 seconds of voicelessness—the tambura alone filling the aural space. In parallel, Srimathumitha describes her bodily mapping of the final section of the piece (2’10” onwards to the end) to the Anjaneyasana (see Figure 1)

*Harmonies translated into imagining my body coming into a beautiful pose. The Anjaneyasana inspired me at the end of Sonic River where my body mirrors the upward gliding of the raga from the second to the octave. It overshoots the octave, only to return to it and unite. The flow into Anjaneyasana is similar. As the arms rise, I feel the chest opening. My throat feels open. My arms are raised. A beautiful backbend unfolds from the lower back. The hip is also open.*

After a few days of immersing herself in the piece, she noted (journal entry dated February 27, 2019):

*My body is so tuned in to following the sound and the sound is so tuned in to following the body. This forms a beautiful cycle of listening to myself. It is not about attaining anything but being in the best possible state of existence physically and mentally at any given moment in time.*

During the final recording Srimathumitha and I had conversations about our singular journeys into the piece, comparing notes across various sections and taking in the wholeness of the experience. We both tapped into the embedded multisensorial memories in the body (Harrison, 2019, pp. 8–9). She frequently revisited her *asana* photographs. This final recording ([available here](#)) is shared in the context of this paper and holds the encrusted memories of process. It references the physiovoical philosophies of voice as witnessed in the work of voice studies and sound studies by scholar Nina Sun Eidsheim (2015), albeit in a subtle way. The interaction—between voice, sound, the body and its state of being through which it achieves comfort and performativity—emerges as a fascinating locus of further research in somaesthetics, sound studies, and cultural studies.

## Conclusions

In summation, Shusterman’s (2012, p. 26) key idea that the body is “the basic instrument of all human performance, our tool of tools, a necessity for all our perception, action and even thought” was explored through voice-led CompoSing and singing in the piece “Sonic River.” Using this experience as a lens, I could suggest that if a composer/singer had to express a philosophy of life as practice, or an aesthetic of living as a singerly being, then the approach shared here could be a plausible and effective exemplar. The character of sound as an aggregate of thought, perception, movement, and affect, has come to mark the philosophies of musical and orally transmitted subject matters, including the *vedas*, across a wide variety of cultures. Shusterman (2013) differentiated between analytical, pragmatic and practical somaesthetics in his noteworthy essay. These distinctive paradigms from somaesthetics could be mapped to sound and music-making. In the same essay, he makes a clear case for somaesthetics as a bridging philosophy between theory and practice, not least because the currently emerging discipline studies “the living, feeling, sentient body” *theoretically*, while also advancing methods to implement *practical* approaches to “improving specific somatic skills of performance”

through “somatic understanding and awareness” (Shusterman, 2013, p. 16). Contextualizing this statement in the current context, in adopting a greater sensitivity towards the *soma*—while composing and singing with enhanced awareness—I believe that I may have achieved a greater sense of fulfilment, as an artist-academic who approaches research in creativity using her body as a central tool.

Through this journey I was also able to interrogate the established patriarchy in the Karnatik music of South India through the idiom of movement, within sound (as harmony) and through sound (as the movement of the singing and the yoga-engaged body). Bodily knowledge marks artistic research, “research done by artists in, through, or by means of their artistic practice” (Kirkkopelto, 2017, p. 134). As an artist-researcher whose practice is very much rooted in voice and its embodied vocality, I found that somaesthetics could be a method, product, and rationale. For, as Lilja (2015, p. 56) observes, “in artistic research there are no standard methods. We have a great acceptance for individual or genre specific methods and the evolution of methods over time during the process of work and research.” Somaesthetics has a good ally in artistic research and vice-versa. Drawing on my experiences in this study, I recommend that Karnatik music performance practice open its doors to somatic approaches to free itself from the imposed conventions that have rendered its identity rather dissociated from the body. I also call for more research in the fertile intersections that I have identified here, namely artistic research and somaesthetics, and singing and yoga. This paper anticipates a greater and rewarding application of somaesthetics in the contexts of music, voice studies, and sound studies.

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## Sound of the Audience: Music Together and Make Sense of Noise

*Peter S. Bruun*

**Abstract:** *In spring 2017 I took part in an experimental music theatre project, “Sound of the Audience”, conducted by The Lab Station, a center for experimental stage art in Copenhagen. My participation as a composer stimulated a reflection upon music and how musical expression and musical meaning may be seen as emerging from mutuality and togetherness. The aim of this article is to contribute to the theoretical and philosophical discussion about the nature of music and music experience. Further, I explore in which way sound plays a role in the emergence of music. The music-making that took place in “Sound of the Audience” can be seen as evincing the way a musical practice can evolve and unfold from the togetherness and auditory awareness within a group.*

**Keywords:** *musical meaning, sound, togetherness, mutuality, shared life*

### 1. Introduction

Avant-garde music has for more than a century explored the territory between musical sound and noise. Futurist composer Luigi Russolo in *L'arte dei Rumori* (1913) stated that music must breach the confines of musical sound and accept the sounds—the noises—of the modern world; of cities and machines. He constructed a collection of instruments called *intonarumori* (“noisemakers”) for which he composed a series of pieces that were performed at concerts, allegedly with great scandal. John Cage challenged our musical perception in another radical way. His piece 4’33” consists of a fixed amount of time where nothing is played. You are invited to listen to whatever sound there is in your environment and in yourself, and that is the music. Many have regarded Cage’s music as *anti-music*: if any sound can be music how can there be music at all? How do we distinguish music? Cage’s own interpretation was the opposite. That any sound can be music is more pro-music than anything! As Cage (1958) put it: there will always be music, we just have to listen!.

Parallel to Cage’s musical experiments, the advent of sound recording and sound engineering made it possible to emulate and manipulate sound electronically. It became possible to *compose sound*—structure sound itself. This and, not least, the massively growing possibilities for disseminating mediated sound by physical media, mass media and digital media, has been seminal for our music perception in ways we have probably yet to understand (Katz, 2010). To

convey his musical ideas, however unconventional and groundbreaking they were, Russolo still needed instruments for somebody (some *body*) to play (“*tocar*” = *touch*, is the Spanish word for “*play*”). And somebody must come and listen.

Philosophy has pondered the nature and meaning of music for ever. The experiments of Russolo and Cage, among other artists, have questioned conventional notions about what music is and can be: can noise be musical sound?—can any sound be musical? But the way music-making and music dissemination itself has developed now compels us to explore these topics from other angles. Music is more and more regarded as a product or a commodity that the individual acquires and consumes, but to comprehend what music is we need to examine how music functions *in us* and, not least, *between and among us*.

In spring 2017 I took part in an artistic experiment called *Lyden Af Publikum* (Danish for *Sound of the Audience*, SOA in the following), conducted at and by The Lab Station, a center for experimental stage art in Copenhagen, DK. My participation in SOA as a composer fostered theoretical and philosophical reflection upon the relationship between musical expression and the bodily founded experience of mutuality and togetherness through sound within a group.

The aim of this article is to develop these reflections and particularly investigate which role *sound* and sonic expressivity play for the emergence of music in a community. Different theoretical conceptions are combined and held together with the experiences from SOA, and I suggest that this may shed new light upon our understanding of music and musicality. I draw especially upon theories and findings from the philosophy of music (Small, 1998; Benson, 2003), cognitive research (Lerdahl & Jackendorff, 1983; Sloboda, 2005) and developmental psychology (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009; Stern, 2004, 2010).

After a short description of the project, SOA, there is an outline of the theoretical approach, the theoretical conceptions invoked, and how they are combined to form a theoretical hypothesis. This theoretical framework is applied, explored and substantiated in an analysis of the experiences from SOA—my own experiences and recollections, as well as experiences and reflections that have appeared in my conversations with another participant in the project. The theoretical considerations and analytical results are summarized, and finally, I shall broaden the discussion and suggest that these results may inspire a discussion about music and music-making from a broader historical and societal perspective.

## 2. Sound of the Audience – Background and Realization

### Idea

In the early twentieth century, the Russian theatre director Vsevolod Meyerhold wanted to investigate the role of the audience at a theatre performance, as he called the spectators the *fourth creator* of a performance (in addition to the writer, the director and the actor.) He catalogued audience response in 20 categories, attempting, apparently, to allow himself to analyze how spectators in the theatre, rather than simply expressing approval or disapproval, take active part in co-creating the performance. (McAuley, 1999, pp. 238–239)

The ideas of Meyerhold inspired artistic directors at The Lab Station, Lotte Faarup (Lotte in the following) and Øyvind Kirchhoff (Øyvind) to undertake a dramaturgic experiment: what if things were turned around? What if the spectators in the theatre were the performers? How could something like that be dramaturgically constructed and how would it play out?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The idea itself may seem as self-evident as it is far-fetched and absurd, but it is characteristic of the way The Lab Station works as a platform

It seemed obvious that the performers should not be professional stage artists but similar to a normal, ordinary audience. Consequently, the piece should be executed as a piece of *Social and Community Theatre*<sup>2</sup> and involve locals from the borough of Vesterbro in Copenhagen, where The Lab Station is located. Participation should be open to anyone, and prior musical experience was irrelevant. The project was eventually to become part of Caravan Next, a network and festival across Europe for Social and Community Theatre.<sup>3</sup>

Lotte and Øyvind realized that the piece could not have a traditional script. It needed to be based upon sound and action; thus in essence, a piece of music performed by a choir of people constituting “an audience”. They knew me from my work as a composer with experimental music theatre and asked me to collaborate. Together we decided to involve Erik Jakobsson (Erik), conductor, to lead the rehearsals. I entered the project when the artistic idea was formulated in detail, and the plan for the realization—recruitment, rehearsals, performances—was set. My role in the project was as a participant and a composer and, occasionally, as a conductor.

### Compositions

Two pieces were planned to form the core of the performance: “Moskva 1920” (“Moscow, 1920”) and “København 2016” (“Copenhagen 2016”). “Moskva 1920” was based on Meyerhold’s catalogue of audience behavior. The material for “København 2016” was an extensive catalog of noises and actions recorded (by memory and description, not actual sound recordings) by Lotte and Øyvind, in theatre performances they had attended in Copenhagen during autumn 2016. On my suggestion, Lotte made a dramaturgic sketch for each piece.

#### *Moskva – 1920*

- Der har vi jo Emil! (Oh, there we have Emil!)
- Hvad fanden handler det her om.. (What the heck’s this all about?)
- Det bliver stort... (It’s going to be grand..)
- Den der kender jeg! (That one I know!)
- Hold så kæft! (Now shut up!)
- Det finder jeg mig ikke i! (I am not going to take this!)
- Bare jeg ikke er ved at blive syg... (I hope I’m not getting ill...)
- Suverænt... (Superb...)

#### *København – 2016*

- Hvornår er det slut? (When is it over?)
- Hvad laver han? (What’s he doing?)
- Er det sjovt? (Is that funny?)
- Jeg kan ikke se noget... (I can’t see anything...)
- De sveder... (They’re sweating....)
- Hun er dygtig... (She’s smart...)
- Jeg er træt (I’m tired)

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for action-based dramaturgic research: the aim is not to produce groundbreaking, interesting performances but rather to try in practice what happens when you question the most basic or obvious assumptions about how theatre works.

2 See, for instance, <http://www.socialcommunitytheatre.com/en/>

3 <http://caravannext.eu/>

I made two compositions based on these dramaturgic sketches that would be the starting point for our work. Below, under “analysis”, I will go into further detail about the compositions and their musical function in the process.

### Process, rehearsals

When rehearsals started, the choir consisted of 40 members, women and men from all social layers, of different ages and from different parts of the greater Copenhagen area. Some participants had some musical experience from singing in choir, and others had no formal musical training at all.

We rehearsed every Friday afternoon from late February to the end of May. A few members left the choir along the way, and a few others joined. Erik led rehearsals with the task of first and foremost of teaching the choir the piece. I assisted and conducted a few of the rehearsals myself. Lotte directed and instructed the choir regarding expression, physical gesture and appearance.

### Performances

Three performances were organized: one informal ‘dress rehearsal’ at The Lab Station and two performances in the playhouse at the Royal Theatre during the Copenhagen Stage experimental stage art festival. The choir was positioned like a theatre audience at the performances, the idea being that they mirrored the actual audience. Part of the performance was also the choir’s entrance, which simulated the entrance of an audience in a theatre. In the Royal Theatre it eventually appeared more like an act, since the actual audience by far outnumbered the choir and the hall needed to be illuminated as for a normal performance.

Below is a link to a documentary about the project in Copenhagen, with clips from the performances. Additionally, there is a link to a video of a Performance of ‘Moskva 1920’ made in Turin in October 2018. The piece was recreated as part of a conference about the Caravan Next Project at The Social and Community Theatre Centre of the University of Turin. Locals from Turin were invited to take part in the choir, Lotte and I led the rehearsals which took place over four days, and I conducted the performance.<sup>4</sup>

## 3. Theoretical Approach: What Is Music and When Is Music?

The theoretical hypothesis which will be applied, explored and substantiated in an analysis of the experiences from SOA is that music begins in bodily founded awareness of mutuality, situated in a context of communality. Music emerges from this awareness as a shared experience of togetherness that can be re-experienced and shared.

As philosophers of music and music education—Elliott (2015) and Small (1998)—have pointed out, in order to comprehend music, as it actually takes place in the world, it is sensible to regard it as *process* rather than *matter*: music is *social action* and *activity* more than it is a *thing* or a collection of objects (musical *works*). Small has invented the term *musicking* to suggest that the word “music” itself is radically to be regarded as a verb rather than a noun:

*To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing.* (Small, 1998, p. 9)

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<sup>4</sup> Documentary from Copenhagen. 2017. <https://vimeo.com/222439272>; Performance of “Moskva 1920” in Turin. 2018. <https://vimeo.com/299920415/9e5358f910>

There is a circularity in this quote, of which Small himself was most certainly aware: he aims to redefine the notion of music and does so by referring to musical *practice*—the practice of performing musically. Music is something we *do*, rather than something we *have* (and do something with). This definition opens up the questions about music’s nature and meaning, because it is now no longer a question of what music *is* (in itself), but a question of what it means that we *do* it. How and why do we perform musically? What does it mean, that we are musical creatures? Part of Small’s answer to that is, that musical performance is a ritualistic behavior by which “..relationships are brought into existence between the participants that model, in metaphoric form, ideal relationships...” (Small, 1998, p. 96). This offers questions for further consideration: *what* it is that is brought into existence; how is the “metaphoric form” constituted, what is the character and essence of the relationships brought into existence, and what is the connection between the relationships and the metaphoric form? Small develops it further by stating that the relationships are “established in mythical time” and that “Mythmaking, like ritual, are deeply embedded and probably ineradicable forms of human behaviour...” (p. 99)

Other approaches to music may, however, elaborate this differently and further: music psychology and cognitive research examines music as a mental faculty in relation to, or parallel to, language. Serafine (1988) argues that music must be seen as a form of cognition: every musical experience is grounded in cognition, and the development of musical cognition is an intrinsic feature of the human mind. Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff (1983) demonstrated how musical experience can be seen as rooted in a structural perception similar to linguistic grammar: the tonal structures unfold in a way that the mind recognizes and understands. Moreover, says Sloboda (2005), an essential feature of musical structures is that they are *dynamic*, and that this indicates a semantic content in music. It is common to say that music may have meaning in a grammatical sense, but it has no semantic content—as in “For I consider that music is, by its very nature, essentially powerless to express anything at all...” (Stravinsky, 1936, p. 53–54). John Sloboda challenges that notion: maybe the dynamic experience, the sensation of force and movement, is the semantic content of music. The dynamic experience is, says Sloboda, an indispensable part of music understanding, and this suggests that music ultimately refers to “the physical world in motion” (Sloboda, 2005, p. 170).

Daniel Stern’s (2010) concept of *forms of vitality* expands this notion, as it connects dynamic experience to an essential feature of the way human beings understand each other. He asks: “How can empathy, sympathy, and identification be explained without in some way capturing the exact movement characteristics of a specific person..?”, and answers: “For identification based on faithful imitation one also needs the ‘how’—the other’s ‘dynamic movement signature,’ their form of vitality.” (Stern, 2010, pp. 4–13). In other words, the dynamic experience of inner motion in oneself and others is crucial for human interaction, and the dynamic experience of music can be a way in which we, through our bodies, communicate what is inside us. Other research in developmental psychology (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009) has shown how essential human traits such as empathy and communality may have a connection to musicality. Malloch and Trevarthen have developed the concept of *communicative musicality*. They say that

*“...we move with rhythm, and this movement simultaneously makes up the measure of time from ‘inside us’; we tell one another measured stories with emotionally expressive grace – with what we call musicality. This musicality communicates, because we meet as actors first who detect the source of human movements in their form, subjectively – before we debate, explain, reason the imaginative and hopeful stories that our minds*

*make up as reconstructions of objective reality 'out there'.*" (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009, p. 8)

Although this may not suffice to explain music as a phenomenon, it broadens the perspective upon how musical performance establishes relationships (Small, see above) and why we *music*: in musicking, we are attuning ourselves to each other and finding out, who we are. This may indicate the nature of the "metaphorical form" (Small, 1998, p. 96 – see above). Maybe that *is The Music*. If we grant that the "measured stories" (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009, 8 – see above) can assume shape as sonic time-pieces that may be remembered and re-told, this may hint at why there *is* such a thing, or such a 'matter', as music in our world; and why, when we perform musically, there is an accompanying feeling of the presence of *something*—a thing or matter that emerges among us. When Sloboda says, music may refer semantically to "the physical world in motion" (Sloboda, 2005, 170) this is true but may not be the whole truth. Maybe music first 'refers' to motion *inside* us: a vibration or tension, because we want to be together, yet cannot escape that to be who we are, we also need to be *selves* with sensations, feelings, experiences and opinions of our own. It is our human fate to "debate, explain, reason..." (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009, p. 8 – see above), yet we never cease to *music*. We pursue the experience of expressing ourselves together through our bodies, musicking, and ameliorate the potential solitude inherent in selfness.

From a phenomenological point of view, Benson (2003) interpreted this ceaseless musicking that is an inescapable part of human life as *the improvisation of musical dialogue*. Music is an eternal dialogue between musickers—that is everybody who take part in music (which, ultimately, means every human being). The piece of music is, says Benson, an "ergon within the Energeia" (Benson, 2003, p. 125): it is never a monad or an ideal object but rather a coagulation or convergence within the dialogue.

## Sound

The question remains, what role *sound* does play? Does music(ing) also necessarily *begin* with sound, or is musical sound—the sound of music—contingent and coincidental? In other words: could there equally well be music without sound? I am not just proposing this as a philosophic puzzler along the way. Two brief examples may show that it is a relevant question in this context.

*Composer Dieter Schnebel (1930-2018) has experimented with graphic scores, that are meant to be 'read' rather than performed and listened to. The 'performance' takes place in your own mind as you (try to) imagine sounds in motion.*<sup>5</sup>

*Jeppe Ernst (b. 1985) puts the question of music and sound to another kind of trial, writing music where there is no sound, neither real nor imagined. The music is notated with conventional music notation, with indications of durations, action dynamics, tempo, etc., but the notes themselves do not necessarily denote sounds. They may denote different kinds of touch – padding the head, stroking the cheek, etc. – and the music is performed by touching. Or they may denote "events" – actions, imagined incidents, possible or even impossible sensations or thoughts ("something cold, something warm, a bird on the sky") – and the performance is to perform the actions or, again, to read the score and imagine. The music comes to resemble a massage. Or a guided meditation.*<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/werke/mo-no/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.edition-s.dk/composer/jeppe-ernst>

Both these examples show that there may well be music even if there is no sound. On the other hand, the fact that music in most contexts *is* intrinsically connected with sound, makes it improbable, that sound does not play a fundamental role in our musicking. In one sense music most probably *does* begin with sound. Sound is a way we connect, as Trevarthen (1979) has demonstrated, and that particular way of connecting probably forms the basis of musicking. There may be an obvious bodily foundation of music in the fact that sound probably is the closest we can come to touching each other without physically touching: it is the transmission of actual vibrations. In another sense, however, music is not the sound. It is, in essence, according to what Dissanayake (2000, pp. 19–50) says, the pursuit of the mutuality and togetherness that the sound may come to stand for. Musicking may be seen as immersing in sonic expression with no other purpose than being together and sensing being-together. Once we have started doing it—musicking—music emerges and there *will be* music, like there is music in our everyday world at all times. Music may then be represented, as in a musical score, constructed, reconstructed or imagined, as in our imagination, in other media (touch, action, visual signal)—or with emulated sound. I shall come back to this last aspect in the final discussion.

#### **4. Analysis: Sound of the Audience – Music Creation Through Shared Experience and Togetherness**

Several actors from different backgrounds were involved in the creation of SOA. The idea came from Lotte and Øyvind. They asked me to collaborate and relied on my composition skills and experience of working with music theatre. Erik played a crucial role as he shaped the composition during rehearsals, not only by working with the sounds and actions but also by modifying the compositional structure itself in order to increase and encourage freedom of expression. The participation of the members of the choir made the piece. Among them and with them, the piece emerged as it was meant to be.

##### **Musical structure, sensation and comprehension**

As I had been left with two catalogues with descriptions of sound and action, I felt as if I had to start from scratch, when I began composing. One limitation was that the performance in total should last approximately 45 minutes. As we wanted to leave time in the performance for some improvisation regarding the choir's entrance and exit, this meant that each piece must last no longer than 20 minutes. Scrabbling for something to get me started, I suggested that Lotte make the dramaturgic sketches (see above, 2). These enabled me to imagine the two pieces as two small operas. I could conceive the pieces as series of scenes with different musical content and overarching musical structures. The compositions are musically quite conventional. They are based on composition techniques such as linear counterpoint, variation, development, iterative processes, augmentation and diminution, repetition and recurrence. The composition tool is traditional music notation and the compositions are presented as musical scores where particular motifs denote particular actions with resulting sounds as described. Below are pages 1, 2, 3 and 8 of 'Moskva – 1920'. The compositions themselves underwent a lot of changes during rehearsals. Suggestions from the participants were considered. Some of the structural ideas in the score eventually turned out to be hard to remember or too complicated to carry out, and needed to be modified.

Lyden af publikum!  
Meyerhold/Moskva 1920

108

I åbn program luk åbn luk Hvad fan-den hand-ler det her om?

II åbn program luk åbn luk

III åbn program luk åbn luk

115

I åbn program luk åbn luk Hvad fan -den hand-ler det her om?

II åbn program luk

III åbn program luk

122

I Hvad fan -den hand-ler det her om?

II Hvad fan -den hand-ler det her om?

III Hvad fan -den hand-ler det her om?

129

I om?

II om? Hvad fan -den hand-ler det her om?

III det her om?

136

I Der har vi jo E - mil?

II åbn luk Hvad fan-den hand-ler det her om?

III åbn luk åbn luk åbn luk

143

I Der

II åbn luk Hvad fan-den hand-ler det her om?

III åbn luk

2

132

I Hvad fan - den hand-ler det her om?

II Hvad fan - den hand-ler det her om?

III Hvad fan - den hand-ler det her om?

139

I Hvad fan - den hand-ler det her om?

II om? Hvad fan - den hand-ler det her om?

III Hvad fan - den hand-ler det her om?

146

I hand-ler det her om? Hvad fan-den hand-ler det her om? Hvad fan - den hand-ler det her om?

II fan - den hand-ler det her om? Hvad fan-den hand-ler det her om? Hvad fan - den hand-ler det her om?

III Hvad fan - den hand-ler det her om?

153

I mil. Der har vi jo E - mil.

II åbn luk Hvad fan -den hand-ler det her om?

III åbn luk åbn luk

160

I mil. Et - mil. Et - mil. Et - mil. Der har vi

II åbn luk Hvad fan -den hand-ler det her om?

III åbn luk åbn luk åbn luk

167

I jo E - mil. Et - mil. Der

II åbn luk åbn luk

III åbn luk åbn luk åbn luk

The score will make immediate sense to someone familiar with musical notation. This has to do with the sheer fact that the score maps (simple, intelligible and established) musical structures (Lerdahl & Jackendoff, 1983). Erik could grab the score, read through it, and form an idea about how it was to be executed. He knew a lot about what he was supposed to instruct the choir to do, and even how it would “feel”, without having any particular notion of how it would eventually sound, or what the choir precisely would be doing. (Just as I had no definite idea of how the sounds and actions would be carried out once we started to rehearse.) The score signifies *music* because it represents a structure that adheres to certain rules: a musical structure. It maps a piece of mental architecture that unfolds in time.

The structure is also *dynamic* (Sloboda, 2005, p. 170). Without listening or playing, reading the score itself opens up an experience of a certain flow, not only a succession of events but actual motion, best described as local undulation and a global build-up of energy or power: intensification, achieved through “densification” of the occurrence of events, and action dynamics (variation and build-up of force in the way actions and sounds are carried out).

Returning to our composition: it is possible to read the score and thereby comprehend the musical structure, but only because reading (and understanding) the score also involves some dynamic sensation. In practice, when people read through musical scores they are commonly seen micro-conducting with small hand movements, the mouth is shaped as for humming, or even the facial muscles may be twitching slightly as if to execute, with some part of one’s body, the motion of the music.

### **Sound and music. Emergence of the piece: togetherness.**

Still, though, there is no sound! I have until now only written about a musical score and how to comprehend a musical composition from a score. Following the theoretical discussion above, one might ask: when there is no sound, is there a piece of music (theatre)? In our context we had a piece of musical structure that was to become a piece in which a particular kind of sound, ‘audience noise’, would play a crucial role. But the score—the musical structure—had no sounds in it. Neither does a score for, say, a Mozart symphony, for that matter. We may have come to see the symphonic score as signifying musical sound, but in fact it does not. It signifies a musical structure with signs that indicate certain performative *actions*. By convention and tradition we can have a strong imagination of the sonic result of the actions. The score for SOA adhered to no convention that could form the basis of such a sonic imagination. Although the structure itself was meaningful, intelligible and musical, it was, in a sense, sonically void. One could ascribe tones to the notes and make a piano rendering of the score. I have made a piano version of the first 8 pages of ‘Moskva 1920’ (link to sound file below<sup>7</sup>.) It could have been made with other instruments, such as non-tonal (percussion) instruments, or even with non-musical sounds to make it sound less conventional, but still, it would not come close to our idea about what SOA could be or what it became. The musical structure now has sound, but the result is boring. We have provided the structure with sound, but for a trained score reader it was probably more interesting to read the score than to listen to what we had now.

According to Lerdahl and Jackendoff (1983) and Sloboda (2005), the score—the structure in itself—is music in a semantic sense. Providing it with sounds does not really make it into a musical experience. The piece, as music, only emerged as what it was to become when we started rehearsing. We provided the structure with the *Sounds of the Audience*, but there is more to it

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.dropbox.com/s/whryj2qi3nvr7al/lyden%20af%20publikum%20pianodemo.mp3?dl=0>

than providing sound. It does not suffice to say that given a functional musical structure, we added the (sonic) content. There was a score, there was a musical structure, but still, no one really knew what the piece was or could be.

Foregoing my work on this text, I asked Malene, a member of the choir in SOA, for a conversation in which I could gain her perspective on the process: how did she experience meeting us, the professionals; how did she experience the collaboration and togetherness of the group; and—in particular—how did she recognize the piece coming into being. Malene works in pedagogy, and she sings in an amateur choir, ‘Verdens Sirener’ (Sirens of the World) where women of different nationalities share their musical roots by singing each other’s songs. During the project she had strong commitment and interest in the artistic ideas and the process. Our conversation is analyzed from a phenomenological approach, inspired from Dahlberg (2006) and Van Manen (1990, p. 39): “A good description that constitutes the essence of something is construed so that the structure of a lived experience is revealed to us in such a fashion that we are now able to grasp the nature and significance of this experience in a hitherto unseen way...”.

I asked Malene, at which point during the process she recognized and comprehended the overall form of the piece. (In the following, quoting Malene, I have allowed myself to highlight keywords).

*Malene: ... I could not, today or even just after the performance, recreate the whole progression of it.. I did not have it all in my head...” She said. “But I remember... we [Malene and her boyfriend] had been away for some weeks [and unable to attend the weekly rehearsals] and then, when we came back, we noticed that something had developed. Things had a **contour**: “This makes some **sense**. At the first rehearsals I thought ”This is really silly. I wonder if anything will ever become of this...” Also, I hadn’t quite realized that it was something we were eventually going to perform... It was when we came back, after having been away, I could sense that this **is something**. It has a form...*

Speaking with Malene, something became very evident to me, of which I had only had a vague impression during rehearsals: the participants in the choir had no perception of an overall musical structure. Even if some of them had been able to read the score, they did not “get it” at any time. They were to learn everything by heart. I am not sure if Erik and I, during the initial rehearsals, were fully aware of this abysmal gap between the choristers’ impression of what was going on and ours. They had been told that there was a score—a composition—and that our work together would culminate in a theatre performance, but still, from their point of view they were taking part in a theatre experiment about audience noises. How could they, by any means, recognize that they were learning a piece of music? Erik and I, were conducting musical rehearsals, part of which was to experiment and find the right actions and sounds.

The gap was bridged with confidence and trust. Initially every rehearsal started with everyone introducing themselves. Later, when the group was established, rehearsals were often rounded off with a common meal or a drink. Malene pointed out there was something in the way the introductions were conducted—by Lotte and Øyvind—that set the atmosphere in a particular way. Rather than asking where people lived, their age, what they did for a living, or their civil status, Lotte and Øyvind would ask people to share things like “what is your favorite music?”, “which kind of weather do you like?”

Malene: *There was something fantastic about those questions... That was clever: asking about something that did not categorize or stigmatize. It made it possible for us to see each other in another way... I have no idea what people were doing in their daily lives. But we got to **know each other as humans**. The way we **were together as humans** was fantastic: **being experimental together**. That was funny, because we all did something together....*

In the atmosphere of confidence and trust it was possible for us to create the piece together.

Malene: *... it said: "Here's room for anyone"... That hasn't really anything to do with **sound**. But on the other hand, if we did not feel confident we wouldn't dare to experiment with sound. We wouldn't be able to express **ourselves**... In a way we could be like clowns. That was also reflected in the performance. It was something "clowny"*

### **Musicking. Immersing your self into the common body and letting it dissolve for a while: our music.**

The feeling of doing something together and having fun together remembered as also connected to the *piece* itself: doing *some thing* together.

Me: *What made it "clowny? Was it the sounds?*

Malene: *"No, the sounds were just human sounds... it was really because it was in a **work**... That we were doing it **together** and **at the same time**. We were like an army of people doing the same... sometimes many things in a mishmash. And then all of a sudden we stopped..."*

So far as the piece came out as a complete aesthetic experience it rested upon the co-creation of the choir. It perhaps took a while for them to realize that we were making a piece of music theatre—a certain progression, that eventually would make sense as a performance. The whole set-up was peculiar in the sense I mentioned: Lotte and Øyvind had conceived the idea as a piece of (music) theatre but relied on Erik and myself, and the choir, to form a coherent piece of music, Erik and I had a piece of music in mind, although we did not really know what kind of piece, the participants in the choir were primarily in it because it felt enjoyable to be together and joyous to experiment together with sound and action, but they sensed an energy.

Malene: *If you think back, you miss it... the **energy**... of performing... but mostly of **being together as humans**...*

The *energy* of being together is connected to the *energy* of performing. As we were together, in the rehearsals, little by little, things fell into place. The sounds themselves became stable and consistent. Transitions became clear. The sounds came together. Everything became more and more transparent and obvious, and in the end we had something that was *some thing*: **our** piece. We did not just feed 'sounds of the audience' into a given musical structure, and even if some people rarely sensed that what we were making was music, we were actually making music. We were *musicking* together.

Following Small (1998), SOA may be seen as an example of how a certain community of practice becomes a musical practice, how it evolves. Although, in SOA, our perceptions of what was going on and where it was heading were different due to our different roles and backgrounds,

we *musicked* together, and music—musical meaning—began to evolve, not from the musical score and the composition, but primarily from our being together. True, in our context there was an inspirational, driving force behind it: the composition, the imminent performance, and, not least, Erik and myself and our musical ambitions on the choir’s behalf, but we still had to develop our sonic language and the sensible doing-together—or rather, let it happen.

As we went with the flow—the good energy Malene mentioned—things started to make sense. Things began to *mean* something:

Malene: *I did not have an overall perception of the piece, but within the different sections I had a strong feeling of what was coming next. Even today, when I hear bottles clinking in a certain way, I can’t help hearing a cough inside my head... [because the succession of bottles clinking and coughing was a recurring phrase in the piece København 2016]. In that way certain phrases and passages got stuck in the head... like it **meant** something very particular to us. Although it didn’t really mean anything...*

During our conversation she and I constantly used the phrase “*Ja, det var stort!*” (“Yes, it was grand!”)—a sentence from Lotte’s dramaturgy (see 2 above) that I chose to put in the score for ‘København 2016’ as a recurrent spoken phrase in the piece. Malene’s experience reveals how music, musical meaning, is something that may happen when people are together. The succession of ‘bottle-clinking and cough’ was a small piece of sonic structure in time, which in our community became meaningful. The tiny sonic time-structure was inaugurated as shared experience, and would then eventually become a piece of mental structure. A similar thing happened with “*Ja, det var stort!*”. It is a sonic structure that has a formal, linguistic, semantic meaning—a proposition—but in SOA, through our *musicking*, it became something else. Tossed around in our voices it became a piece of sound, stripped of its semantic content and imbued with new meaning; *our* musical meaning.

The way we musicked in SOA—with awkward noise and behavior—stressed, as I see it, how musicking and music may be seen as a mutual quest to overcome or ‘live with’ a tension that is inherent in being human. We want to be together with our sensing, expressive bodies, but we must also be ‘selves’. To be selves we must “debate, explain and reason” (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009, p. 8), but, still, we are also always musicking humans. We take part and re-create music every time we listen and let music flow through our mind and body, and we are all very familiar with musical sounds. The sounds that sound ‘nice’ are stimulating and comforting, call forth emotions and bring us together. But most of us are not aware that we are *musicking*, and that it is our musicking that makes musical sounds sound nice. Most of the participants in SOA were probably no more aware of their own musicality than that they like music and probably use music in their life. A lot of them could perhaps not themselves make music with musical sounds, their voices would be rough, or they might not be able to carry a tune, but the sounds we played with were not musical sounds from the outset. Our sounds were not nice. They were the kind of sounds that would most often lead to reprimanding counteractions: “We ourselves, our selves, do not approve of what your body is doing. So you, yourself: make your self make your body stop doing it. Now!”. Even more so, those sounds became *our* musical sounds. Musicking does not begin with musical sounds but with mutual listening and careful attention. The sound-making together in a shared, communal and safe space, allowed us to be together as bodies paying attention to other bodies and attuning ourselves to one another. We “...told one another measured stories with emotionally expressive grace and met as actors first who detected the source of human movements in their form, subjectively” (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009, p. 8)

## Performance and remembrance

What then, again, about *the piece*? The professionals, Lotte, Øyvind, Erik and myself, had had a piece in mind all the time. One could possibly say the piece was merely a conclusion that we drew: “This is what we have been doing, here we exhibit a slice of a certain corner of reality!” I think, however, that this is not how it was. Doing the piece and performing it, we all put something of ours into the world: something we had created together and now could share with someone—from our sounding bodies to the resounding bodies of the audience-audience.

*Malene: The first time I truly realized what this was about was at the first viewing. And I thought “who on earth will care to look at this?” I say, we’re having fun, but will anyone else think it’s funny?” But then I could see my neighbor’s four year old son, who I had invited. He was laughing out loud.... People could sense that we’d had fun. It was not just the **piece** itself, it was that inter-play that did it... that it worked as a **performance**.*

Me, proposing tentatively: *Yes – every performance has something vulnerable: “Are we going to get this right?” But this performance was fragile at another level: “Will it make any sense to anyone..?”*

*Malene: Yes – will it in any way convey the **energy** that we want it to... but it did!*

In SOA the whole idea of someone performing *for* someone else was to be questioned, because the normal division between performers and spectators was blurred, but the performance was none the less a performance. We showed something that we had done to other people. The obviousness and simplicity of the whole artistic idea itself made it accessible. It was ‘clowny’ and funny for the ‘audience-audience’ to see the ‘choir-audience’ perform with sounds and actions that normally are annoying and unwanted. The accessibility and the amusement lay not only in the familiarity of bodily gesture and funny noise and action, however, it was accessible because it was a piece of music. The sounds and actions came through as a true endeavor to make sounds and actions come together in a work, no matter how rough and awkward those sounds and actions were. Our shared experience—the time we had spent together—could be shared, because the energy of our work for togetherness was embedded in the performance. It exemplifies how music, as Benson (2003) says it, can be understood as an eternal flow of dialogue, and how, consequently, the piece can be seen as an ‘*ergon within the energeia*’ (Benson, 2003, p. 125): it is a ‘piece of work’ within the eternal flow. The performance was not a rendering of a composition; it was ‘a piece of work’ by which we shared ‘a piece of work’ we had completed by being together and letting our bodies sound. The fragility I referred to in the conversation above, showed that every performance necessarily entails the ambition of bringing something to life. As Brandt puts it “Since the performer creates ‘something’ and thereby could fail or succeed to give birth to it, the meaning immanent in the something is saved by the performance; a feeling of a precarious, fragile transcendent intentionality quite naturally accompanies the aesthetic display.” (Brandt, 2009, 39). The performance came to stand as a token of shared life that could be shared. The piece was something—*some thing*—that might be shared again and again, and every instance of sharing would bring new life.

## 5. Conclusion: Musical Creativity and Aesthetic Experience as Shared Life

SOA was a very special collaboration between theatre and music professionals and a group of people with little or no musical or artistic training. The idea and concept called for a particular approach, which rested totally on the involvement and co-creation of everybody. We, the professionals, were driving it, but we did not have a fixed goal or final solution. The piece had to emerge among us. To be able to express yourself with sounds and action that you would normally not consider musical sounds, to sense the others, and to be together in a trustful and playful environment, created an unusual situation in which the participants could express themselves musically without a specific musical purpose—maybe even because there was no apparent musical purpose. This makes it possible to see SOA as an example of how musical practice evolves within a community of practice. The impulse that here, at the Lab Station, in this project, we would play around with the annoying, disturbing, unwanted, involuntary ‘Sounds of an Audience’, evolved into what one could call a musical language: a certain way of musicking. Our work culminated in a musical performance. The piece came to life and we may say we had co-created a work, a piece of music theatre. The piece itself is “*ergon within the energeia*”—it is a coagulation within the flow of energy, that was our work together and, ultimately, our being-together. As such it could be shared in performance, from the sounding bodies of the choir-audience to the resounding bodies of the audience-audience.

SOA is an example of how music begins as musicking, which can be seen as bodily founded mutual awareness of mutuality: a shared inner experience of the energy of being together. From this music may emerge as a transcendent experience of “*measured stories told with emotionally expressive grace*” (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009, p. 8) or as a ‘a piece of work’ we have completed and shared and may share with others: “*ergon within the energeia*” emerging in the ceaseless musical dialogue (Benson, 2003, p. 125). *Sound* is not music’s content nor meaning, and there may well be music without sound, but SOA also demonstrates how a connection between sense of mutuality, sound, and temporal and bodily dynamic expression (what Stern calls *forms of vitality* (Stern, 2010)) may be a precondition for musicking and hence music.

## 6. Discussion

In our digital age, music has become transcendent in a new and unexpected way. Music can, as mediated sound, be enjoyed as a solitary experience—without bodily movement, expression of voice or the touching of instruments—in the presence of no one but yourself. It has become a product, a sound-product, to an extent that we may ask: is that ‘sound’—for our minds and bodies? Is there a risk that we are, little by little, numbing our musical perception and musical thinking? Musical sound-products have in a short time become omnipresent. It seems as if humans crave them just because they exist. Trying to undo this would probably, already, be comparable to overturning the agricultural revolution, but while ‘the sound of music’ seizes the space, the lack of mutual embodiment may leave us with musical sound-products that we can have and enjoy and that satisfy a demand, but that are never truly our music. When John Cage encouraged us to liberate our musical minds, let sound be sound, and let music happen, that was surely not what he wanted. Russolo, when he constructed his noise machines, did not just want to make spectacular sounds. He wanted to reclaim music, from what appeared to him as stagnated convention. Making music together, as in SOA, can also, from a pedagogic perspective, be seen as the possibility of reclaiming musicality in a world overloaded with musical sound; to do something that you can do yourself. To be your own voice and your own sounding body—together with others.

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# Resounding in the Human Body as the ‘True Sanskrit’ of Nature: Reading Sound Figures in Novalis’ *The Novices of Sais*

*Alexis B. Smith*

**Abstract:** *The early German Romantics Novalis and Johann Wilhelm Ritter interpret Klangfiguren (“sound figures,” known most commonly as “Chladni Figures”), as pointing towards the scientific evidence of a universal language of nature, with sound containing its own writing—sound that can be seen, and writing that can be heard—a language that is therefore revealed with the human body as its instrument. This language, which Novalis calls the “true Sanskrit” of nature in his literary fragment *The Novices of Sais*, becomes Novalis’ and Ritter’s key to deciphering the knowledge of the self through an inner seeing and hearing.*

**Keywords:** *Klangfiguren, sound figures, Chladni figures, German Romanticism, Novalis, Die Lehrlinge zu Sais, The Novices of Sais, Johann Wilhelm Ritter, fragment, Sanskrit, nature, body.*

## 1. Introduction

Ulrich Gaier has called *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* (*The Novices of Sais*, 1798/99) by Novalis (1772–1801) “perhaps the most complicated text in German literature.”<sup>1</sup> The abstract and philosophical discussions that ensue among the characters have left much confusion and debate over the meaning of the literary fragment, and to what or whom Novalis is referring in each passage.<sup>2</sup> Set in Sais, Egypt, an unnamed teacher leads a group of likewise nameless novices on a search for the lost universal language of nature. Interestingly, the Rosetta Stone was discovered by Napoleon’s team of explorers in 1799 in the town of Rashid, just months after Novalis stopped work on *The Novices of Sais*. It is believed to have been originally displayed in the temple of Sais, where Novalis’ story takes place—but Novalis’ novices are not looking at the hieroglyphs. Instead, Novalis writes in the beginning of “die wahre Sanskrit,” “the true Sanskrit”:

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<sup>1</sup> As quoted in Hoffmann (1989, p.28) by the editor, Charlton.

<sup>2</sup> In her review of Ulrich Gaier’s book, *Krumme Regel*, Stopp (1973) explains, “After Jurij Striedter’s pioneering work, supplemented by Ulrich Gaier’s fuller analysis of *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, it would seem that Rudolf Haym’s judgment of this work as a confused, ‘noch völlig ungestattete Dichtung’ has been finally disposed of; however, this view is still valid for Professor Neubauer in his *Bifocal Vision*” (p. 459). Of Gaier’s seven-stage analysis of the literary fragment, Immerwahr (1972) writes, “All of these are difficult to follow, some are unconvincing in themselves, and some are incompatible with each other” (p. 743). The general incomprehensibility of Novalis’ story has therefore not only been in the narrative itself, but also in attempts to analyze it!

*We do not understand the language, because the language does not understand itself, nor wishes to; the true Sanskrit would speak in order to speak, because speaking is its delight and essence. (Novalis, my translation and emphasis)*

*Man verstehe die Sprache nicht, weil sich die Sprache selber nicht verstehe, nicht verstehen wolle; die echte Sanskrit spräche, um zu sprechen, weil Sprechen ihre Lust und ihr Wesen sei. (Novalis, 1960, I, p. 79, my emphasis)<sup>3</sup>*

That Novalis avoids the hieroglyphs and turns to Sanskrit as a basis for his novices' search for the lost universal language can perhaps be explained by the following passage in Friedrich Schlegel's (1772–1829) "Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier" (1808). In the context of his analysis of Sanskrit compared to other languages and specifically in the search for the origin of language, Schlegel discusses the "perfect grammar" of Sanskrit in contrast to the hieroglyphs. He emphasizes the experience of a "feines Gefühl" ("fine feeling") that comes with understanding the primordial meaning of nature through Sanskrit. Of this feeling he writes:

*This fine feeling then had to produce writing with the language itself at the same time; **no hieroglyphic painting or imaging after external objects of nature**, but one which now also depicts and denotes the inner character of the letters, as it is so distinctly felt, in visible outlines. (My translation and emphasis)<sup>4</sup>*

*Dießfeine Gefühl mußte dann mit der Sprache selbst zugleich auch Schrift hervorbringen; **keine hieroglyphische nach äußern Naturgegenständen mahlende oder bildende**, sondern eine solche, welche den innern Charakter der Buchstaben, wie er so deutlich gefühlt wird, nun auch in sichtlichen Umrissen hinstellte und bezeichnete. (Schlegel, 1846, p. 298, my emphasis)*

Unlike the hieroglyphs, which were created after external images of nature, Sanskrit, in its alphabet and sounds, represents the inner character of nature, which is sensed by a "fine feeling". Here, a brief history of Sanskrit is needed. Joshi (2016) writes:

*Sanskrit is regarded as the ancient language of Hinduism, where it was used by the Hindu Celestial Gods, and then by the Indo-Aryans. (...) The Sanskrit language was termed as Deva-Vani ('Deva' Gods – 'Vani' language) as it was believed to have been generated by the god Brahma who passed it to the Rishis (sages) living in celestial abodes, who then communicated the same to their early disciples from where it spread on earth.*

There are four types of Sanskrit that were written by the Rishis (sages, also known as "seers") between 1500 and 600 BCE—together they are called the Vedas. Morreall and Sonn (2012) explain,

*The Vedas are traditionally ascribed to ancient 'seers,' called Rishis, who 'heard' or 'perceived' them. That is, the knowledge they convey is not thought to be 'revealed' in the way that Western scriptures are. Instead, the Rishis had extraordinary abilities to*

3 Two volumes of Novalis' writings will be referenced in this article. Volume I, which contains the story *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* (*The Novices of Sais*). Volume III, referenced later, contains his fragments from *Das Allgemeine Brouillon* (*The General Notebook*).

4 All future bolded text in quotations is my emphasis in order to highlight the most important language and phrases and keep them in context.

*understand Reality, to 'see' it as it truly is, and to convey that information in language.*  
(p. 213)

The Rishis therefore both heard and saw this language (perhaps to be understood as an internal, synaesthetic experience, since others did not have access to it) and then transcribed it.<sup>5</sup> The Sanskrit alphabet, which consists of 52 letters including 16 vowels and 36 consonants, is intimately connected to the physiology of creating sound—it is made out of every possible sound that the mouth can make—and pronunciation is extremely important for the accurate communication of the language.<sup>6</sup> Panini, who lived around the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, is credited with writing “the only source of Sanskrit grammar and vocabulary today” in *Ashtadhyayi*, which “contains 3959 systematised rules that are undiluted in brevity, full of wonderful analysis, explanation, and preferential usage of the language and word formation” (Joshi, 2016). When Panini’s text was first published in 1810, Friedrich Schlegel’s analysis and first translation from Sanskrit into German was discredited. “Armed with Panini’s grammar, later 19<sup>th</sup> century linguists such as Bopp and Böhtlingk revised Schlegel’s theories on the nature of Sanskrit” (Figueira, 1989, p. 425).

The early German Romantics were fascinated with, and integrated aspects of, Hinduism, Buddhism, and ideas about India and Sanskrit into their writings to suit their own purposes. Cowan (2008) writes:

*Among the early German Romantics, the four figures that would become most enthralled with ancient Hindu and Buddhist texts and medieval Sanskrit drama were Novalis, Schelling, and the two brothers Schlegel. The Indological groundwork laid by French and English scholars like Abraham-Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron, Pierre Sonnerat, William Jones, and Warren Hastings had been absorbed and elaborated upon by Kant, Herder, and Friedrich Majer in the German principalities, having a direct impact on the early Romantics.* (p. 325)

The Schlegel brothers wrote articles for their quarterly, *Athenäum* (1798–1800), which Cowan (2008) states “reflected their enthusiastic support of the virtues of Sanskrit language and literature” (p. 327).<sup>7</sup> Dauer (1965) writes, “Friedrich, in ‘Gespräch über die Poesie,’ argues that the treasures of South Asian literature should be as accessible as those of Greek and Roman antiquity, viewing India as the source of *Universalpoesie*,” which is the Schlegel brothers’ and Novalis’ project on creating an ideal, universal language. In Schlegel’s conception of *Universalpoesie*, he embraces the infinity in *becoming*—that the *Universalpoesie* will forever evolve and never be

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5 The Rig Veda is considered the core text of the Vedas and is the oldest known Vedic Sanskrit text, the earliest chapters date from either between around 1500 and 1200 BCE or 1700 and 1100 BCE. It contains ten books known as mandalas (“circles”) written by Rishis. It was first translated into Latin in 1830 CE by Friedrich August Rosen, and was therefore not available to the early German Romantics. The last of the Vedas, the Upanishads, were written from approximately 800 BCE and 500 BCE, and were a reaction against the focus of religious life from “external rites and sacrifices” in the earlier Vedas and a turn toward “internal spiritual quests” (Violatti, 2014). The translation into Latin by Anquetil Duperron in 1801–1802 CE became the introduction of the Upanishads to the western world, and was therefore not available to Novalis when he wrote *The Novices of Sais* (on which he ceased work in 1799). Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) and Friedrich Schelling (1775–1854) are most commonly credited with embracing and praising these texts, increasing their popularity in the western world.

6 Neuroscientist Tony Nader, MD, PhD (2000) writes about how the Veda also gives rise to the structures and functions of human physiology (which is out of scope for this current project). His work focuses on the understanding that everything is made of vibrations and that the various fields join in a unified field. Even thought is a vibration of consciousness. His work shows that science found its success by restricting itself to objective knowledge, carefully excluding subjectivity (and therefore consciousness). The Vedic civilization explored consciousness so deeply as to make it a science. Nader is the successor of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who was also a researcher in Veda and consciousness.

7 Cowan (2008) also notes, “In an essay entitled ‘Die Sprachen,’ August Wilhelm describes the grammatical perfection of Sanskrit as the language of heaven, its characters having been designed by God himself” (p. 327).

perfect or complete.<sup>8</sup> There are only a few specific references to India in Novalis' encyclopedia project, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon* (*The General Notebook*, 1798/99), which he worked on in tandem with *The Novices of Sais*, but scholars have identified the ways in which he integrated ideas of ancient India into his writings.<sup>9</sup> In the "Einleitung der Herausgeber" ("Introduction by the Editors") to *The Novices of Sais*, the editors, Kluckhohn and Samuel (1960), explain:

*Because Novalis already speaks of "true Sanskrit" in the beginning, the influence that Georg Forster's Sanskrit studies must have had on him cannot be overlooked. They can be found in Forster's introduction and commentary for the translation of Kalidasa's Sakuntala (1791) and in a few essays in the "Short Writings," that Friedrich Schlegel included in his essays about Forster (Lyceum, I, 1, 1791). Forster, following his teacher Sir William Jones, describes Sanskrit as the "holy language" (...). (My translation)*

*Da Novalis aber schon zu Anfang der Dichtung von "echter Sanskrit" spricht, so darf doch nicht der Eindruck übersehen werden, den Georg Forsters Sanskritstudien auf ihn gemacht haben müssen. Sie finden sich in Forsters Einleitung und Erläuterungen zu seiner Übersetzung von Kalidasas Sakuntala (1791) und in einigen Aufsätzen in den "Kleinen Schriften," die Friedrich Schlegel zu seinen Essays über Forster (Lyceum, I, 1, 1797) veranlaßten. Forster, seinem Lehrer Sir William Jones folgend, bezeichnet Sanskrit als die "heilige Sprache" (...). (p. 77)<sup>10</sup>*

Like Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis received great inspiration from the drama *Sakuntala* in his philosophy of becoming (Cowan, 2008, p. 327). He explores this in his conception of *Poesie* and in the *process* of the novices' search for the universal language in order to discover the inner reaches of the self. He did not study the Sanskrit texts or translations as Friedrich Schelling and the Schlegel brothers later did (indeed, he passed away too soon), and only mentions "Sanskrit" once in his writings—in the opening section of *The Novices of Sais*.<sup>11</sup> "Sanskrit" therefore remains

8 Schlegel (1800) defines *Universalpoesie* in *Athenäum* fragment 116: "Romantic poetry is a progressive universal poetry. Its purpose is not merely to reunite all the separate genres of poetry, and to put poetry in contact with philosophy and rhetoric. It wants, and should also mix poetry and prose, genius and criticism, art poetry and poetry of nature, soon to merge, to make poetry lively and sociable, to make life and society poetic, to poeticize the joke, and the forms of art with a rich educational material of every kind fill and saturate, and animate by the vibrations of humor. (...) The romantic type of poetry is still in the process of becoming; yes, that is their very nature, that they can only become eternal, never be perfect. It cannot be exhausted by any theory, and only a divinatory critique would dare to characterize its ideal. She alone is infinite, as she alone is free, and who acknowledges as her first law that the poet's arbitrariness does not suffer any law over herself. The romantic type of poetry is the only one that is more than art, and, as it were, poetry itself: for in a certain sense all poetry is or is supposed to be romantic." (My translation) (Die romantische Poesie ist eine progressive Universalpoesie. Ihre Bestimmung ist nicht bloß, alle getrennte Gattungen der Poesie wieder zu vereinigen, und die Poesie mit der Philosophie und Rhetorik in Berührung zu setzen. Sie will, und soll auch Poesie und Prosa, Genialität und Kritik, Kunstpoesie und Naturpoesie bald mischen, bald verschmelzen, die Poesie lebendig und gesellig, und das Leben und die Gesellschaft poetisch machen, den Witz poetisieren, und die Formen der Kunst mit gediegnem Bildungsstoff jeder Art anfüllen und sättigen, und durch die Schwingungen des Humors beseelen. (...) Die romantische Dichtart ist noch im Werden; ja das ist ihr eigentliches Wesen, daß sie ewig nur werden, nie vollendet sein kann. Sie kann durch keine Theorie erschöpft werden, und nur eine divinatorische Kritik dürfte es wagen, ihr Ideal charakterisieren zu wollen. Sie allein ist unendlich, wie sie allein frei ist, und das als ihr erstes Gesetz anerkennt, daß die Willkür des Dichters kein Gesetz über sich leide. Die romantische Dichtart ist die einzige, die mehr als Art, und gleichsam die Dichtkunst selbst ist: denn in einem gewissen Sinn ist oder soll alle Poesie romantisch sein.)

9 In regard to Indian gods, see Volume I, p. 111; III, p. 590. For Indian fairy-tales, see II, p. 280 and III, p. 587. The index to Novalis' writings (Volume V) misses his reference to "indischen Heymath" (Indian homeland) in III, p. 285. The only reference to "Sanskrit" specifically is found in *The Novices of Sais*, I, p. 79.

10 It is also important to credit Herder's *Ideen* (Ideas) in bringing the German readership the first overall picture of India. In 1871 he received Georg Forster's translation of the play by Kalidasa, *Sakuntala, oder der entscheidende Ring*, which was the first translation of Sanskrit into German (via the English translation by William Jones). Herder contributed a forward for Forster's publication, and both Herder and Forster are credited with expressing great value in intercultural dialogue. However, Dauer (1965) argues that Herder created an ideal India of his own, having very little to do with actual India, as he never traveled there. Forster's approach is paternalistic in nature, argues Esleben (2003), as he conceptualizes the exchange between Europeans and Indians as similar to the relationship between fathers and their children (p. 227).

11 Dauer (1965) analyzes Novalis' adoption of endless reincarnation in the search for the blue flower in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (*Henry of Ofterdingen*, 1802), as well as the significance of the dream state in relation to the yoga elements in Buddhism. However, Novalis had already begun his explorations of the dream-state in *The Novices of Sais*, especially in the embedded fairy-tale, "Hyacinth and Rosenblümchen" ("Hyacinth and Rose Petal").

an abstract ideal in his thought. He seems to take his cue from Forster's introduction to his translation of *Sakuntala* for the very basis of his narrative. Forster writes:

*The accumulation of experiences of all kinds, partly directly with our own senses, and partly through the writings, consequently becomes the preparation for the most convenient application of our being here (Hierseyns) (...). (My translation)*

*Die Einsammlung von Erfahrungen aller Art, theils unmittelbar mit eigenen Sinnen, theils mittelbar durch die Schriftzüge, wird folglich die Vorbereitung zur zweckmäßigsten Anwendung unseren Hierseyns (...). (p. XXVII)*

Jörg Esleben (2003) points out that in his "Vorrede" ("Introduction"), Forster suggests that the German Romantics, "due to geographical and historical factors, have the 'eklektischen Charakter' ['eclectic character'] that enables them to collect, study, and order, in an unselfish and disinterested fashion, the fragmented and varied instances of beauty, goodness, and perfection that are scattered all over the world" (p. 219). Interestingly, this is precisely Novalis' approach to the novices' search for the universal language of nature; they are searching for this language by gathering and organizing objects of nature and tracing lines in the sand. However, why would Novalis emphasize the "true" ("echte") Sanskrit of nature, if he is writing about actual Sanskrit? It seems, rather, that Novalis is proposing a *different* Sanskrit, a "true" holy writing, one that is not only writing, but also "speaks" from objects of nature, including the human body—and therefore not only spoken or transcribed by humans.

According to Novalis in his literary fragment *The Novices of Sais*, all of nature has the same original substance...a *Sprachlehre* (grammar). This *Sprachlehre* is the key to the *Wunderschrift* (magic writing) of nature. The *true Sanskrit* of nature is described as one in movement—figures appear and disappear—bringing thoughts and wishes, and, as the novices are hoping to discover, also letters and words. Looking for this lost universal language, these seekers of nature's deepest mysteries search through objects of nature in order to discover a language that emerges from inside these objects—and themselves, as both sound and written signs in one. The language consists of not only writing ("Schrift"), but also images ("Bilder"), figures ("Figuren"), light ("Licht"), and sound ("Klang"). One key to interpreting this mysterious combination of attributes is subtly apparent in the opening paragraph of the literary fragment:

*Various are the roads of man. He who follows and compare them will see **strange figures** emerge, **figures which seem to belong to that great cipher** which we discern written everywhere, in wings, eggshells, clouds and snow, in crystals and in stone formations, on ice-covered waters, on the inside and outside of mountains, of plants, beasts and men, in the lights of heaven, **on scored disks of pitch or glass** or in iron filings round a magnet, and in strange conjunctions of chance. In them we suspect a key to the magic writing, even a grammar.... **Only at moments do their desires and thoughts seem to solidify. Thus arise their presentiments, but after a short time everything swims again before their eyes.** (p. 3/5, my emphasis)<sup>12</sup>*

*Mannigfache Wege gehen die Menschen. Wer sie verfolgt und vergleicht, wird **wunderliche Figuren** entstehen sehn; **Figuren, die zu jener großen Chifferschrift zu gehören scheinen**, die man überall, auf Flügeln, Eierschalen, in Wolken, im Schnee,*

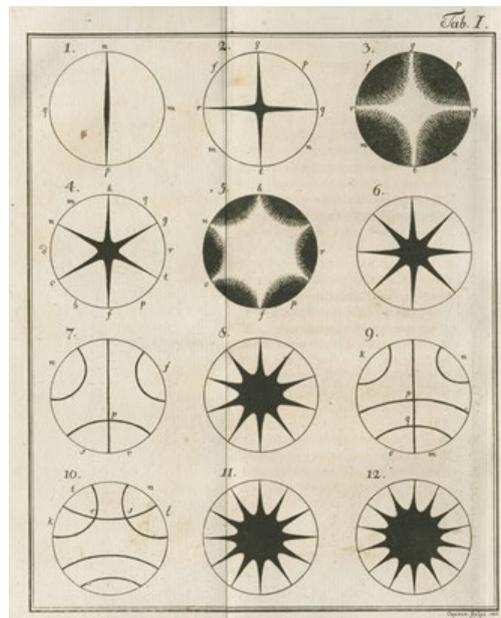
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12 The translation by Manheim (Novalis, 2005) contains graphic artwork on every other page, so the page numbers of the story are always on odd pages.

*in Kristallen und in Steinbildungen, aufgefrierenden Wassern, im Innern und Äußern der Gebirge, der Pflanzen, der Tiere, der Menschen, in den Lichtern des Himmels, auf berührten und gestrichenen Scheiben von Pech und Glas, in den Feilspänen um den Magnet her, und sonderbaren Konjunkturen des Zufalls erblickt. In ihnen ahndet man den Schlüssel dieser Wunderschrift, die Sprachlehre derselben.... Nur augenblicklich scheinen ihre Wünsche, ihre Gedanken sich zu verdichten. So entstehen ihre Ahndungen, aber nach kurzen Zeiten schwimmt alles wieder, wie vorher, vor ihren Blicken.* (I, p. 79, my emphasis)

The list of objects and phenomena of nature are suddenly contrasted by the phrase “on scored disks of pitch or glass” (“auf berührten und gestrichenen Scheiben von Pech und Glas”) (I, p. 79). What Novalis describes here are materials used in the formation of sound figures.<sup>13</sup>

Ernst Florens Friedrich Chladni (1756–1827), a German physicist, inventor and amateur musician, was the first to perform extensive experiments on the sound figures, and he published his findings in *Entdeckungen über die Theorie des Klangs* (Discoveries on the Theory of Sound) in 1787. He is ultimately the one who became famous for them, known today in English as “Chladni Figures.”<sup>14</sup> He demonstrated various modes of vibration on rigid surfaces by placing sand (or other fine material) on a circular, square or rectangular surface and drawing a bow along the edge. The sand bounces with the vibration and settles at the nodal points, where there is no vibration. These nodal points become the intricate figures that form on the plates. These figures became integral in the development of acoustics and instrument building, for which Chladni is named the father of acoustics.<sup>15</sup>



**Figure 1:** Table 1 from *Entdeckungen über die Theorie des Klangs*, 1787.<sup>16</sup>

13 This has been previously recognized by Bonds (1997), who mentions in a footnote that Novalis' opening paragraph of *The Novices of Sais* contains a reference to Ernst Florens Friedrich Chladni's *Klangfiguren* (198), but he does not analyze this aspect of Novalis' text further. Menke (1999) also writes that Novalis studied and worked on the *Klangfiguren* in his notes for *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*.

14 I will continue to use the general term “sound figures” to differentiate between the Romantics' use of them and that of Chladni.

15 Many influential studies have been undertaken on Chladni, acoustics, and the history of instrument building; see for example Ullmann (2012) and Jackson (2006).

16 Image from “Ernst Chladni” (2016).

I argue that sound figures play a prominent role in *The Novices of Sais* in Novalis' concept of the development of *Poesie* as a universal language, and are alluded to through poetic, metaphorical imagery. Novalis mixes the subjective, abstract, and ideal experience of Sanskrit, which only the teacher (like the Rishi) experiences with the objective, scientific analysis of the sound figures. However, the sound figures that Novalis poeticizes are not those directly interpreted by Chladni, whose focus was on the study of vibrational patterns of tones, but rather are a result of his collaboration with friend and physicist Johann Wilhelm Ritter (1776–1810), who developed a galvanic interpretation of the “Chladni Figures.”<sup>17</sup> Whereas Chladni writes of “Schallwellen” (“sound waves”), Ritter writes of “Schallstrahlen” (“sound rays”),<sup>18</sup> arguing that sound and light are one. In his “Appendix” to *Fragmente aus dem Nachlasse eines jungen Physikers (Fragments from the Estate of a Young Physicist, 1810)*, Ritter interprets the sound figures as representing the universal language of nature, with sound containing its own writing—sound that can be seen, and writing that can be heard—a language that is therefore revealed with the human body as its instrument.<sup>19</sup> His text, along with Novalis' fragments on the sound figures, help provide a key to read the abstract imagery in *The Novices of Sais* as an analogy for Novalis' “true Sanskrit” of nature.

## 2. Sound Figures According to Novalis and Ritter

In fragment 245 of *Das Allgemeine Brouillon (The General Notebook)*, Novalis defines the nature of speaking language through metaphors, including the physical attributes of the sound figures:

245. *Music. Consonants are fingerings, and their sequences and alternations belong to the application. Vowels are strings of sound, or batons of air. The lungs are [the] bow in motion. (...)* (p. 37)<sup>20</sup>

245. *MUSIK. Die Consonanten sind die Fingersetzungen und ihre Folge und Abwechslung gehört zur Aplicatur. Die Vocale sind die tönenden Saiten, oder Luftstäbe.*<sup>21</sup> *Die Lunge ist der bewegte Bogen. (...)* (III, p. 285)

These first three sentences call to mind not only a stringed instrument being played by hand, but also a human voice producing sounds with the mouth by way of the movement of air from the lung up through the vibrating column of the throat. The “finger placements” (“Fingersetzungen”) also evoke the fingers placed on the edges of a plate to form additional nodal lines of a sound figure, and the “moving bow” (“bewegte Bogen”) which draws them stimulates the movement of the sand and sound from the plate (see Figure 2).<sup>22</sup>

17 Ritter later collaborated with Hans Christian Ørsted (1777–1851) on this project. For a detailed account of the partnership and collaboration between Ritter and Ørsted, see Christensen (1995).

18 Menke (1999), p. 70.

19 Benjamin (1963) was the first to recognize the importance of the “Appendix” for its conceptual work on the relation of language, music, and writing (pp. 240–243).

20 The translation by Wood (Novalis, 2007) misses the “the” in “Die Lunge ist *der* bewegte Bogen.”

21 Here, “Luftstäbe,” translated as “batons of air,” is a poetic license for wind instruments, indicating an air column of a rigid vibrating body.

22 For a demonstration of how Chladni Figures are formed, this video, although of poor visual quality, is helpful: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlIBfYdddhU> (Cortel 2009).

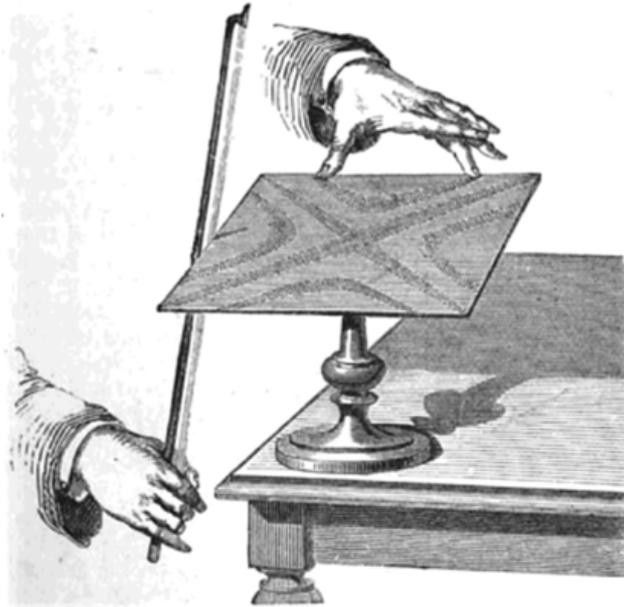


Figure 2: From William Henry Stone (1879) *Elementary Lessons on Sound*.

Of particular relevance to this analysis is Novalis' interpretation in Fragment 362 which, as I will show, is very similar to Ritter's.<sup>23</sup>

362. PHYSICS AND GRAMMAR. *A dampened sound in close proximity appears far away to us./ Lateral motions of the air in sound. **Figurelike motions of sound, like letters of the alphabet.** (Were letters originally acoustic figures? Letters a priori?) (...) Colored images are figures of light. **The light ray is the [striking] bow of [the] violin.**<sup>24</sup> (...) Every word should be an acoustic formula for its construction and pronunciation—the pronunciation itself is a higher, imitative sign of a higher pronunciation—Construction of the meaning of a word. (...)*" (p. 54, bolded text my emphasis)

362. PHYS[IK] UND GRAMM[ATIK]. *Ein gedämpfter, sehr naher Ton dünkt uns weit zu seyn./ Lateralbewegungen der Luft beym Schall. **Figurirte Schallbewegungen wie Buchstaben.** (Sollten die Buchstaben ursprünglich acustische Figuren gewesen seyn. Buchst[aben] a priori?) (...) Farbenbilder sind Lichtfiguren. **Der Lichtstrahl ist der streichende Fiedelbogen.** (...) Jedes Wort sollte eine acustische Formel seiner Construction, seiner Aussprache seyn – die Aussprache selbst ist ein Höheres, mimisches Zeichen einer höhern Aussprache – Sinnconstruction des Worts. (...)* (III, p. 305, bolded text my emphasis)

23 Early 20<sup>th</sup> century Novalis-Ritter scholar Heilborn (1901) accuses Ritter of plagiarism here (p. 135), but Specht (2010) argues that it was rather a product of their Romantic concept of "Symphilosophie"—the integration of many voices into one's own thinking (p. 159). A similar approach is found in music. Composers have been known to take musical quotes from other composers in honor of the composer and quoted piece (known commonly as "borrowing"). In Burkholder's (2019) definition, "Musical borrowing has typically been studied as an issue related to a particular repertory or genre, such as the Renaissance mass or the 20<sup>th</sup>-century avant garde, or to a particular composer, such as Handel or Mahler. Yet the use of existing music as a basis for new music is pervasive in all periods and traditions, parallel to and yet different from the practices of borrowing, reworking and allusion that contribute to the formation of traditions and the creation of meaning in literature, architecture, painting and sculpture."

24 Wood's (2007) translation is "The light ray is the stroked bow of a violin," but it should be "The light ray is the *striking* bow of *the* violin."

Looking at these figures as though they are letters, Novalis sees the basis of the language of nature. With each word then as an “acoustic formula” of its construction and pronunciation, Novalis emphasizes that there should be no separation between the signifier, its sound, and the signified. The word, sound or “acoustic formula”, and meaning (“Sinnconstruction,” which Novalis describes as a “mimetic sign of a higher pronunciation”) should ideally be one. Sanskrit offers a helpful model: Hopkins (1971) explains, “Sanskrit words were not just arbitrary labels assigned to phenomena; they were the sound forms of objects, actions, and attributes (...)” (p. 20). Rather than interpreting this language of nature as an expression of human words, Novalis imagines that the language is always in itself an expression of being.

Novalis’ ideas of language intermingle with scientific observations of the figures in the remainder of the fragment—from the movements of light and warmth, to a description of an experiment with phosphorus powder.<sup>25</sup> These notes indicate that he worked with these materials himself, similar to the way Ritter records his experimental work and plans. His scientific descriptions are also complemented by combinations of scientific observation and poetic metaphor, for example, “The ray of light is the striking bow of the violin.” But then what does light have to do with the sound figures? Ritter makes similar claims as Novalis in the “Appendix” to his *Fragments* from 1810 but explains them further.

Ritter’s “Appendix” oscillates between passages addressing scientific observations of the sound figures and poetic speculations on the relationships between music and language. The opening first few pages of the “Appendix” closely follow a letter that he wrote to Hans Christian Ørsted, in which he discusses the electrical qualities of the sound figures and speculates on performing similar experiments via chemical materials—thereby creating *chemical* sound figures.<sup>26</sup> Suddenly, in the third paragraph he writes:

—*It would be nice if that which is externally clear here, would be precisely that which the sound-figure is to us innerly:—light figure, firewriting). Every tone thus has its letter immediately by itself; and the question is whether we do not in fact only hear writing,—read, when we hear,—see writing!—And is not every seeing with the inner eye hearing, and hearing a seeing of, and through, within?* (p. 473)

—*Schön, wäre es, wie, was hier äußerlich klar würde, genau auch wäre, was uns die Klangfigur innerlich ist:—Lichtfigur. Feuerschrift). Jeder Ton hat somit seinen Buchstaben immediate bey sich; und es ist die Frage, ob wir nicht überhaupt nur Schrift hören,—lesen, wenn wir hören,—Schrift sehen!—Und ist nicht jedes Sehen*

25 “(...) What takes the place of sand here? One actually (forces) the sound to impress itself—to become *enciphered*—on a *copperplate*. Further application of this idea. (Strew phosphorus powder on a plate—so that it absorbs the colors of the *different light*, or after gently *heating*, so that it combusts—and radiates—the differently formed and diversely contacted bodies in strange figures—Preparation of such a powder). (...)” (p. 54) (“(...) Was vertritt wohl hier die Stelle des Sandes? Man (zwingt) eigentlich den Schall sich selbst *abzudrucken* – zu *chiffriren* – auf eine *Kupfertafel* zu bringen. Weitere Anwendung dieser Idee. (Bestreuung einer Tafel mit Phosphorpulver – das die Farben des *verschiednen Lichts* annähme, oder das bey einer gelinden *Erwärmung* verschiedengestalteter und mannichfach berührter Körper in sonderbaren Figuren brennte – und leuchtete – Bereitung eines solchen Pulvers.) (...)” (III, p. 305))

26 Hans Christian Ørsted, with whom Ritter studied and was in close contact, was a Danish physicist and chemist who worked with various plates of metal, glass, sand and other materials to produce sound figures. He modeled his figures after the work of Ernst Florens Friedrich Chladni (whom Ritter also mentions in his fragments). Together, Ørsted and Ritter were able to displace earlier resonance theories by discovering that no vibration can occur without electricity—which is his interpretation of added energy (Erlmann, 2014, p. 194). Music as sound also contains electricity, and therefore also light. Ritter is not just writing on a poetic, Romantic notion, but rather sees the electric current in connection with the sound figures as an energy force necessary for life on multiple levels. Strässle (2004) argues that “Chladni’s and Oersted’s *Klangfiguren* were no more than external visualizations of acoustic phenomena. Ritter’s aim, however, is rather different in that he is attempting to theorize the inner representation of tone” (p. 31). However, Ørsted’s work in *Naturphilosophie* is largely overlooked in the scholarship—his work was more in line with Ritter than with Chladni. Christensen (1995) explains that Ørsted went on to discover electromagnetism in 1820, which Ritter did not live long enough to experience. “Ørsted’s discovery was probably inspired by Ritter’s failed experiment of 1803 on galvanism and magnetism” (Christensen, 1995, p. 164).

*mit dem innern Auge Hören, und Hören ein Sehen von und durch innen?* (p. 472)<sup>27</sup>

Ritter wishes to discover that that which is clear in the outer appearances of the sound figures could be as clear on the *inside* of the body. He suggests that the appearance of this language could be connected in an organic, perhaps synaesthetic way within the body as a result of the combined perception from the eyes and ears. In a footnote to this passage after the word “firewriting” (“Feuerschrift”), Ritter explains that there are electrical processes which accompany the emergence of tone as a part of oxidation processes. He therefore questions whether sound is not also accompanied by light, which would suggest a more *natural*, organic connection between that which is visible and that which is audible—that seeing and hearing the language should happen at the same time.<sup>28</sup> Unlike in the semiotic theory of human language in *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), which shows how sounds are arbitrarily assigned to the symbols/letters of an alphabet and the signifier and signified are therefore separate from each other, this language of nature, the word itself, comes from the object it is describing—they are contained in each other:<sup>29</sup>

*In general, however, the writing must be that which is written by language, by tone, by the word itself. Here one maintains for music, or the general language, the hieroglyph, or [the one] which completely writes out the entire tone, the entire chord, etc. The speaking [thing] is identical to the spoken since everything only speaks itself. The matter itself is therefore here the writing, the note. (...) All writing must relate to the hieroglyph as organ to organic whole (...).* (p. 489)

*Ueberall aber muß die Schrift das von der Sprache, dem Ton, dem Worte, selbst, Geschriebene, seyn. Hier erhält man dann für die Musik, oder die allgemeine Sprache, die Hieroglyphe, oder die völlig vollständig den ganzen Ton, den ganzen Accord, u. s. w. ausschreibt. Das Sprechende ist dem Ausgesprochenen gleich, da alles nur sich selbst ausspricht. Die Sache selbst ist als hier die Schrift, die Note. (...) Alle Schrift zusammen muß sich zur Hieroglyphe wie Organ zum organischen Ganzen (...) verhalten.* (p. 488)

Just as the appearance of sound and light are inseparable, so, too, is the relationship between the spoken and written word. Unlike Novalis, Ritter places importance on the concept of the hieroglyph here. By the time Ritter wrote this “Appendix,” the Rosetta Stone had already been discovered, so the possibility of translating the hieroglyphs was a reality.

As signs that represent “logograms (words), phonograms (sounds), and determinatives (placed at the end of the word to help clarify its meaning)”<sup>30</sup> the hieroglyphs of ancient Egypt (however static) provide Ritter with an example of how to approach uncovering the multi-

27 Translator Holland (Ritter, 2010) offers a bilingual edition of Ritter’s *Fragments* and “Appendix.” The page numbers for the German quotes will always precede those of the corresponding translation.

28 In connection with the language-nature of the sound figures, Ritter writes about the *Lichtenberg Figuren* (“Lichtenberg Figures”), which were discovered by German physicist Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742–1799) and are produced by applying an electric current through solids, liquids, or gases. Ernst Florens Friedrich Chladni had initially received the idea to perform the sound figures experiments after having studied Lichtenberg’s *Lichtfiguren*. Interestingly, these Lichtenberg Figures can also appear on the surface of the human body, for example, after being hit by lightning—a scarring, or as Ritter would argue, a “writing” that appears on the outside of the body. See for example Domart, Garet, E. and Garet, Y. (2000).

29 Novalis takes this idea further, suggesting that the word should also be a mimetic sign of its “higher pronunciation,” that is, its “meaning”: “Every word should be an acoustic formula for its construction and pronunciation—the pronunciation itself is a higher, *imitative sign* of a higher pronunciation—*Construction of the meaning* of a word.” (p. 54) (“Jedes Wort sollte eine acustische Formel seiner Construction, seiner Aussprache seyn – die Aussprache selbst ist ein Höheres, *mimisches Zeichen* einer höhern Aussprache – *Sinnconstruction* des Worts.” (III, p. 305))

30 Scoville (2015).

layered essence of music as a universal language through the sound figures—not as understood by the mind, but rather by the body. Ritter sees language—both written and spoken—as an entire, organic system in motion.<sup>31</sup> Electricity, in his thinking, is the means by which light and sound travel—it is what connects humans with nature, and in turn, the entire universe. Music occupies and exists in space, then, not only in time. Indeed, he calls upon the Music of the Spheres to support his claim, suggesting that the music of all worldly bodies travels from the sun through the rays of light—that music, the general language, which split into specific languages, originated from the sun.<sup>32</sup> He continues this thought:

*The world, as far as it is and can become visible is this letter, this writing. The word writes, the letter resounds; each, inseparable is being, consciousness, life; and so on up to God. Writing, word, light, and consciousness fall into one. The eye [is] the sense for writing which can only be recognized on and through the sound. The sound itself however is light, which must already belong to another sense than the eye because the eye does not see the light but rather only by way of light = tone. (p. 485)*

*Die Welt, soweit sie sichtbar ist, und werden kann, ist dieser Buchstabe, diese Schrift. Das Wort schreibt, der Buchstabe tönt; beydes in seiner Unzertrennbarkeit ist das Sein, das Bewußtseyn, das Leben; so herauf bis zum Gott. Schrift, Wort, Licht und Bewußtseyn fallen in Eins. Das Auge der Sinn für Schrift, die nur am und durch den Ton erkannt werden kann. Der Ton selbst aber ist Licht, das ohnehin einem anderen Sinne, als dem Auge, gehören mußte, weil das Auge das Licht nicht sieht, sondern nur vermittelst des Lichts = Tons. (p. 484)*

Just as there are types of light that are not visible to the human eye (for example ultraviolet rays, which Ritter discovered in 1801), Ritter postulates that there are also sounds, not audible by the human ear. Because sound and light waves do not interfere with each other, Ritter finds them to be intimately connected; in fact, toward the end of his “Appendix” he concludes, “Therefore: *tone and light do not interfere with each other!* How could they however, in essence, since they are indeed *one?*” (p. 507) (“Also: *Ton und Licht stören sich nicht!* —Wie aber im Grunde auch könnten sie es, da sie ja Eins sind?” (p. 506)).

While today we know that sound and light are not one and the same, Ritter’s theory was ahead of its time, as it was not until Heinrich Hertz’s discovery of radio waves in 1886 that there was scientific proof that sound can travel via invisible light waves.<sup>33</sup> Ritter suggests then, that like the direct relationship between sound and light, and the spoken and written word in these figures, the understanding of the self can be uncovered in the same way by studying this phenomenon in nature—which brings us back to *The Novices of Sais*.

31 As Wetzels (1971) writes, the Jena Romantics, inspired by Friedrich Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*, thought of nature as “one huge living organism;” they therefore desired to find the “soul” of this all-encompassing unity of inorganic and organic nature (p. 45). Erlmann (2014) adds, “Nature was seen as a coherent whole, with Volta’s electric pile being but one element in a long chain joining the organic and inorganic. In fact, the cosmos itself was seen as an immense battery and galvanism as the ‘key to the entry into innermost Nature’” (p. 191).

32 Echoing Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) in “Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache” (“Treatise on the Origins of Language, 1772”), Ritter asserts that sound, and therefore music, was the first general language—then, human languages developed from it. See especially pp. 473–476 in the “Appendix” for the German and English references to Herder.

33 Shlain (1991) explains, “Although radio waves are at the far end of the electromagnetic spectrum and are invisible, they are a form of light” (p. 285).

### 3. Poetic Sound Figures in *The Novices of Sais*

As mentioned in my introduction, in Novalis' story, the *true Sanskrit* is described as not only writing, but also image, figure, light, and sound. These descriptions are spread throughout the narrative and not all of the elements are described at once. This is indicative of the novices' search for the elusive universal language of nature, which they have not yet experienced, but of which they have heard. Novalis' fragment 511 on *Poesie* in *Das Allgemeine Brouillon* (*The General Notebook*) explains this approach:

[511.] *Poesie must never be the main material, always only the miraculous. One should not represent what one would not fully overlook, distinctly perceive, and of which one would be quite a master—for example in the representations of the transcendental.* (My translation)

[511.] *Die Poesie muß nie der Hauptstoff, immer nur das Wunderbare seyn. Man sollte nichts darstellen, was man nicht völlig übersähe, deutlich vernähme, und ganz Meister desselben wäre – z. B. bey Darstellungen des Übersinnlichen.* (III, p. 640)

For this reason, the novices are not able to represent precisely what the teacher experiences in the descriptions of their observations. The novice who is the narrator of the opening section, explains that only the teacher, like the Rishi (the "seer" of the Vedas), has access to experiencing this language. He observes:

*A little later, there was one who said: "The holy scripture needs no explanation. He who speaks true, is full of eternal life, his written word seems wondrously akin to the mysteries, for it is a chord taken from the symphony of the universe." Surely the voice was speaking of our teacher, for he knows how to gather together the traits that are scattered everywhere. A unique light is kindled in his eyes when he lays down the sacred rune before us and peers into our eyes to see whether in us the [star] is risen that makes the figure visible and intelligible.* (p. 5/7, my emphasis)<sup>34</sup>

*Nicht lange darauf sprach einer: „Keiner Erklärung bedarf die heilige Schrift. Wer wahrhaft spricht, ist des ewigen Lebens voll, und wunderbar verwandt mit echten Geheimnissen dünkt uns seine Schrift, denn sie ist ein Akkord aus des Weltalls Symphonie.“ Von unserm Lehrer sprach gewiß die Stimme, denn er versteht die Züge zu versammeln, die überall zerstreut sind. Ein eignes Licht entzündet sich in seinen Blicken, wenn vor uns nun die hohe Rune liegt, und er in unsern Augen späht, ob auch in uns aufgegangen ist das Gestirn, das die Figur sichtbar und verständlich macht.* (I, p. 79, my emphasis)

Here, he describes several elements of the language. The "holy writing" is a chord from the symphony of the universe. Only the teacher knows how to bring the "traits" ("Züge") together—a light emerges from his eyes when he lays the sacred rune before the novices' eyes, and he looks into theirs to see if the image of the star has formed, that this figure makes visible and understandable. The novice continues:

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<sup>34</sup> Manheim (2005) translates this last line as "...whether in us the light is risen that makes the figure visible and intelligible." "Light" misses the original German "Gestirn," which means star, and emphasizes not only the light but the shape of the light like a sound figure.

*Often he has told us how when he was a child, the desire [to] practice, to busy, and to fulfill his senses left him no peace. He looked up at the **stars and copied their paths and positions in the sand**. Unremittingly he observed the heavens, and never wearied of contemplating [his] clarity, [his] movements, [his] clouds, [his] lights.<sup>35</sup> He gathered stones, flowers, insects of all sorts, and **arranged them in rows of many different kinds**. (...) The perceptions of his senses crowded into **great colorful images; he heard, saw, touched and thought at once**. (p. 7/9, my emphasis)*

*Oft hat er uns erzählt, wie ihm als Kind der Trieb, die Sinne zu üben, zu beschäftigen und zu erfüllen, keine Ruhe ließ. **Den Sternen sah er zu und ahmte ihre Züge, ihre Stellung im Sande nach**. In's Luftmeer sah er ohne Rast, und ward nicht müde **seine Klarheit, seine Bewegungen, seine Wolken, seine Lichter** zu betrachten. Er sammelte sich Steine, Blumen, Käfer aller Art, und **legte sie auf mannigfache Weise sich in Reihen**. (...) In große bunte Bilder drängten sich die Wahrnehmungen seiner Sinne: er **hörte, sah, tastete und dachte zugleich**. (I, pp. 79–80, my emphasis)*

This is the first instance in the literary fragment where the novice describes how the teacher creates these figures: from the stars, which he imitates in the sand, and from objects he collects from nature, which he lays in rows. By gathering objects of nature or tracing the stars in the sand, the teacher creates the form that produces a sound (that at this point only he can hear). But it is not just sound—a mixing of the senses occurs—a synaesthetic reaction, which allows for deeper understanding through *feeling* (recall Schlegel (1808) describing the “feines Gefühl,” “fine feeling” of Sanskrit). The novices, as though in unison, lament that humanity cannot hear the inner music of nature anymore, and therefore cannot sense the figures inside themselves. If the human could learn to feel again, “then the stars would arise within him” (p. 71) (“dann gingen die Gestirne in ihm auf” (I, p. 96)).

The stones are mentioned several times throughout the story—they are placed in many “rows” or “rays” that touch each other, like an image of stars or the sun, which is a common form and variation of the traditional sound figures. Recall Ritter’s assertion in his “Appendix” about the physical sun in the universe, which represents the opposite movement—the splitting that happens from music (the general language) into specific languages is from the source, the sun outward (p. 484). Novalis’ *manmade* sound figures then represent the retracing of the rays back to the source—and the self.

Just like Ritter’s assertion that the writing of the sound figures is already present before their excitation, so too is the knowledge of the self already present and needs only be set in motion. In Novalis’ text, this process of deciphering must be *developed* with a combination of contemplation about the outer and inner worlds.

*[If one would have only first brought out a few movements] to serve **as nature’s [letters]**, the deciphering would become increasingly simple and our power over the movement and generation of thoughts would enable us to produce natural ideas and natural compositions even without any preceding real impression, and then the ultimate end would be attained. (p. 81, my emphasis)<sup>36</sup>*

35 Manheim translates this line as “...their clarity, their movements, their clouds, their lights,” when the original clearly specifies “seine,” “his.”

36 Manheim translates “Hätte man dann nur erst einige Bewegungen” as “Once we had evolved thought processes,” which misses that Novalis writes here of “movements,” which can be related to the wave forms of sound. He also translates “Buchstaben der Natur” as “nature’s code,” losing the significance of letters making up an alphabet—they represent precisely what they are: likewise, wave forms are the building blocks of tones.

*Hätte man dann nur erst einige Bewegungen, als **Buchstaben der Natur**, herausgebracht, so würde das Dechiffrieren immer leichter von statten gehen, und die Macht über die Gedankenerzeugung und Bewegung den Beobachter in Stand setzen, auch ohne vorhergegangenen wirklichen Eindruck, Naturgedanken hervorzubringen und Naturkompositionen zu entwerfen, und dann wäre der Endzweck erreicht. (I, p. 98, my emphasis)*

The novices’ ultimate goal is to understand these figures as letters of an alphabet, so that the language can be deciphered with more ease. Here the base form of the inner sound figures is named, just as in both Novalis’ fragment and Ritter’s “Appendix”—first the letters of nature must be found, which will then ultimately form the language of nature.

So, the novices begin their search in the outer world of nature in order to rediscover their inner connections—the key to which only they have. Some say,

*What need to journey warily through the dismal world of visible things? **For the purer world lies in us**, in this source. (...) We need not inquire at length; an easy comparison, a few lines in the sand are enough, and we shall understand. Thus all things are a great manuscript to which we hold the key... (p. 47, my emphasis)*

*Was brauchen wir die trübe Welt der sichtbaren Dinge mühsam zu durchwandern? **Die reinere Welt liegt ja in uns**, in diesem Quell. (...) Wir brauchen nicht erst lange nachzuforschen, eine leichte Vergleichung, nur wenige **Züge im Sande sind genug, um uns zu verständigen. So ist uns alle eine große Schrift, wozu wir den Schlüssel haben...** (I, pp. 89–90, my emphasis)*

According to Novalis, it is not mankind as a whole who has this particular gift—it is reserved for a special kind of human—the poet. The poet is the one who can make words out of the lines of movement (I, p. 102). He follows the path of the scientist and picks up where he left off (I, p. 103–104).<sup>37</sup> With this, he has the gift of reading the “labyrinth paths” like a “map” (I, p. 103).<sup>38</sup>

In the seemingly climatic moment of the literary fragment, the narrator steps back from tuning into the conversations between the novices and travelers they encounter, and hears the “musical pronunciation” of their speech:

*(...) **Their speech was a wondrous song**, its irresistible tones penetrated deep into the inwardness of nature and split it apart. Each of their names seemed to be the key to the soul of each thing in nature. With creative power these vibrations called forth all images of the world’s phenomena, and the life of the universe can rightly be said to have been an eternal dialogue of a thousand voices; for in the language of those men*

37 “The **scientist** follows their steps and gathers every treasure they have let fall in their innocence and joy, the **poet**, filled with sympathy, does homage to their love, and seeks in his **songs** to transplant this love, this germ of the golden age, into other times and lands.” (pp. 101/103) (“(...) Ihren Tritten folgt der **Forscher**, um jedes Kleinod zu sammeln, was sie in ihrer Unschuld und Freude haben fallen lassen, ihrer Liebe huldigt der mitfühlende **Dichter** und such durch seine **Gesänge** diese Liebe, diesen Keim des goldnen Alters, in andre Zeiten und Länder zu verpflanzen.” (pp. 103–104))

38 Unlike Novalis, Ritter gives the power to understand and create the musical universal language of nature directly to the composer, suggesting that music can be used to manipulate its listeners, for good and for evil. Ritter explains in his “Appendix”: “Composers can achieve an infinitely great dignity. They **manage an entire race related to mankind**; they allow its **servants** and **angels** to appear, and they can also summon its **devils**. They will never succeed in the latter as much as the former; and thus of the glorious, **good apparitions in music** there are more significant ones, and far more, than the ones which are **worthy of contempt**.” (p. 479) (“Componisten können zu einer unendlich hohen Würde gelangen. **Sie verwalten ein ganzes dem Menschen verwandtes Geschlecht**; seine **Diener** und seine **Engel** lassen sie erscheinen, und auch seine **Teufel** können sie aufrufen. Aber das letzte wird ihnen nie zu jenem Grade gelingen, wie das erste; und so sind der herrlichen, **guten Erscheinungen in der Musik** bedeutendere und weit mehrere da, als der **verachtungswürdigen**.” (p. 478))

*all forces, all modes of action seemed miraculously united. To seek out the ruins of this language, or at least all reports concerning it, had been one of the main purposes of their journey....* (p. 113, my emphasis)

*(...) Ihre Aussprache war ein wunderbarer Gesang, dessen unwiderstehliche Töne tief in das Innere jeder Natur eindringen und sie zerlegen. Jeder ihrer Namen schien das Losungswort für die Seele jedes Naturkörpers. Mit schöpferischer Gewalt erregten diese Schwingungen alle Bilder der Welterscheinungen, und von ihnen konnte man mit Recht sagen, daß das Leben des Universums ein ewiges tausendstimmiges Gespräch sei; denn in ihrem Sprechen schienen alle Kräfte, alle Arten der Tätigkeit auf das unbegreiflichste vereinigt zu sein. Die Trümmer dieser Sprache, wenigstens alle Nachrichten von ihr, aufzusuchen, war ein Hauptzweck ihrer Reise gewesen....* (I, pp. 106–107, my emphasis)

This seemingly euphoric moment toward the end of the literary fragment is placed into question by the language itself. Some observations are certain, and others only appear to be the case, as indicated by the verb *scheinen* (to seem or appear). Their names only *appear* to be the key to the soul of every natural body, and it *only seems* that they come close to uniting themselves with the incomprehensible. Novalis writes with more confidence, however, that their speech or pronunciation (“Aussprache”) was a “wonderful song,” and that one could certainly say that the life of the universe is an “eternal thousand-voiced conversation.” Returning to fragment 245 from *Das Allgemeine Brouillon* (*The General Notebook*), a principal component necessary for Novalis’ concept of *Poesie* is music, as he explains toward the end of the fragment:

245. *Music.* (...) *On the universal language of music. The spirit becomes free, indeterminately stimulated—which is so beneficial for it—and seems so familiar to it, so patriotic—that for this short moment it is transported to its Indian homeland. All love—and goodness, future and past are aroused in it—hope and longing. / Attempts to speak musically. Our language—was much more musical to begin with, and has gradually become so prosaic—so unmusical. It has now become more like noise-sound [Laut], if one thus wishes to degrade this beautiful word. It must become song once again. The consonants transform tones into noise.*” (p. 37, with my corrections and bolded terms my emphasis)

245. *Musik.* (...) *Über die all[emeine]n Sprache der Musik. Der Geist wird unbestimmt angeregt – das tut ihm so wohl – das dünkt ihm so bekannt, so vaterländisch – er ist auf diese kurzen Augenblicke in seiner indischen Heymath. Alles Liebe – und Gute, Zukunft und Vergangenheit regt sich in ihm – Hoffnung und Sehnsucht. / Vers[uch] bestimmt durch die Musik zu sprechen. Unsre Sprache – sie war zu Anfang viel musicalischer und hat sich nur nach gerade so prosaisirt – so entönt. Es ist jetzt mehr Schallen geworden – Laut, wenn man diese schöne Wort so erniedrigen will. Sie muß wieder Gesang werden. Die Consonanten verwandeln den Ton in Schall.*” (III, p. 285, bolded terms my emphasis)

Novalis traces the origin of music as the universal language to India—that in experiencing music the spirit returns to this home. He therefore suggests that the attempt to speak musically will bring one closer to experiencing the universal language. According to the teacher in *The Novices of Sais*, this is achieved by first gathering, organizing and meditating on objects in nature.

The language of nature comes from these objects as though sound figures inside of the body... eventually sound, light, and figures emerge that will make the language comprehensible. The *Trümmer* or “ruins” that the novices seek, as Ritter would also suggest, are inside themselves and must only be set into motion—then their pronunciation, or speech, will become musical again.

#### 4. Conclusion

In *The Novices of Sais*, Novalis takes the characteristics of the sound figures and separates them into their distinct attributes; they are fragmented through descriptions of inner and outer light rays and sound, in turn representing the irrepresentability of *Poesie*, his ideal, universal language—the “true Sanskrit” of nature. Novalis makes the figures themselves more *tangible* by giving humans (and in particular poets) the power to create them via rows of stones and other objects of nature and by drawing lines in the sand—suggesting that the physical images in the outer world also produce the figures and sounds which should be perceived as a synaesthetic reaction from inside their bodies.<sup>39</sup>

Together, Novalis and Ritter were longing for an absolute, universal language, and through their scientific and poetic investigations, the sound figures seemed to be the key to deciphering this language—they point toward the scientific expression, perhaps, of this original language of nature so closely related to music. This *Poesie* would contain its sound, writing, and meaning all at the same time; as in Sanskrit, there would no longer be a separation between objects and their names, nor humans and nature. Knowledge of the properties of Sanskrit and Ritter’s scientific and poetic narratives on the sound figures help shed “light,” so to speak, on the possible significance and meaning behind Novalis’ abstract and metaphorical use of them in his fragments and *The Novices of Sais*.

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The content for this article has been derived from my dissertation, Smith., A. (2017). *Hearing with the Body: Poetics of Musical Meaning in Novalis, Ritter, Hoffmann and Schumann* (Doctoral dissertation) with some revisions and an important addition. This present article addresses the role of Novalis’ ideal concept of “Sanskrit” in his literary fragment, which I previously overlooked and adds a significant layer of meaning to Novalis’ and Ritter’s interpretation of the sound figures. It also corrects and further clarifies some of my early assumptions regarding the role of hearing in his text—not from the outside through the ears, as I argue in my dissertation, but rather as an expression from inside the human body—an inner hearing or “feeling” that then becomes the “musical pronunciation” of speech. The sound figures become an analogy for Novalis’ concept of the “true Sanskrit” of nature. This shows a significant influence from the early reception of Hinduism, Buddhism and Sanskrit studies by the western world on both Novalis and Johann Wilhelm Ritter’s work, however abstract and fragmented. This research project is a work-in-progress. Like Novalis, my subjective knowledge of Sanskrit is very limited, as I cannot read or speak it. From what I have read objectively, any true experience of the language must be subjective, like the teacher’s—it is otherwise lost in translation. Many thanks to the editors of the journal for their detailed feedback, and to Yasas Renn and Don Carrell for the helpful resources and our discussions on Sanskrit.

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<sup>39</sup> Ritter, on the other hand, gives this power to composers, acknowledging their great responsibility and the possible positive and negative influences that could ensue.

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RELATE (Research Laboratory for Art and Technology), Aalborg University  
Rendsburggade 14, 9000 Denmark

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