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**Citation:** Pace, I. (2020). What does it mean to be a Self-Reflective Practitioner?. Paper presented at the Sir John Manduell Research Forum Series, 5 Feb 2020, Manchester, UK.

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# **‘What Does it Mean to be a Self- Reflexive Practitioner?’**

**Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester  
5 February 2020**

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# Key Concepts

- *Practice-as-Research*

# Some Research Questions for Performers

- What tempo should be used for various large-scale sections of the score in question?
- How much flexibility should be employed within these broad tempi?
- On a smaller scale, what forms of stylisation and elasticity would be most appropriate for playing various types of rhythms?
- In music with a relatively stable metre, should one at least slightly stress notes which fall on strong beats, and play those on weak beats less?
- Should dissonant pitches receive special emphasis, and if so, how much?
- When might the dynamic envelope for a line serve to emphasise its contours, or be otherwise?
- What is the dynamic range desired for the piece (e.g. how quiet are dynamics such as *ppp* and how loud *fff*)?
- Through various combinations of accentuation, articulation and rhythm, to what extent, and where, should one tend towards continuity of line, or more angular approaches?

# Some Research Questions for Performers

- In polyphonic or contrapuntal textures, to what extent should one be aiming to project a singular voice which is foregrounded above others, or a greater degree of dynamic equilibrium between parts?
- How exact should synchronisation between hands or parts be? Are there occasions where staggering of different pitches and lines can be fruitfully employed?
- In a piano work, where should one employ the right pedal? Should the 'basic sound' in legato passages be pedalled, or might it be used more selectively? Should pedalling be allowed to carry across changes in harmonies, and if so, when?
- What sort of technical approach to one's instrument is appropriate for this music (it may be several)? In the case of the piano, might one tend towards higher fingers and a clear, well-articulated sound, or play closer to the keys?
- Should one aim for a singular prominent climactic point within a movement, or can there be several of roughly equal prominence?
- (and many more)

# Key Concepts

- *Practice-as-Research*
- *Autoethnography*

# Ethnography and Autoethnography

- *Ethnography*: the study of peoples, social and cultural practices, values and environments, in the form of writing.
- *Autoethnography*: turns the lens on the researcher themselves and their own cultural milieu, practices, values and ideologies. Sometimes (wrongly in my opinion) conceived primarily as a *method*.
- Ethnography commonly employed as a strategy by ethnomusicologists.
- Classic ethnographies grew from immersion within the cultural environment being investigated, then detailed analysis of the data found.
- But now the term is used to denote almost any research with data sourced from living participants.

## **Anonymous (ethnographically sourced) senior UK musicologist on ethnomusicological work**

‘The best ethnomusicologists I have worked with have strong critiques of authenticity narratives, skepticism about the general way the ethnographic method is conducted, read books (including historical writing and writing about history) and use various kinds of theory that pervade other kinds of humanities scholarship. The worst simply show what look like lovely holiday snaps, give a pseudo-literary, ‘atmospheric’ narrative about their trip, and quote their interlocutors at length, nodding sagely.’

# My definitions

1. Ethnography of a community of which the research is a part.
2. Self-documentation, often for cathartic or therapeutic purposes.
3. Self-documentation accompanied by wider contextualisation and critical self-reflection.

3 can be called *self-critical practice and critical writing on practice*.

For performers, simply *critical performance*.

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‘The conscious and deliberate *exploration* of an artist’s aesthetic universe is how I define “artistic research.” It is obvious that, since artists are the only ones who have unmediated, direct access to their own aesthetic universe, artistic research can only be performed by those artists themselves.’

Bart Vanhecke, ‘A New Path to Music: Experimental Exploration and Expression of an Aesthetic Universe’, in Darla Crispin and Bob Gilmore (eds.), *Artistic Experimentation in Music: An Anthology* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2014), p. 94.

# Key Concepts

- *Practice-as-Research*
- *Autoethnography*
- *Experimentation*

# Experimentation

Model from Michael Schwab, in various essays in Darla Crispin and Bob Gilmore (eds.), *Artistic Experimentation in Music: An Anthology* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2014), drawing on philosopher of science Hans-Jörg Rheinberg. Three key terms:

*Experimental systems*: the smallest units of empirical research, designed ‘to given unknown answers to questions that the experimenters themselves are not yet able to ask’. Schwab argues that the outcomes of these matter more than the means by which they are arrived at.

*Technical objects*: fixed and accessible objects, sometimes the results of previous experimentation, which condition and limit experimental systems and ‘embody the knowledge of a given research field at a given time’.

*Epistemic things*: the results of experimental systems.

# Notation

Ian Pace, 'Notation, Time and the Performer's Relationship to the Score in Contemporary Music', in Darla Crispin (ed.), *Unfolding Time: Studies in Temporality in Twentieth-Century Music* (Leuven: Leuven University press, 2009), pp. 151-192.

- Rejection of 'positivistic' model of notation as indicating a singular result, then stylisation, interpretation is an added extra.
- Fundamental question of how one *reads* notation.
- Notation instead delineates a range of possible practices by a process of exclusion and difference.
- No 'right' way to play a triplet, but there are some ways which would definitely be 'wrong'.

# Notation

- Developed this model out of frustration with positivistic assumptions about notation and scores in existing performance cultures, and which also informed some theoretical writings, such as those of Roger Marsh or Roger Heaton, or some of the empirical musicology of Nicholas Cook and others.
- To simply ‘hear what one writes’ assumes some singularity of what is ‘heard’. Removes the performer from the equation.
- Myopic model of performance, resembles some of Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt’s polemics from the mid-1920s on the virtues of mechanical instruments.



# Ian Pace, *Das hat Rrrrasss* (2018)

59 momentarily synchronised with piano 11

you are quite ri dic - u - lous

*f poco a poco cresc.*

*f poco a poco cresc.*

60

16:11

# Ian Pace, *Das hat Rrrrasss* (2018)

19

95

6:5

dep - u - ty played a - long.

*f* (upper part)

9:7

10:7

*mf* (upper part)

*p* (lower part)

(L.H.)

7:4

L.H.

9:8

17

16

17

16

Detailed description: This is a page of a musical score for a piece titled 'Das hat Rrrrasss' by Ian Pace, page 19. The score is written for voice and piano. The vocal line is on a single treble clef staff, starting at measure 95. It features lyrics: 'dep - u - ty played a - long.' Above the vocal line, there is a bracketed measure of 6:5. The piano accompaniment consists of three staves: a right-hand treble clef staff, a left-hand treble clef staff (labeled '(L.H.)'), and a bass clef staff. The right-hand staff has dynamic markings *f* (upper part) and *mf* (upper part), with a bracketed measure of 10:7. The left-hand staff has a dynamic marking *p* (lower part) and a bracketed measure of 9:8. The bass staff has a bracketed measure of 7:4. The score ends at measure 117, with a double bar line and the number 16 in the bottom right corner of the piano part.

# Sylvano Bussotti, *Five Piano Pieces for David Tudor* (1959)

**V<sub>b</sub>) piano piece for David Tudor 1**  
(Tutto nell'orbita del pp, sempre)

MD  
MS

1 30''

2 15''

3 45''

1.5.1959

# Sylvano Bussotti, *Five Piano Pieces for David Tudor* (1959)

7 vedi NOTE

XIV piano piece for David Tudor 4  
disegno del 1949  
adozione pianistica: 27.3.1959

1 { S  
M  
P

2 Battuto  
Muto  
Coperchio  
Tastiera

3 { sequenza  
frequenza  
timbro  
durata  
intensità

4 { u  
o  
dentro il piano

5 ( )

6 {

# Michael Finnissy, 'A foggy day in London town'

Faster ( $\text{♩} = 76$ ) (and rubato), but still rather gloomily to start with

The first system of the musical score consists of two staves, treble and bass clef. The treble staff begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic marking. It features a series of chords and intervals, with a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure and another triplet of eighth notes in the fourth measure. The bass staff provides a steady accompaniment with quarter notes. The system concludes with the instruction *marcato*.

The second system continues the piece. It includes a *rall.* (rallentando) section followed by a return to *a tempo*. The treble staff has a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure and a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure. The bass staff has a triplet of eighth notes in the third measure and another triplet of eighth notes in the fourth measure. A piano (*p*) dynamic marking is present in the treble staff. The system concludes with the instruction *(marcato)*.

The third system features tempo changes: *poco accel.* (poco accelerando), *poco rall.* (poco rallentando), and *a tempo*. The treble staff has a triplet of eighth notes in the fourth measure. The bass staff has a triplet of eighth notes in the third measure. The system concludes with a triplet of eighth notes in the treble staff.

# Michael Finnissy, 'Embraceable you'

faster

The first system of musical notation consists of two staves, treble and bass clef. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 5/4. The music features a complex, rhythmic melody in the treble staff and a more rhythmic accompaniment in the bass staff. A bracket above the treble staff in the fourth measure indicates a 5:4 ratio. The system ends with a repeat sign.

The second system of musical notation continues the piece. It features similar complex rhythmic patterns in both staves. A bracket above the treble staff in the third measure indicates a 5:4 ratio. The system ends with a repeat sign.

The third system of musical notation concludes the piece. It features a triplet of eighth notes in the treble staff in the final measure, marked with a '3' above it. The system ends with a repeat sign.

# **Finnissy, Gershwin Arrangements – considerations and approaches**

- Attempting to assert Finnissy's modernity, in the face of some scepticism about his then-later work (by the mid-1990s).

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- Dissatisfaction: flat and monochrome textures; didacticism of rhythms; overly bleak; music becomes a dogmatic aesthetic-political statement.
- Anti-romanticism: related to experiences at Chetham's School of Music, and its association with toxic, charismatic and abusive teachers. Able to gain more measured view after campaigning on abuse there.