

The Aesthetics of Losing Control

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ABSTRACT

My thesis consists of a series of compositions for voice and live electronics called *Every Night I Lose Control*, as well as the accompanying text and performances. Every piece is designed so that I fail as a performer. I performed the work in several venues as a complete work in a style similar to cabaret.

The written component of the thesis presents my rationale behind this body of work. In Chapter 1 explain the set of concepts that my work engages: the fragile body, the tension between artifice and actuality in performance, and the aesthetics of losing control. Chapter 2 provides an analysis of works that deal with similar issues of loss of control and failure during performance. In Chapter 3, I present and discuss the design and implementation of each composition in the series. In the Appendix, I include a journal of my thoughts and experiences from taking the piece on tour.

The three pieces that comprise *Every Night I Lose Control* are *N is for Neville who died of Ennui*, in which the computer gets bored when I repeat movements; *The Error of my Ways*, in which a bad implementation of an algorithm gradually adds error until the process fails; and *balancing act*, in which I attempt to follow the path of an invisible point in space using auditory feedback.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In every moment, there is the possibility of the unexpected. And with the unexpected, there is the possibility that the illusion of control over one's own volition may be shattered. This situation is mirrored on stage for musicians and other performers. It might be that part of the thrill of watching a performance is the very real possibility of failure. In both cases of real life and performance, the same questions are raised: What does it feel like to lose control? How does one respond to the experience? *Every Night I Lose Control* directly engages the issues surrounding this type of failure by making the loss of control inevitable. As the performer of this work, I have direct experience with loss of control and failure. I have no choice but to confront this experience of failure and respond to the situation of losing control as it is happening.

The loss of control of one's own body is one of the most disturbing varieties of human failure. It challenges the sense of self. Specifically, the breakdown or failure of the body affects the self-concept, that is, the person's perception of herself. It also affects the mode of embodied interaction, that is, the subjective experience of the body interacting with the external world. Embodied interaction is a salient issue for musicians in performance because producing sound necessarily involves the body: one must pluck a string with one's fingers for it to sound on a guitar; one must draw breath and direct it through the vocal chords when singing, and so on. Losing control of the body could imply a disassociation of self from sound. When sound does not follow from intentional movements made by the musician, it causes a disruption in her sense of embodiment.

She no longer has the experience of affecting sound directly. Instead, she is aware of the bodily processes involved in the creation of the sound.

When a performer loses control of her body and experiences a shift in awareness of the body, how does the performer respond to the experience? On one hand, the performer would like to pretend that there is nothing wrong. On the other hand, the performer should convey the intentions of a work. What happens when the explicit intention of a work is the loss of control?

In *Every Night I Lose Control*, this conflict of interest introduces a difficulty in interpreting the actions of a performer. The performer may be pretending either a loss or retention of control. However, a struggle to maintain control over the musical elements of the piece is still taking place on stage. When the performer moves her hand, it could be in order to affect the sound, or it could serve to convey the struggle or metaphor of the piece to the audience; i.e., the movement could be in the service of acting, not making music. It also could be that the performer is moving her hand to give the impression that she is controlling the sound because she has lost control, and she is attempting to hide that fact. In the performance, the line between what is actually happening and what it staged becomes blurred.

The ambiguities of performing *Every Night I Lose Control* are a result of the loss of control in the work. In exposing the limits of the body, this work is also creating a space for the inventions of artifice by the performer. Being out of control musically leaves room for the performer to make gestures and movements that are for the purpose of conveying an emotion or alluding to a state of being. If the performer maintains control

over the music, she must allocate her all resources to that task. Losing control provides both a challenge and an unusual freedom.

1.2 The Fragile Body

In terms of an individual, subjective experience may be described as a conscious awareness of her own existence as it is occurring. A person may also have an awareness of being physically embodied. Additionally, there might be more than one way to experience this embodiment.

For instance, when one's hand picks up a pen, this may be experienced as the self picking up the pen. This mode of experience may be called *unreflective*. A second mode of experiencing embodiment may occur when the individual perceives herself as existing inside the body. In this case, she may develop the concepts of self and body as distinct entities. This internally existing self may use the body as an interface to the environment. When she picks up the pen, she controls the fingers of the hand to grasp and raise the pen. In order to pick up the pen, she has developed a set of mental representations for the hand and fingers. She engages with those representations in order to pick up the pen. This experiential mode of embodiment may be called *reflective*.

If one is interacting with the environment in an unreflective mode, what causes the shift into a reflective mode? This moment can be called a *break*. A discrepancy between intentional action and its results can cause such a break. One attempts to pick up the pen and instead it falls to the floor. This causes a shift in perception, and one becomes aware of the pen falling out of one's hand, and of the body failing in a task. One is now in a reflective mode. The term *the fragile body* describes when the body fails in such a way

that it causes a break. When I describe the body as fragile, I am pointing to a sense of the self, which consists of the integration of subject and body that can easily be broken.

Another example of the reflective mode is when one is learning to play a musical instrument. A novice learning to play the violin tries to produce a pure tone, but he lacks the skills to do so. The situation creates a discrepancy between intention and capability. The limitations of the body are made apparent. The novice violinist must think in detail about the body's movements in relation to the instrument; e.g., how fingers are to be placed so as to produce the correct pitch, which part of the finger to press down on the strings, and so forth. The novice's body feels clumsy and inefficient; she is confronted by the fragile body.

1.3 Artifice and Actuality: What is staged and what is not

A distinction may be drawn between *functional* and *expressive* performance gestures. For example, consider a pianist performing. The functional gesture encompasses the movements that occur in order to produce and affect the sound of the piano. Pressing her fingers down on the keys constitutes a functional action. This stands in contrast to the expressive gesture, which encompasses movements that the performer makes in order to convey a sense of feeling to the audience. The flourish with which she lifts her hands from the keyboard could be seen as an expressive gesture, in that it does not contribute to the production of the sound.

In performance, the differences between the two types of gestures can become blurred. For the pianist, some motions are either functional or expressive. Perhaps during performance, her body sways back and forth in time with the music. This could be seen as either expressive or functional. She may be expressing the rhythm and feeling of the

piece, or she may be moving her body to keep time as she is playing. Or, she may move some part of her body to the music in order to keep time, but she sways instead of tapping her foot for expressive reasons. It can be difficult to discern the motivations behind the performer's actions.

Another distinction might be drawn between *staged* and *reactive* gestures. For example, when an actor pretends the lukewarm cup she holds is too hot to handle; when someone hands it to her, she drops it. Conversely, the action would be spontaneously reactive if someone handed her a cup that is actually hot. Much of the actor's work resides in making the staged *seem* reactive.

Even in scripted works, the difference between these types of gestures can be indistinct. According to Stanislavski's *Theory of Physical Actions*, when a person performs a gesture it affects her emotional state; by performing the actions of a particular emotional or mental state, one can produce that state (Moore 17-21). It might be unclear, even to the performer, which action is staged and which is not.

1.4 The Body and the Aesthetics of Losing Control

It [theater] invites the mind to share a delirium which exalts its energies; and we can see, to conclude, that from the human point of view, the action of the theater, like that of plague, is beneficial, for, impelling men to see themselves as they are it causes the mask to fall, reveals the lie, the slackness, baseness, and hypocrisy of our world. (Artaud 1958: 31)

One may move through life as if it is predictable, unconsciously disregarding the possibility of the unexpected. In such a state, one may interact with people and objects as if their nature is known and deterministic. I have set up situations in performance that raise questions about these assumptions. My work explores the idea that one's own body

can become unknown and foreign. One may not even be aware of the motivation behind one's gestures.

This theme of loss of control rests partly on a view of embodiment that Schroeder calls “the body assaulted (Schroeder 2004: 1).” She writes that performances featuring the body assaulted “most clearly expose, and indeed require, the phenomenon of an enhanced sensation towards one’s own body, towards the limits of one’s body (Schroeder 2004: 1).” While my performances do not involve physical harm to the body, they bring attention to the body by exposing its inability to cope with specified tasks. My work presents the body as breakable. When one experiences the environment directly, one does not distinguish between entities such as the self, the body, and the relationship between them; my work presents a fragile body that calls into question this mode of experience.

One aspect of the fragile body may be a disassociation of the subjective experience from a specific part of the body, such as a hand. This may be called *dislocation*; it may arise when one part of the body fails, and the rest of the body continues to function normally. For example, when the novice violinist experiences a break, she may begin to develop mental representations for her hands and fingers without developing representations for the rest of her body. She may not have to think about the mechanics of balancing on her feet or where to hold her head. Part of her experience may continue to be unreflective; the shift into the reflective mode only affects her hands. Her subjective experience may be displaced from part of her body. The struggle to produce sound from a recalcitrant source exists alongside an artificial portrayal of that same process.

Functional and reactive gestures are components of actual events and emotions that may be taking place; they do not involve artifice. Expressive and staged gestures are part of the artificiality of performance. The separation between functional and expressive gestures begins to break down as the piece progresses. It becomes impossible to tell whether the emotion displayed is genuine or artificial. Reality is revealed as a construct.

In my work, I am presenting dangerous tasks to a performer, myself. The tasks are not physically dangerous, but dangerous in the sense that failure and the unexpected are inevitable. This creates boundary conditions and ambiguities between indirect and direct modes of experience, awareness of the body, the actual and the artificial. This liminality may make the loss of the control compelling to both a performer and an observer. The attraction of this type of performance is in the way that the performer's vulnerabilities are revealed.

2. Case Studies in Losing Control

This section addresses performances that raise questions about the body, its relationship to the self, and loss of control through performance. The works discussed engage a variety of performance practices including theater, performance art, and music. I consider the artists' views on embodiment, the nature of each performance, and how each work engages issues of loss of control and failure of the performer.

2.1 Antonin Artaud, *To Have Done with the Judgment of God* (1947)

Antonin Artaud was a French surrealist dramatist, playwright, and actor whose views on theater and the body have had tremendous influence in theater, physical theater, and performance art. His radio-play, *To Have Done with the Judgment of God*, implements many of his ideas.

Artaud viewed the mind and the body as fused. He rejected the notion of mind/body duality, particularly one that places more importance on the mind. In his essay, "Theater of Cruelty," he talks about "renouncing" man as a social and psychological being, while asserting that he is addressing the "total man (Artaud 1958: 126)." He claims that "one does not separate the mind from the body, nor the senses from the intelligence (Artaud 1958: 86)." In *To Have Done with the Judgment of God*, Artaud references this view:

they pressed me
until the idea of body
and the idea of being a body
was suffocated in me (Artaud 1947)

Further, Artaud presents the body as subject to limitations and physical harm. The exploitation and exploration of this vulnerability is key to his philosophy. Franziska Schroeder refers to this view as the "the body assaulted", and suggests that Artaud presents "a body that considers failure and exposes the inherent potential for its breakdown (Shroeder 2006: 99,104)."

Artaud's conception of the body is integral to his theories on theater and performance. In "The Theater and the Plague," he portrays the action of the plague on the body and society as beneficial because it strips away the delusions of everyday life and culture (Artaud 1958: 15-32). The plague cleanses the person of acculturated habit

through the havoc it wreaks on the physical body. As it does so, it reveals the limitations of the body to the person. Since, in Artaud's view, the person is the body, the plague reveals the limitation of the person and her agency. According to Artaud, evil is inherent in life and bound up in our inability to control our circumstances. It is the theater that must reveal this evil, through the same means as the plague (Artaud 1958: 30-31). It must reveal the vulnerabilities of the body (Artaud 1958: 30-31). He writes, "We are not free. And the sky can still fall on our heads. And the theater has been created to teach that first of all (Artaud 1958: 79)."

Artaud envisions a visceral theater, made of pain and blood, rooted in the moment. He repudiates his contemporaries' devotion to text. He is not so much against words per se, as the reduction of the theatrical experience to the written script. He resents the demotion of the physical dimension of performance. Artaud demands that the theater be experienced and felt, not read about. His groans, grunts, and glossolalia in *To Have Done with the Judgment of God* are lost if the work is not heard; one cannot experience the work fully by reading the script. According to Artaud, the full meaning and impact of a theater work cannot and should not be defined by its dialog. In order to engage with the theater, one must witness a staged performance. Words are not enough; something must be at stake.

According to Artaud, traditional French realism is merely a mirror of how people blindly and habitually live their lives. It never addresses the lie that is at the foundation of this blind existence (Artaud 1958: 123-30). Rather, Artaud proposes a theater far removed from ordinary life. He calls for "spectacle" and advocates the use of masks, myth, and music designed to evoke particular atmospheres and emotions. For instance, in

To Have Done with the Judgment of God, he uses the xylophone and other percussion instruments to create a sense of ritual and spectacle. He intends to reveal the artifice of this constructed reality using the artifice of theater. His ideas emanate from a blurring of the line between artifice and actuality. He declares that "between life and the theater there will be no distinct division, but instead a continuity (Artaud 1958: 126)." A parallel may be drawn between Artaud's vision of a theater indiscernible from life and his view of the body.

A further connection can be made between Artaud's conception of an individual's agency over her life and an actor's role in theater. It is his contention that we are, essentially, out of control. Anything could happen to us at any time to disrupt our lives; whereas, the actor lacks control over her actions. He calls the actor "a kind of passive and neutral element, since he is rigorously denied all personal initiative (Artaud 1957: 98)." The actor is never in control, as she must perform the prescribed rituals of the theater. In performances influenced by Artaud, the actor often becomes a surface for abuse and attacks that reveal the vulnerabilities of the body (Schroeder 2006: 91-97). The performer, like the audience, is not in a position of power.

2.2 Stelarc, *Ping Body* (1996)

When I increasingly malfunction, it means that I can look forward to increasing awareness (Stelarc, quoted in Jones 1995)

Stelarc is an Australian performance artist who explores what it means to exist as a body. These explorations are often aided or enabled by technology. According to Stelarc, humans have created technologies and machines that outperform the physical body in

precision and power. The body, then, becomes a flesh and blood bottleneck to the efficacy of the individual. In Stelarc's words, "the body is obsolete (Stelarc 2006)."

Ping Body is a piece in which Stelarc's body is controlled over the Internet. Stelarc created a website for users to interact with a virtual version of his body. When users move his body in virtual space, their actions send messages to a muscle-simulation system, causing his body to move without his control. The offsite audience can remotely move his body. However, only the right side of his body can be moved. Stelarc retains control over his robotic third arm and the left side of his body. Furthermore, some of his muscles were controlled by mapping the response times of Internet domains to messages in the same muscle-stimulation system.

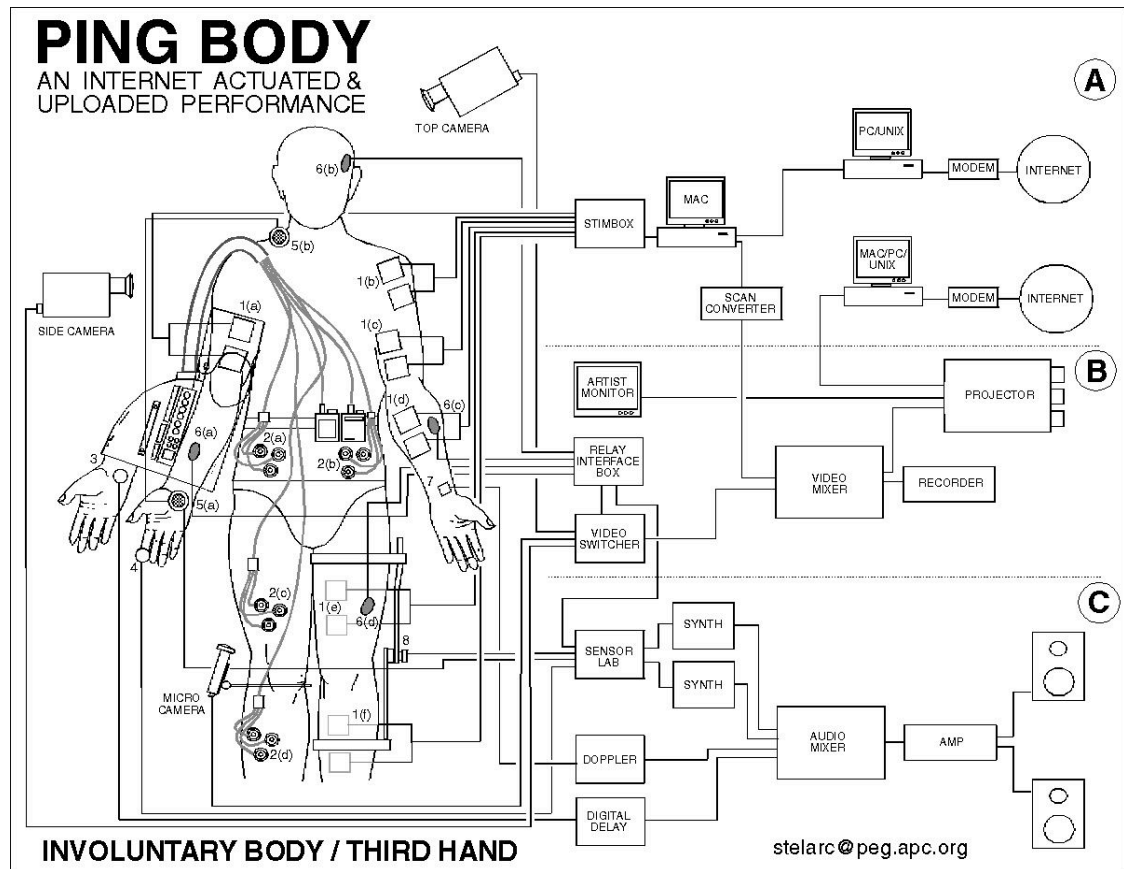


Figure 2-1 Layout Diagram for *Ping Body* (Stelarc 2008)

In *Ping Body*, only half of Stelarc's body is controlled by external forces. He retains control over the other half. He calls this single body controlled by separate agencies the "split body (Stelarc 2006)." In performance, he uses the left half of his body to stabilize himself because the involuntary motions of the right half repeatedly threaten to throw him off-balance. The right side of his body, constantly being subjected to the muscle-stimulators, responds to external forces by reflexively moving in the opposite direction. The movements caused by the muscle stimulation are jerky and unnatural, and the parts of his body affected by the muscle-stimulation appear to have become foreign to him. Stelarc's volition seems to be disassociated from his physical body.

Rather than presenting Stelarc as a single entity, *Ping Body* shows a fragmented body disconnected from its subject. The body is not just separated from the self, it is split into a collection of limbs and parts. The movement of the arm is not related to the movement of the leg in a natural way. This phenomenon is not often seen in a healthy body. Like injury and learning an instrument, this awkward movement may be perceived as causing a break in the experience of embodiment. This movement draws attention to the body existing as a physical object in the world rather than Stelarc, as a person, existing in the world. In fact, he does not seem to view the body as part of himself during his performances. When asked how he felt about being both the artist and the artwork, he denies that he is, himself, the artwork. Rather he emphasizes that it is his body that is the artwork, and he only uses it because of its immediate availability to him, as an artist. He says: "To me, the body is an impersonal, evolutionary, objective structure (Stelarc, quoted in Atzori and Woolford 1995)."

Stelarc draws attention to the body as a biological interface to the world. He claims that in everyday experience, the body is invisible (Jones 1995). If the body becomes visible and distinct from self, then subjective experience becomes dislocated from the body. One must negotiate a relationship between one's concept of self and one's body; one's body becomes an interface to the world.

2.3 Marina Abramovic, *Rhythm 10* (1973)

Marina Abramovic is a pioneer in performance art who uses her body as an instrument. She explores the limits of the body by testing her endurance for pain, often



through the use of ritualistic actions. For example, during the performance of her work *Freeing of the Voice* (1975), she screams until she loses her voice. In *Interruption in Space* (1975), she runs into a wall repeatedly until she collapses (Novakov 31). Loss of consciousness during performance is also a recurring theme in her work; a state in which she is unequivocally out of control.

movie's

18)

Rhythm 10 is a piece that raises some

interesting questions about Abramovic's

relationship to her body during performance. Her

instructions for the piece are as follows:

Preparation

I lay a sheet of white paper on the floor. I lay twenty knives of different shapes and sizes on the floor. I place two cassette recorders with microphones on the floor.

Performance

I switch on the first cassette recorder. I take the knife and plunge it, as fast as I can, into the flesh between the outstretched fingers of my left hand. After each cut, I change to a different knife. Once all the knives (all the rhythms) have been used, I rewind the tape. I listen to the recording of the first performance. I concentrate. I repeat the first part of the performance. I pick up the knives in the same sequence, adhere to the same rhythm and cut myself in the same places. In this performance, the mistakes of the past and those of the present are synchronous. I rewind the same tape and listen to the dual rhythm of the knives. I leave. (Abramovic 2006)

One can find correspondences in the performances of Abramovic and those of a classical violinist. The successful violinist plays the notes exactly as the composer has written them; similarly, Abramovic performs the rituals and tasks exactly in the manner she and other performance artists have described them. During performance, her gestures may be seen as functional, like the musician's gestures.

At the beginning of *Rhythm 10*, Abramovic appears lost in her actions; she may be experiencing the unreflective mode. The knives that she is holding seem a part of her, much like the violin can seem part of the violinist. However, the moment she spreads her

fingers on the floor, the apparent unity of experience is destroyed. She is effectively dislocated from her hand.

When she misses and cuts her hand, the failure may cause a slip into the reflective mode of experience. Is there a moment when her experience shifts from unreflective to reflective mode? In her interviews, Abramovic emphasizes that she is often in a sort of transcendent state that enables her to increase endurance and put her body through painful obstacles. She says, "I move from the lower self to a higher state, and the fear and nervousness stop. Once you enter into the performance state, you can push your body to do things you absolutely could never normally do. (Abramovic, quoted in Kaplan 6)."

During *Rhythm 10*, she cries out every time she cuts herself but her motion does not slow or stop. Her passive out-stretched hand seems less and less a part of her as the performance continues. It is almost like a puppet without an actor. She even seems to be separated from her voice. We see Abramovic completing the task, but it is hard to connect her with the sounds of a woman yelping in pain. We cannot see her face, her hair is covering it. It appears as though her screams are disembodied, unconnected to the woman.

In the second half of the piece, Abramovic is confronted with an almost impossible task. She must recreate the first performance using only the recorded sounds of the knives striking the ground. The very real possibility of failure opens up. Furthermore, when she repeats a mistake from the first half, she is forced to damage her hand. Abramovic and her audience are immediately aware of her mistakes, because the sounds of the knife are out of sync. Like the violinist playing the notes of a well-known piece, we hear her missteps.

It remains unclear even in the second half what the notion of success or failure of the performer means. No matter what happens, Abramovic is still in the process of completing the self-assigned ritual. How significant is it that she has cut herself, or that she has not satisfactorily recreated the first performance? Her performance emphasizes process rather than result.

2.4 Chris Mann, *la de da* (1985)

la de da is a piece for two people with similar voices reading the same text in different rooms. Their task is to read through the text as fast as possible while remaining in sync. Both performers are wearing headphones. Performer A can only hear performer B through the headphones, and vice versa. Mann says, "I was interested in taking all the traditional performer feedback mechanisms out of the equation (Mann 2008)." He describes the process as using another performer as a "biological vocoder," or a "signal processor."

la de da displaces the performer's voice with that of another. This displaced voice does not respond appropriately to physical cues and the actions of the body: the performer cannot directly control it. A singer's conception of the voice is that it originates from within, and the singer directs it outwards. For example, a voice teacher will tell a student to funnel the sound out of the top of the head rather than the throat or the chest. Furthermore, the diaphragm supports the voice, and it is located under the lungs, in the center of the body. The displaced voice is like an organ transplant since it is situated inside the body. As such, it would be hard to reconcile an external voice, divorced from internal bodily cues, as a valid substitute for one's own. Despite the lack of direct tactile limitation, it is in some ways a more intimate breakdown of the body.

Mann intends to reveal a particular intimacy to the audience; there is a purposeful element of voyeurism in this piece. The audience is privy to a conversation between two performers who are engaged in a very private negotiation with one another. Richard Povall has said of the piece, "the material and its style of delivery is so personal and strangely intimate that the listener is effectively being asked to play the role of the voyeur (79)." *la de da* can be seen as turning a traditional paradigm of performance on its head. Mann feels that the traditional discourse of performance includes an element of the performer educating the audience. In other words, the performer has information to which the audience has no access. In *la de da*, however, the audience is privileged. He says, "in *la de da* the audience has all the information whereas the performers have only part of the story (Mann 2008)." Furthermore, since the performers wear headphones, it prevents them from being fully aware of the audience.

An idea related to the performer's loss of control is the notion of performance as "blood sports." According to Mann, the struggle to survive makes *la de da* an interesting piece to watch. For instance, he mentions the difference between musical theater and opera. Musical theater, he says, is "safe as milk" because it does not challenge the performer or the audience. On the other hand, people go to opera because "they want to be there when the soprano misses fucking high C like her life is on the line (Mann 2008)." For this reason, he asserts that amateurs are more interesting to watch than professionals because something is at stake.

Mann, however, denies that *la de da* engages the idea of performer failure. He reasons that in order to fail, one must have a clear definition of what it means to fail or succeed in a piece. The point of the piece is its process, not a matter of how gracefully the

performers of *la de da* complete the task (Mann 2008). However, if there is not the threat that one cannot complete the performance or keep up the pace, what makes it dangerous? If the performance is like blood sports, the implication is that one may not survive. Failure may not be explicitly defined, but a clear threat is implicitly present.

Nevertheless, Mann focuses on the mental state of the performer rather than the circumstances that induce the state. If it is vulnerability that makes the performer interesting to watch, then according to Mann, it is "thinking that is a measure of vulnerability (Mann 2008)."

2.5 Conclusions

The artists described in this chapter create situations in which the performer's body is made vulnerable. This fragile body may create boundary conditions that cause a perceptual shift into the reflective mode of experience. For instance, both Mann and Abramovic create a physically impossible task; the process of attempting to complete this task reveals the limitations of the performers' bodies.

One way the break in experience may be portrayed is through dislocation. Both Stelarc's *Ping Body* and Abramovic's *Rhythm 10* create this sense of dislocation. In *Rhythm 10*, the injured hand is separated from the rest of Abramovic. In *Ping Body*, Stelarc's deliberate creation of a "split body" separates his agency from the right half of his body. The displacement of the voice in *la de da* may also be seen as dislocation. These works present the body in parts, not as a whole.

Further, most of these works address the loss of control through real struggles and situations. Elements of artifice, nonetheless, are still present; one expectation of the stage

is the suspension of belief. In this setting, the distinction between functional, expressive, and reactive gestures become blurred.

Ping Body is a good example. When Stelarc attempts to maintain composure during its performance, it is hard to determine the purpose of his gestures. His movements could be automatic reactions in response to outside control; they could could also be exaggerated. He claims that he can move his third robotic arm, but those movements do not appear premeditated (Stelarc 2008).

Like *Ping Body*, *Rhythm 10* involves an actual struggle. It includes deliberate elements of ritual, as well. She bows before the performance and places her knives in front of her, one after the other, with a sense of gravity. If her ritualistic actions may be considered functional gestures, then the extent to which those gestures are expressive is ambiguous. For instance, when she misses and cuts her hand, she cries out loudly. Does she make this sound because she needs to record it for the second half of the performance? Does she cry out because she is responding to the pain or to increase the affect of the performance?

Artaud also makes extensive use of ritual, but his ritual takes on a much different form. His misinterpretation of the performances of Balinese theater affects his use of ritualistic action (Scheer 61-63). He did not realize their gestures and hand signs had semantic meaning; he believed their actions were conveying frenzied emotion through the use of ritual (Scheer 61-63). Artaud presents these performances as a “perspective in hallucination and fear (Artaud 1958: 53).” For instance, he screams as if in catharsis in his work *To Have Done with the Judgment of God* in order to convey a sense of ritual. (Artaud 1947). However, when he screams in such a manner, he also appears unhinged.

Further, in the conclusion of *To Have Down with the Judgment of God*, the interviewer concludes that Artaud is mad; meanwhile Artaud raves on about how microbes were reinvented to impose a new idea of God (Artaud 1947). This raises a question about the artifice of the performance versus the actuality. Artaud did go mad; he was a schizophrenic who was eventually institutionalized for a number of years. In light of these facts, it becomes uncertain how much he is acting and how much of his madness, if any, creeps into his performance. Is there a real element of loss of control in his performance?

The exposure of the performer's vulnerabilities is an essential element to the aesthetics of losing control. This allows the audience to empathize with the performer; and identifying with the performer causes the performer's actions on stage to become compelling. For example, it is hard not to look away when watching Abramovic cutting her own hand again and again. One cannot help but imagine what it feels like. This empathy with the performer is an element of what makes a particular performance engaging

The process of losing control in these performances produces boundary conditions and ambiguities. These threshold states exist both in the modes of experiencing embodiment and between artifice and actuality. These states are compelling because they leave questions unanswered and possibilities open.

3. . Every Night I Lose Control

Every Night I Lose Control consists of three pieces, each of which uses a different metaphor to explore the loss of control in performance. The work is written for voice, live electronics, and an accelerometer strapped to the wrist. The accelerometer is small and wireless, and it is hidden under a glove during performance. It is hidden in order to discourage a human vs. machine interpretation of the work. The conditions for loss of control are implemented in the mappings of the accelerometer's output to sound parameters. In performance, these mappings change, and it becomes progressively more difficult for the performer to use the accelerometer.

The work lives in the performance; it must be experienced. *Every Night I Lose Control* is an experiment that is carried out in the moment and evolves from one performance to the next.

3.1 Every Night I Lose Control: Technology

The control system for *Every Night I Lose Control* consists of three layers: the sensor layer, a C++ application that parses the accelerometer data, and a SuperCollider application, which produces the sound and music for the piece. See figure 3-1. Each piece in the series has a unique SuperCollider implementation.

The accelerometer measures tilt and rotation, and sends ASCII data to Bluetooth COM serial port. It is connected to a small battery, which allows the device to be hidden under a loose-fitting glove.

Flow of Control of Accelerometer Data

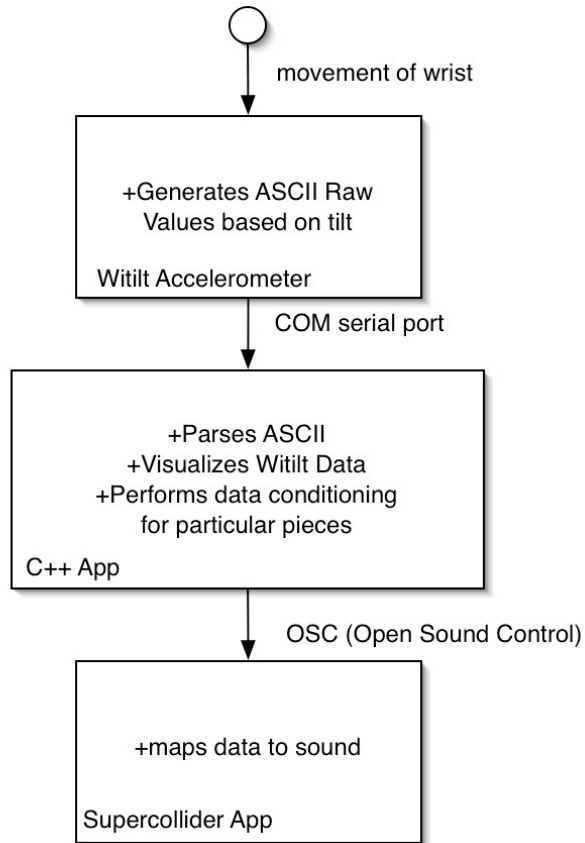


Figure 3-1

The C++ program reads the ASCII data from the serial port, parses it into numerical x, y, and z values, then sends the information via Open Sound Control (OSC) using UDP transfer protocol. These x, y, and z values are the coordinates of the accelerometer's relative position in three-dimensional space. After parsing, the C++ program then sends these position values via Open Sound Control (OSC) using UDP transfer protocol. The C++ program also shows a visual representation of the accelerometer position on the computer screen, and provides initial data conditioning. I made the decision to implement this layer between the SuperCollider sound generation layer and the sensor layer because

it allows for the integration of external libraries into the system. No external libraries are implemented at present, but there are plans for future integration.

The SuperCollider application receives the OSC packets and maps the accelerometer data to sound synthesis parameters. Using the OSC protocol is efficient because SuperCollider is an audio synth engine that uses a client-server architecture, and the server already uses OSC for messaging and communication. The C++ program is able to send data over OSC to nodes on the server, so that the separate SuperCollider applications for each piece in the series can easily share the data. This architecture is the basis of the implementation for each piece of *Every Night I Lose Control*.

3.2 balancing act

3.2.1 balancing act: Concept and Implementation

The essential metaphor for *balancing act* is the struggle to maintain balance in spite of the difficulty of the task. The piece is in song form with influences from tango and cabaret.

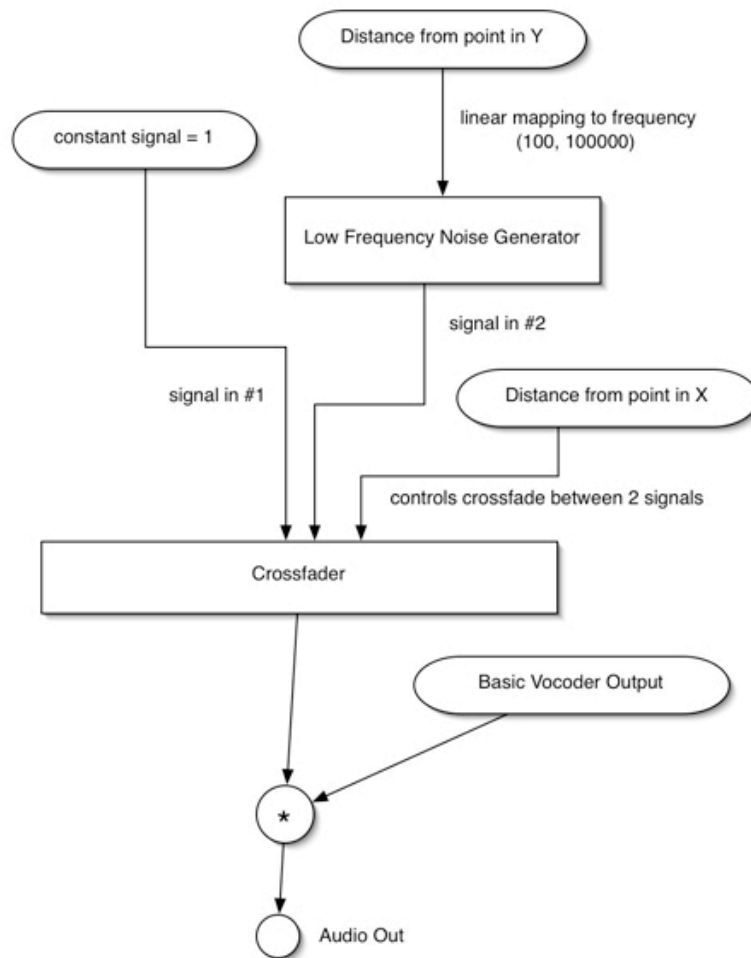
The task in *balancing act* consists of the performer following the path of a moving invisible point with the accelerometer. The aim is to make it difficult to maintain balance, a situation that is physically awkward for the performer. The performer finds this path by means of auditory feedback. If the performer is close to the point, the percussion parts are in sync and at the correct tempo. As the distance between the accelerometer position and the the virtual point becomes greater, the different layers of the percussion part fall out of sync. The C++ layer instantiates and controls the virtual moving point, and then calculates the distance on the x and y axis from that virtual point to the current location of

the accelerometer. The z-axis is calculated but ignored because three dimensions proved

much too difficult to

handle.

Control of Noise in Balancing Act



The tempo of some tracks decreases if the distance increases in the x - dimension; conversely, the tempo in some tracks increases in relation to distance in the y - dimension. In addition to the syncing of the percussion, noise is introduced into the mix of the song as a function of the

distance. If the performer is doing well, i.e., close to the virtual point, no noise is added.

If the performer is failing, there is a lot noise. Figure 3-2 details the implementation.

The erratic feedback and noise from vocoders also contribute to an aesthetic of losing control. These vocoders use reson filters to create the effect. Figure 3-3 and Figure 3-4 show how they are implemented.

Figure 3-2

Basic Vocoder

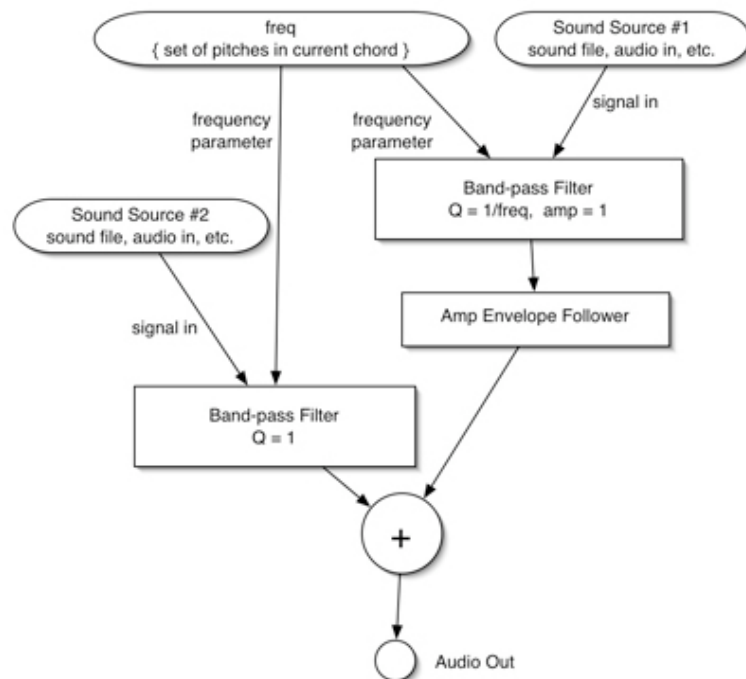
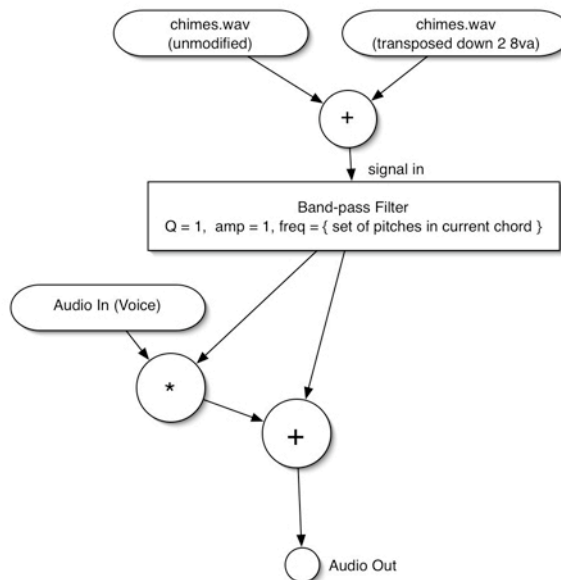


Figure 3-3

"Chimes Synth" in Balancing Act



The subject matter of the text is about the experience of feeling and, in some cases, taking responsibility for the actions of another, while being helpless to prevent a number of tragedies. The text relates to balancing because of the nature of the situation; one must find a way to balance obligations with the demands of one's own life, to be helpful without being controlling. At the end of the work all of the parts that give auditory feedback for location of the point end, and the performer sings "if I could save all the time" until she collapses or the piece ends.

3.2.2 balancing act: Performance, Results, Conclusions

Performing *balancing act* causes a break in my experience of the body. During the performance, I must contort my arm in odd angles to find the spatial location that results in the least amount of noise. This causes a sense of dislocation; my arm seems separate from me; a manikin's arm that I am controlling. I also must think about how to rotate my wrist to affect accelerometer tilt. The accelerometer measures tilt using gravity values; thus, moving my arm does not affect the position values in an intuitive manner. I must learn how movements of my wrist alter the position values in order to navigate the piece. The experience reminds me of *Ping Body*, in which Stelarc controls one side of his body, and his arm moves arbitrarily and flails helplessly. Unlike Stelarc's piece, however, my arm feels alien without being externally controlled. I am constantly performing a mental translation between my gestures and the search for the virtual point.

In performing, *balancing act* leads to a shift into a reflective mode of experience. A great deal of concentration is taken by the need to use my wrist as an interface, and this leaves me less able to pay attention to other aspects of performance. I improvise parts of a dialog during part of the work, and it is difficult to perform the task and talk

simultaneously. Occasionally, I lose track of either singing or following the point, and stop performing one or the other. The amount of things demanding my attention becomes overwhelming.

During the first few performances, I could not find the virtual point. In the beginning of the piece, I used the visualization on the screen as a guide. The visualization, however, did not help. I attempted to convey a trajectory into failure despite the unchanging level of difficulty. The audiences appeared to gauge my success or failure by the quality of my actions rather than the output of the sound. At one performance, the accelerometer stopped working at the beginning of the piece. Thus, my gestures really were meaningless. Still, several people commented on the effectiveness of the piece, and they had no idea that the accelerometer was not working. In that case, none of my gestures were functional; it was all artifice. However, most of the time, an actual struggle was taking place alongside my efforts to convey the trajectory and emotional impact of the work. Some of the unnatural positions that I employed were useful both in the attempt to find the correct location and in conveying an awkwardness and loss of control.

My task ends before the music does, with a sense of helplessness instead of relief. I have at least two more minutes left of repetitive chord changes, and I must do something to make that time interesting. That thought causes a sense of dread that keeps me moving into unaffected emotional collapse. It is unclear, even to me, whether my gestures are authentic expressions or simply artifice. Either way, I struggle to make it through those last, excruciating minutes.

3.3 The Error of My Ways

3.3.1 The Error of my Ways: Concept and Implementation

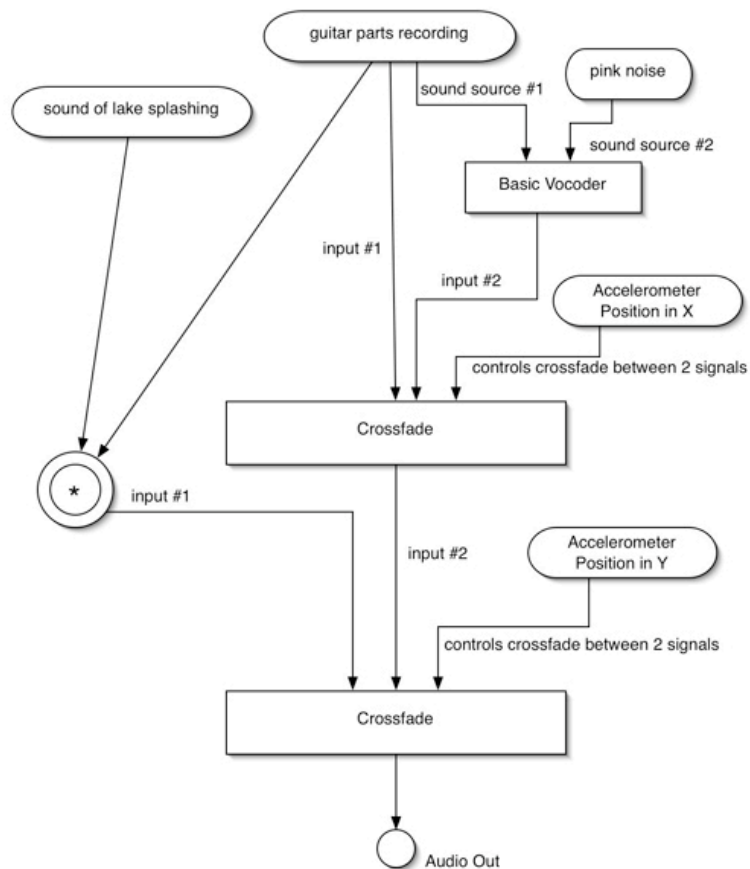
The metaphor for *Error of my Ways* is that of a badly designed algorithm which gradually accumulates error until it is useless. The piece has three main layers: the voice, guitar parts, and a synth that the performer controls with the accelerometer. Each time the performer flicks her wrist, it triggers the synth, and the rotation of the wrist on the z-axis controls an aspect of the timbre. The error-prone algorithm is implemented by decreasing the sampling rate of the accelerometer over the duration of the piece. Eventually, it becomes very frustrating for the performer, as the synth's response becomes increasingly intermittent and unpredictable. The performer will flick her wrist and nothing will happen. She may try several times, but she will not be able to determine when the synth will respond. Further, the piece has a function that randomly resets the sample rate to a high value, restarting the process of degrading the sampling rate. After several minutes of frustration, the performer may suddenly be in control of the synth again.

Error of my Ways takes its form from popular song with influences from early goth rock. The guitar parts create structure by articulating both the harmony and repeating rhythmic patterns. They are processed by a vocoder that reconstructs the sound of the guitars from pink noise and reson filters. The unmodified guitar parts are also convolved with the sound of splashing water. There are three versions of the guitar parts: the unprocessed guitars, the vocoded guitars, and the convolved guitars. These are mixed into the output signal. The tilt of the accelerometer in the y and z axis control the gain of each part in the mix. Refer to Figure 3-5 for this implementation. Thus, the guitar sounds are coupled with the control of the synth. When the performer tries to trigger the

synth to change the pitch, she also inadvertently alters the timbre of the guitar parts. This unintuitive coupling is part of the metaphor of the badly designed algorithm.

Figure 3-4

Guitar Parts in *Error of My Ways*

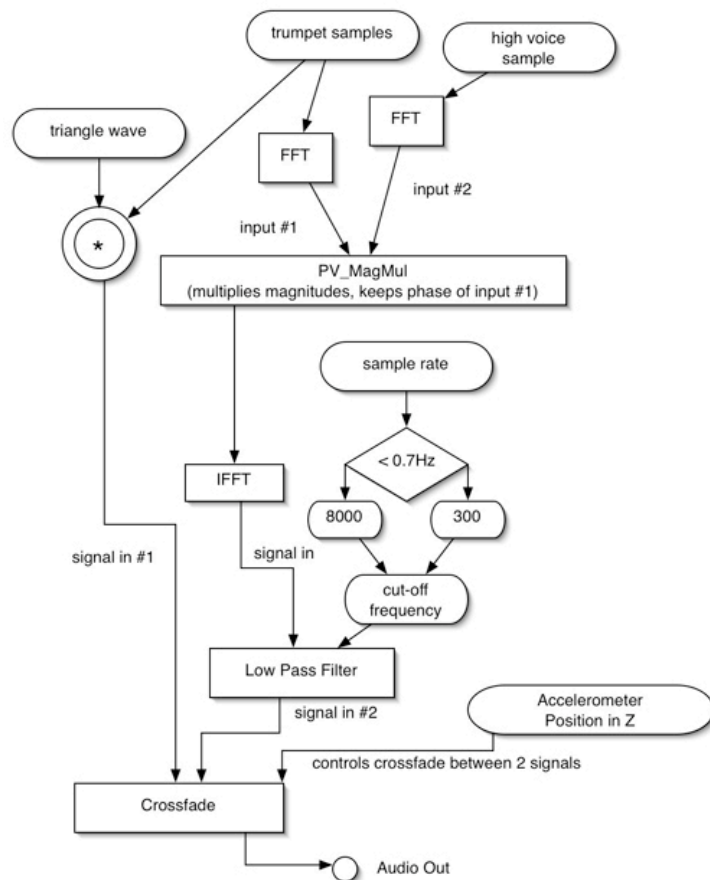


The vocals and the synth alternate as the lead instrument. The role of the synth is analogous to the role of a lead guitar in rock band. It plays small melodic figures between vocal phrases, and occasionally leads. The synth is constructed by cross-synthesizing trumpet samples with triangle waves; the result is added to the unmodified trumpet sounds. The z-axis of the accelerometer controls the relative volumes of the cross-synthesized and unmodified trumpet samples. As the performer loses control (i.e., the sampling rate decreases) the range of the synth increases to include higher and higher

pitches. The trumpet signal is also cross-synthesized with a high female voice, which creates a number of high frequency sounds. The result is also added to the output. When the sampling rate of the synth decreases, the gain of this cross-synthesized signal increases. Refer to Figure 3-6. These high frequency components serve to convey an increase in the sense of fragility and danger to correspond with the increase in loss of control.

Figure 3-5

Synth in *Error of My Ways*



3.3.2 The Error of my Ways: Performance, Results, Conclusion

The performance of *Error of My Ways* gives rise to multiple shifts in my experience of embodiment. In the beginning of the piece, using the synth is similar to playing a familiar instrument. It feels as if I am directly producing the sound. The moment I recognize a delay in the response of the synth, however, I am taken out of that unreflective state. This reaction occurs before the effect is noticeable. Although I am aware my actions will not alter the synth's responsiveness, my movements become forced and jerky. My wrist seems undependable, as if it is a faulty piece of machinery. My subjective experience becomes dislocated from that part of my body.

I begin to experiment with how my gestures affect the guitar parts when the synth ceases to respond. Depending on the angle of my wrist, different frequencies appear to be emphasized or attenuated; if I quickly move my wrist back and forth, I can create a tremolo effect. This experimentation leads me to slip back into an unreflective state. Once again, I am able to hear sounds in my head and reproduce them.

A few moments after this re-entry into an unreflective state, the synth triggers unexpectedly. I am thrown into the awareness of the fragile body. I feel out of control. I attempt to move my wrist to affect timbre without triggering the synth by confining my wrist motion to rotation around the z-axis. This is an extremely difficult task. I must develop a mental representation of both my wrist and an axis of rotation. I have little concentration left for the other elements of performance, such as singing.

Another reaction to the unresponsive synth consists of shaking my wrist continually. It is both an expression of frustration and an attempt to trigger the synth. At other times, I shake my wrist violently for dramatic effect. The functional, reactive, and expressive

gestures become blurred. When the synth is unpredictable, my movements become erratic. I am caught between different motivations of performance. I cannot give up the struggle to control the synth, yet I must convey the metaphor of the piece. My gestures become motivated by both expressive and functional goals.

Learning to use the synth in *Error of my Ways* requires practice. In performance, I discover that the time spent practicing has an impact on my willingness to fail. For instance, in the first performance I accidentally set up parameters in such a way as to never lose control. In a sense, that performance was failure, because I was not able to lose control or render myself vulnerable. After that performance, I corrected the problem, even though it feels as if I created one. In performance I dread the lack of response; I am anxious about the effects of the reflective mode of experience. In that mode, it is difficult to remember the lyrics and the melody as I am singing. Failing is not easy. It is a struggle.

3.4 Future Work: N is for Neville who Died of Ennui

3.4.1 N is for Neville who Died of Ennui: Concept and Implementation

N is for Neville who died of Ennui is based on the metaphor of a computer that gets bored with its performer during the course of a piece. When the computer reaches a state of boredom, it reacts by altering how it responds to performer input. This behavior is implemented in the mapping of wrist movements to sound. The performer must learn the new mappings during performance. The cycle of the computer becoming bored and altering mappings persists for the duration of the piece; the performer must continue to adapt.

Novel mappings are generated via a network of nodes with weighted edges. Each time a value passes through an edge, it is multiplied by the weight of the edge. When two or more values are sent to the same node from different edges, those values are summed before being sent to the next node. The inputs to this network are the x, y, and z position values from the accelerometer. The network also consists of two layers of inner nodes and five output nodes. The output nodes are mapped to sound parameters. All the nodes are connected to their adjacent orthogonal neighbors in a feed-forward network. In the initial state, the edges that constitute a direct path from input to output have a weight value of one. The rest of the edges have a weight value of zero. Thus, in the initial state, the input passes through the network unaltered. The output nodes without a direct path from accelerometer values will output zero; thus, in the beginning of the piece, the performer cannot affect the sound parameters mapped to those nodes.

When the computer gets “bored”, it adds random values to a random edge in the network. As the edges between nodes gain weight, the output values of the network become scaled combinations of the input values; output nodes unconnected to the accelerometer data in the initial state may output nonzero values.

Figure 3-6

Initial State of Network

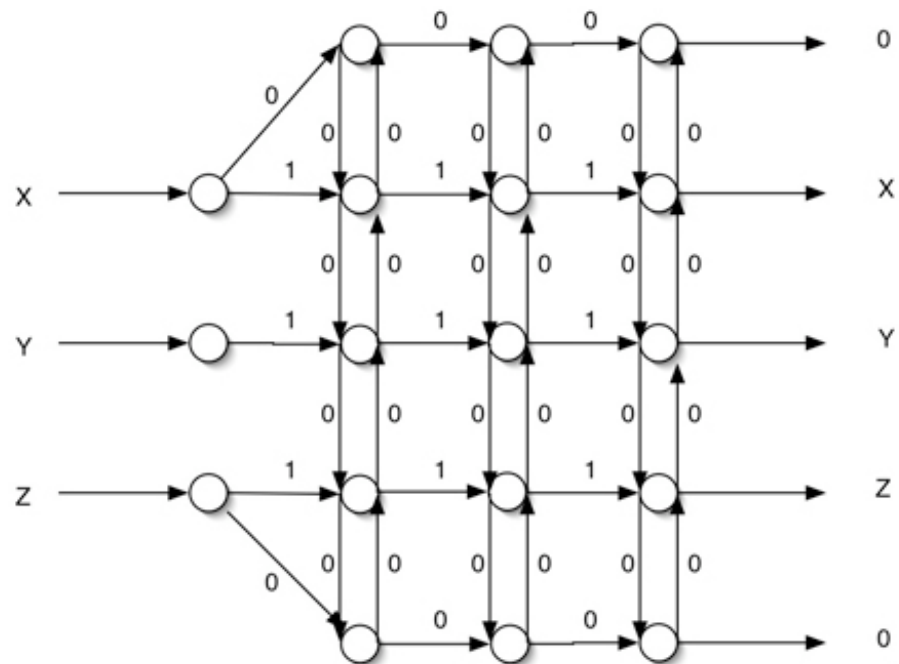
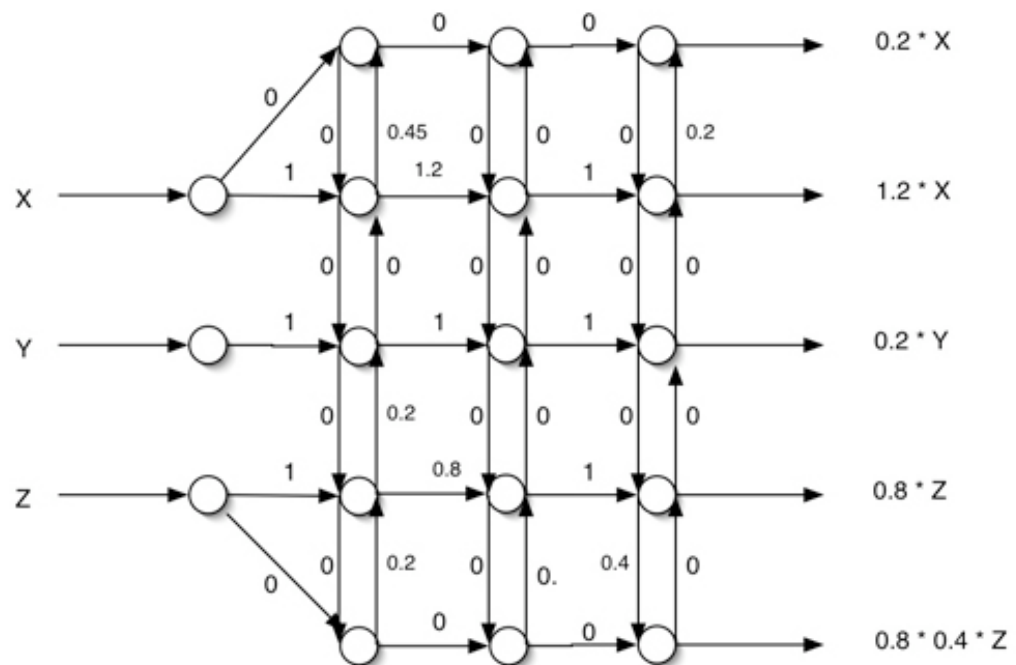


Figure 3-7

Network with added Random Weights



Thus, movement in one dimension may begin to affect movement in other dimensions, and movement may begin to affect sound parameters that were previously unaffected. As the process continues and more random values are added to edges, the output of the network will approach white noise. In this state, the performer's gestures become meaningless.

The mechanism of boredom may be implemented in several different ways. The simplest method is using time as a metric for boredom. A preprogrammed timeline may determine when boredom occurs. Another method is using gesture repetition as a measure for boredom; that is, when the performer repeats a gesture or a sequence of gestures often enough, the computer becomes bored. The difficulty in this implementation is how to detect when the performer is repeating gestures. Much room exists for experimentation in this area.

3.5 Every Night I Lose Control: Conclusion

During the performance of *Every Night I Lose Control*, each moment is a struggle. My body becomes foreign as I shift into the reflective mode of experience. Sometimes I am not even aware of the motivations for my movements — whether they are genuine reactions or whether I am acting. I am in a liminal state that is uncomfortable but also full of possibility. When I break the connections from my intentional action to sound, I affect my experience of the self, at least for the duration of the performance.

4. Conclusion

As human beings, we are all subject to an inevitable loss of control: death. Our bodies will fail. This may happen through a gradual process of aging, but it could also happen suddenly, without warning. A person may feel safe in the rhythm of daily life, but at any time, her life could be altered by circumstances beyond her control

How does a person grapple with the experience of a deteriorating body? There is a possibility that she will divorce her conception of herself from her body. A deteriorating body may have significant implications for the definitions of the self. An example is when a person suffers a brain injury. She is often changed in significant ways. She might not be able to control her impulses; she might lose her memory. She might not even recognize the changes in herself. If a professional violinist loses her hand, it will have a considerable impact on her life. She will no longer be a violinist, since she cannot play. Her sense of self as a violinist is contingent on an intact body. Further, she will have to take into account her missing hand in her daily life: when she eats, when she puts on her clothes, etc. Her interactions with other people could change because others may find the missing hand off-putting. I lose control of my hand in *Every Night I Lose Control*, but this is a temporary experience. I may walk away unchanged after the performance.

It may be more comfortable to assume that the self is separate from the body. We often find it disturbing when confronted with a self that is dependent on a physical body. In losing control during performance, I engage the unknown in a limited capacity. My work is a simulation of a small part of the loss control that we, as humans, must inevitably confront during the course of our lives.

Appendix A: Tour Diary

The following Tour Diary is an account of the Every Night I Lose Control tour, occurring between the dates of March 2, 2008 and March 31, 2008.

The content was originally posted on an online blog, while I was still on the road. As such, the entries constitute an informal narrative of events.

March 2, Test run of balancing act, Hartt-Darmouth Concert

Exchange

I wake up extremely ill and extremely late. Carmen is also ill and sleeping late. We cram Beau, my accordion, a guitar, a viol da gamba, a Kristina, me, Carmen, laptops, and backpacks all into my tiny civic. I have "Losing my Religion" on infinite repeat, because I infinite repeat songs as a matter of course. But I stop this for the sanity of others.

By the time we get to Connecticut I have turned into a miserable coughing wreck. Others offer to drive but I am not willing to stop since we are so late. I am valient and also needlessly melodramatic. I recover, tho, after we get there, and I've been sitting for a while.

Me: Will it break your heart not to do Wolff's Tilbury?

Beau: I hate the Tilbury.

Me: No practice! Let's eat lunch!

We eat Indian food. David seems boistrous. Matt is good-humored. I am off and on with attention.

Carmen gives me dayquil. I take a lot of it. And also get a large Americano. That's four shots of expresso, mind you. I am human again! kinda!

I set up my piece. No disasters. It is actually painless. I get changed into my post-modern cabaret hey-I'm-kinda-Edward-Gorey-like-I-swear costume. (David says "before you were sick now you're sick") The lace does an excellent job of hiding my accelerometer.

First thing: free improv. I can't remember a thing about it. Just sitting with my accordion and playing some descending half-steps on the bass... Everyone stands up and bows but that's too hard for me because the accordion is too heavy.

The show! Beau's piece is nice with the acoustics. I like it. Kristina's piece is crazy beautiful and man it really made me wish I could play the gamba worth something... Carmen's piece was v. good. I remember thinking it was way better than anything I'd heard at ICMC.

My turn. I get up. I turn on the sound but I can't hear it. Turns out its just cos the monitors are in front. OOOOOOoooookay. Well, I restart everything and then go. I can hardly hear anything at all. I hear enough to stay in tune. I don't cough at all... its a miracle.

Okay, so for this show, I've rigged the set-up for my piece, balancing act to be very easy. I'm supposed to follow a moving invisible dot. Well. The dot isn't moving. Its still hard! I watch the screen for a while, totally cheating, before I resign myself, suck it up, and actually start doing it by ear. I can't actually hear myself so I just suck. There's no progression. I fake a progression actually. Its true that I am not quite sure what I'm doing because I'm trying to fake something or whether I'm actually trying to find that damn dot. I mean, its in the same place!

At some point, the cord falls out of my mic. I don't know how this happens... it just does. Well, I have to take my free hand with the accelerometer and fix it regardless. I remember thinking: oh, this is perfect. This is just what I'm talking about.

At one point in the song, where I'm just saying stuff... I tell myself: this is sad, remember. this is where you fall apart. and I'm out of it, I'm not remembering that. So, I'm like: okay... what am I saying? I am saying actually, the contents of a personal blog entry that is friends-locked on my myspace blog that I wrote when I found out something awful had happened to my sister. I have to remind myself at this point. Ironically, what I say is: "I am in this moment" and then I repeat that for a bit.

Then, I go into the bit where I say, "If I could save you all the time" again and again. Here, I'm like, maybe I should fall apart more here? hmmm.... and then everything runs out and there is just the organ-y sound and most everything is over. I stand still and I'm sort of mumbling my lyrics, and I'm thinking: so, do I collapse on the floor and start making high-pitched noises like in practice or is that just too much? In the end, I decide standing still and losing it that way is less rehearsed. I feel indecisive. I also reach over and fade out the song instead of letting it go the painful minute where nothing else happens. Maybe when I feel a little less jumped up on cough medicine and caffeine.

At the end, I say: "That was from my series, Every Night I Lose Control." I'm all composed and stuff. That's to be like: "No, I am a sane person. That's just my act." That's what I really meant when I said that.

Afterwards, Beau told me I made him feel very uncomfortable. I give him a thumbs up. Kristina asked me how much of it was real (the emotional part, I think, maybe)... I think I mumble something about it being inbetween. Stanislavski, you know, but I am too sick to give her my spiel and she probably doesn't want to hear it in its entirety at that moment. I don't believe in reality anyways.

We end with an improv. All of us Dartmouth people keep on trying to end it at one point, but David & Nolan just keep on going. and going. NOooOooooooOOooOOOoooOOOOo! but it does end finally. I think I just stop playing my accordion at one point because I am so wrecked.

I meet some Hartt professors who now think I am a crazy person. They like my gloves. They like seeing the accelerometer. OOoo, shiny! Techy! One asks me if I use MAX. I say: NO!

We drive home. Beau drives actually.

March 9, Providence, RI @ Firehouse 13

A few days before, I get a link to the website of the organization that is putting it on. It is blinky. It is scary. It is soooooo blinky. I am deeply deeply afraid. Everyone is traumatized by the web design when I show them. This is the direct link to the most insanely blinky parts of it, but I don't know how long it will stay up.

I leave Lebanon, NH at 4pm, certain that I've left something crucial behind. Mid-way through, I'm convinced that this is my laptop. When I get there, I check and I haven't forgotten anything.

I get there about an hour early, before anyone else is gonna be there. So, I end up going and getting a coffee at McDonald's, which is really bizarre and 50's space age inside. It also has internet. I haven't actually been to a McDonald's in a really long time, so maybe all McDonald's are like that. This guy says, "HI!!!" really loudly and then he says, "I like saying hi to people!!". At this point, I figure out that he is talking to me, and I mumble, "hey" or something. I am worried he is crazy. A few minutes later, the manager tells him and his girlfriend to leave. Before they do, he comes over to me (I'm sitting at my computer, in front a window over-looking my car) and says, "I like smart women."

I think, it could be that I'm not smart. It could just be that I have enough money to buy a laptop, which is different thing. Anyways, then he tells me he's made his girlfriend jealous by talking to me, and they leave. She falls down as they are leaving and if I didn't think so before, I think they are on something.

Well, at eight, I head back to the Firehouse 13. Still no one is there, but I bring all my stuff in and chill. Finally, a guy comes down, and we're like, "Hey!" I say, "I'm Courtney, I'm going to play tonight. I'm in from New Hampshire?"

He says, "Do you need anything? We have spaghetti upstairs and lots of tea. I'll leave the door unlocked." I say I don't need any spaghetti. Then, he disappears. I'm at a loss, so I try and go upstairs after a bit, just to figure out what's going on. The upstairs is locked.

Another fifteen minutes, and someone finally shows and lets me into the gallery. It's actually quite a big space, with a small raised stage. He's not the guy that's supposed to be there. That guy is going to be an hour late. So, I take a table and start setting up on the stage. Someone else shows up and starts asking me lots of questions. I smile and nod and finally tell him I'm not in charge. He's like, "oh". Also, it turns out they have internet, so I start IMing with Stefan as I'm getting things ready. It is surreal.

Maralie, the person who booked me, finally shows up. She looks hip and she also plays the accordion it turns out. She tells me the other band is probably going to be punk, and the other band, Lazy Magnet, showed up the wrong day: yesterday. So, they aren't playing tonight. I decide to play my really pop dance yet Wagnerian-esque song at that point. If there is a punk band on the bill with me, anything goes!

She helps the lost guy who has the video poetry, too. It isn't his poetry, he just helped do the video editing. Unfortunately, she doesn't know anything about the PA, so we are all waiting for Justin. I show the video poetry guy (who is actually a graphic artist) my set-up and we chat some. He seems cool. We both hope people will show up. Justin finally shows up past 9:30pm and I get sound out, etc. I change into my post-modern cabaret attire... ready to go! People are showing up... young college scenester-types.

Interesting conversation: Justin apparently saw Oktophonie at Harvard with 32-surround sound speakers. We talk about how Stockhausen is crazy... how he's a meglomaniac and

comes from outerspace. He mentions Cardew's Stockhausen Serves Imperialism... turns out he didn't actually read it, and then I geek out over Christian Wolff, etc. etc. and he says, "I'm not a music student, you know," and I realize I've taken the conversation away from comfortable territory or something. er. He mentions that he's publishing a tract of fanfiction by some woman about Xena: Warrior Princess which seems really surreal to me. It's apparently a commentary on fandom itself, etc., and wonder if its ironic at all. I hope its not. I hope it is earnest.

The band arrives, late. I'm already set-up, so I'm first. They start the video poetry. It is amazingly primitive. Words appear like: "The woman I love is not in the same room with me." "The Man that I love is in this room" and "epiphany" appearing on the screen several times and floating "yes yes yes no no no yes yes" and hot pink backgrounds. It is 80s, kinda. They ask me if they can have video poetry behind me, and I say, "no". They are cool with it. They put on the second DVD, and I get a beer. The poetry starts to become obscene stories. Awesome.

Now I go on. I say, "my set starts very pop, and then everything breaks down into experimental electronics. Everything will break down." Someone says, "yeah!". I play, "one day", and people dance a little. They seem kinda into it, but this kids are too hip too dance, I think. Or, that is the vibe I get. I keep a running commentary throughout my set and say what every song is about. Partly because I have to set-up shit at the computer. Everything goes okay. I feel very alone on stage; it is surreal. I am used to having a band. I mess up initializing "Study in Losing Control" and realize after singing a bit that the electronics aren't going to kick in. I just stop it and start it again. It's fine... I'm not even embarrassed or anything. I'm like, "alright kids, that's actually not responding to me, its not just being unpredictable"

I explain my last piece. I say it is a task piece and they I am following a dot with my sensor, but that I will fail. I think maybe next time I will not mention that it is designed for failure. At the end of balancing act, I collapse, but it is completely staged and not real

at all. I am curiously lacking in emotion for the entire set actually, and everything I do is artifice. I feel in control but at a loss, if that makes sense. I am not in the moment, I feel.

After my set, the artist in residence at Firehouse 13 comes down and tells me he really likes it, which was nice. We talk later, and he is very interested in collaboration so I give him my information. He asks for a cd, and that reminds me that I should make a bunch of demos for the tour. Various people are interested in my tech set-up. "Do you use MAX/MSP?" Me: "NO!" I need a t-shirt that says, "I do NOT use MAX/MSP!!!" or MAX/MSP with an "X" through it.

The second act sets up lightening fast. WOW. They are very raw punk. Very very. 3 girls and a guy, which is just really hip. These kids are unspeakably hip and fun. I feel old. They have an a cappella chant about the boys with eyeliner that they met during Warped Tour 2002. I approve and also share their taste in men. HAahaha! They have a cello player who plays it distorted through an amp. It is... so different from what I did! They do have video poetry in the background and it is very obscene. This thing about a woman doing a 360° on some guy's cock keeps on showing up. Something about a different kind of dessert. Also, the singer in the band screams "cunt!" and "titties!" over and over. I find out later they just got together last week and had about 2 hours practice. Ha! That is so raw.

So, then everything is over and Maralie helps me carry stuff to my trunk. She is apologetic more people didn't show.... apparently there was some confusion about it being the day before, but there were way more people there than usually show up to a Vaughn or even a Spheris show. Also, I found out I got the gig about 5 days before I played it, so I figure its a net gain whatever happens. Gave me a chance to test run things. Also, they forgot to take a door. I didn't know there was supposed to be a door. Ah, well.

I truck it all the way back home. Its not that bad, except for I'm forced to stop and eat at a McDonald's because everything else is closed. Ugh. I had no idea there were so many

McDonalds and so little other types of fast food around. Ugh Ugh. I mean, I don't like fast food, but there slightly better things. Even the gas stations are closed on the inside. I really tried not to eat McDonald's. I had chicken nuggets and fries.

I listen to Paul Simon's Rhythm of the Saints album almost the whole way. Then, the Paris Combo album.

Its snowing for about 20 minutes in New Hampshire. Everything glitters.

March 13 @ Monkeytown, Brooklyn, NY

I get about 2 hours of sleep the night before, but I was able to practice my set, finish my timbre paper, and pack everything up so when I wake up everything is ready to go and I don't need to be an intelligent human to manage things. I rush out, Carmen sends me off, and I pick up John and we go.

Everything goes smoothly. We find the place right away, and it is a very, very cool venue. The restaurant part is really interesting but we are playing in the video screening room/stage area. There are four screens, one for each wall, and they soon start playing video. We are setting up in the center of the area, and everyone will sit all around us. Its kinda unusual.

Anne arrives as I'm loading stuff in, as does Lainie, and I finally meet them. Good times. Lainie is going to play the harmonium! Which is a nice free reed theme to the evening. Free reed instruments and sopranos.

Around 8:30ish people do start trickling in, Thank God. Bruce Arnold, a guitarist from Princeton I invited on Newton's suggestion shows up, and we talk. He's cool.

Then, its time and John goes on. The Chris Mann mix rocks, as always. I try and take pictures with the camera, but I kinda suck. So I take a lot. I figure if I take lots of them, it

makes up for the fact that I am sucky photographer and I don't know what's going on with the photos.

Then, Anne is up. I really like her voice. I like sopranos. She plays the love/disease song from the video that I saw. I really enjoy that song. Also, the harmonium bit that comes later is nice. I like free reeds. Every one sings in the style of classical voice, which is nice.

Okay, then me. I go up and trip over something of Anne's and the feedback is horrendous. Its fixed soon... I start with my improv accordion piece + beats.... then: Time becomes Magnetic... actually, all of my set goes pretty damn well except for Every Night I Lose Control. First off, I lose my nerve, and decide not to perform Error of My Ways and balancing act had a problem in the initialization. Thankfully no one knew it because I just rolled with it for about 6 minutes then faded out as I was singing. It was disappointing, but I think it was a good show, regardless. People seemed to like "things that breathe". Also, I got several comments that the video went really well. I didn't notice. I didn't even control the video, so it was a happy coincidence. Once again I get asked for my website, etc, and I wish I had cards or something. Argh!

Also, two people came up and thanked me for inviting me randomly on myspace. They hadn't been to the venue before and they were really impressed. Well, it is a very rocking venue. Also, random promotion on myspace works. Awesome! Next time I hope I have more time to do promotion! I'm already doing more.

Then, I tried to pack up really fast since my friends I was staying with were going to get up early for work. And I was going to have to get up early, too. We got a little lost, but I was still all hyped up from the gig and in a good mood. It was nice seeing Greg again. We giggled a lot.

Then I didn't sleep because I've had insomnia the past few nights and this one was not an exception. I think I'm going to do my thesis pieces first next time and get them over with. Off to DC...

March 15 @ The Red Room Collective

First thing, we're in the car and Stefan notices all my directions that I printed out are from The Red Room, not to the Red Room. But I printed them twice! Mysterious. The presents some mild difficulties, but we manage to arrive mostly on time. At least, on time enough so that I am not freaking out.

Except for we arrive at the wrong place. It takes us a bit to figure this out.

See, the contact address for the Red Room Collective and its physical location are quite different things... which we find out when Stefan checks his phone and sees their directions to the place at a different address. Huh.

Shit.

So, back to the car, and back on I-83 to the next exit. I'm thinking, well, I don't take that long to set-up! Really! And shows are usually pretty late! We do get there and find a good parking spot. We rush in. "Sorry I'm late! blah blah blah wrong place lost blah blah blah!" and there's one guy there. He's like, "Its okay, the audience hasn't found the place, either."

I immediately relax, and just start setting up. There's a guy setting up for the opening band with a large basket next to a drum set, and we do the introduction thing. Later, we ask what is in the basket and it is a surprise. The other band is freaking out because there's no one there. Apparently, all the members of the collective are out of town or not showing up, and they forgot to send out the email to everyone. There is a mass telethon

of calls to try and coax audience members to show up. People from the opening band start using emotional blackmail against friends who are not going to show...mostly in jest. It is amusing.

Meanwhile, one of the guys says, "You need a place to stay, don't you? I have the keys to John's place and you can use the guest room." John is not actually in town, but he is going to let me stay there?

Me: "Uh.... what?"

Apparently, they just assumed I needed a place to stay, and went ahead and provided me one.... which was very nice, actually. But not needed. Anyways, they call John and ask him if they can watch movies at his house afterwards. He says yes.

Meanwhile, the opening band starts their set with us, the guy who took the door, me & Stefan, and the book store clerk that is subbing for organizer in the audience. I have to interrupt & point out to Stefan they have started because they are so quiet. The guy at the drums plays guitar and the other guy has a bunch of electronic gadgets connected to a mixer. He puts a knife in some small string instrument and runs it through a guitar pedal which seems to add distortion. He also has a circuit-bent keyboard and some other sort of organ / thing.

During their set, three people show up. Audience members! We all cheer because we are so happy there is an audience. I am pretty okay with it because I feel like the pressure is off and I can test run things and try different things. Plus, the other shows actually had an audience and I have more shows after.

Near the end of the opening band's set: "The Taste of Popcorn" (or "The Subjective Taste of Popcorn"? one of those) we find out about the basket. The guy sitting at the electronics goes crazy and starts throwing shit. The drummer opens the basket and throws clothes everywhere. Everywhere. It did look like a clothes hamper. He starts playing the hamper

with his sticks. The guy at the electronics grabs another string instrument, and they pretend to play for a few minutes. One of the audience members yells, "Free jazz is so deep!" a bunch.

I just realized that I am better at names when I don't know the faces first, because I don't remember anyone's names from that night. Yet, mention a friend's name I don't know and I will know it forever attached to everything you tell me about this person. Actually meeting people, I forget to pay attention during introductions or something.

Anyways, I get dressed and then go on. It takes me incredibly long to initialize the software this time, for some reason. I start with Error of My Ways, and that goes without a hitch.... except for I don't actually lose control. Or, I do for a bit, and then I get it back pretty quickly. Somehow, my random reset is pretty generous with me. I think this is actually the result of the fact that I hate losing control in this piece, and I made it a little too possible to regain it. Must re-calibrate. Meanwhile, I enjoy having control. Its a fun little thingy to have control of.

Then, balancing act follows. Everything goes well. I continued to feel distanced. I'm getting slightly better at finding the dot, but I think I need to add a threshold before the error starts affecting things. In that piece, I am never doing well finding that dot. Even when I had it programmed still for a while.

The set-up time for those pieces is atrocious, and I am now working on minimizing it.

This time, one of my synths mysteriously just doesn't start in things that breathe. It doesn't really affect the song so much in structure, etc. but it was surprising because normally that piece is rock solid.

Afterwards, it seems most people really liked Time becomes Magnetic, which is interesting because that is the piece I was most worried about not fitting into the set. At least the rest of the set is unified by voice, is what I'm thinking. The only remarkable

thing about the set is that I start crawling around on the floor for some songs and climbing on furniture. My inbetween song banter remains a bit weak / mediocre.... which is something I have to work on if I'm billing my act as cabaret...

Afterwards, they give me all the door. The other bands don't want it, so I'm like, okay. Ironically, this is the only gig where someone has remembered to take a door. When we get to the car, we find out its over \$70. Holy crap! Only three people who were not obligated to show up, showed up! They must have felt bad about the whole deal or something.

We decide to truck it back to DC and go out and drink there. We walk around for an hour trying to find the right bar.

March 20 @ The Lighthouse, Washington, DC

The first inkling I get that The Lighthouse is, in fact, a house where people live and not er, some other sort of venue is when they send an email that says we have to start at 8pm because we can't disturb the neighbors, and also we should come early because they are making dinner for everyone. Since the place is about fifteen minutes from Stefan's place, we do not have strange directional problems, and we arrive right on time. It is totally a house. A nice, big one, though!

We run into the members of Sonic Circus, and they tell us we can just start unloading... and so we do. Everything goes in the basement. The PA hasn't arrived yet, so I do the amount of set-up that I can do without it. I'm done in about fifteen minutes, and so we go up and have dinner. It's nice and relaxing. Dinner is vegan and very good. They made applesauce from scratch, partly because their band name is Fantasy Apple Pipe Machine.

We chat and stuff. Layne is teaching music for Quaker kids and teaching them how to make instruments. I wish I had a teacher like that in junior high. I also talk with Mike

from Sonic Circus and we find out we know lots of the same people and play the same venues. He even met Katia and Charlie during ICMC 2006.

Initially, I was scheduled in third place, but I end up playing last due to the fact that I claim I am not particularly loud. Anyways, we all go down to the basement to watch Sonic Circus. Their first piece is very cool and unexpected. It is for bassoon and turntables, and it was pretty rocking. I've never seen anyone rock out on a bassoon before. The rest of the set is also very solid, and in particular, they play this awesome video along with a Terry Riley piece. Later, Stefan tells me that for a while, it even matched with the color of the music in his mind. (context: he has synesthesia)

Next up: The Fantasy Apple Pipe Machine is interesting. Layne is playing a mic'd styrofoam box with pipes laid on top. As he hits the box, the pipes start rolling off and he has to constantly keep them steady and put them back. It is very precarious. That is probably my favorite part of watching the band. I say so later, but he seems very nonplussed when I mention it. It occurs to me briefly that others may not share a similar interest in things going wrong and dangerous performance situations.

Then, Sejayno. They seem humorous, which is nice. I am not sure which parts are serious and which parts are not sometimes. Their homemade instruments look incredibly interesting.

Then me. I start with Error of My Ways. I accidentally start the guitar parts twice, which throws me at first. But, it works, actually. Its very interesting. I try to follow only one guitar part for my voice parts. This time, the synth really does stop working (it is supposed to that, I know. I programmed it in). It is frustrating. It is also softer because it is competing against two copies of the guitar.

things that breathe and Study in Losing Control go especially well that night. There's something about performing things a lot that makes them go better. Huh! It is mystery. (no, not really). Lastly, I do balancing act. Unfortunately, the speakers are placed for

maximum feedback, the song is more about me trying to find the place with the least amount of feedback than trying to find the dot. It is sort of different piece than I intended and yet the same arc. Oh, I fail in preventing feedback. I am thinking of just taking out some of the ways the voice affects the piece. It sounds pretty awesome in ideal conditions but that's happened... once.

Oh, and before I play balancing act one of the people watching asks me about my technology, in progressive questions.

him: Is that Supercollider?

me: No, its C++

him: Is that Supercollider?

me: yes.

him: version 3?

me: 3.1, actually.

Entertaining, I'm sure.

ETA: Although this gig was at a party, it still had one of the better turn-outs I've seen!

March 21 @ The Nightlight in Chapel Hill, NC

Stefan and I leave DC planning to arrive at Chapel Hill in time to have a leisurely dinner with my friends before the 9:30pm show...in theory. The catch here is that we both forget it is Easter weekend. Do you know what that means? It means that we were horrendous traffic for three hours.... until we were about an hour away from Richmond, I was never going above 35mph. It took us almost seven hours to get to Chapel Hill.

It looks like we will be arriving when the gig is supposed to start. I didn't think I was the first one to go on... but I'm freaking out a little in any case. I call the venue several times. No one answers. In a panic, I call Gennette and get her to go to the club to tell them we

were going to be late. Luckily, this is one of the two places on my tour where I have this kind of option. She calls me back.

No one is at the club. Not even the owner or the manager. None of the other musicians. Just some girls that always hang there. It is, at this point, around 8:45pm.

I forgot about living in the South. Then, Gennette tells me the game went over and that's probably why. She doesn't know which game, although we assume it is basketball or something. It's very big there.

We arrive at 9:30pm exactly. No one is playing. They tell me I'm second and I don't have to set-up until right before. In fact, they don't want me to set-up until the first act tears down. My friends are already there and we run into more on the way. We decide to leave and get a drink at the Lantern. We need to unwind post stressful trip. I say I will be back in 20. When we get back, which is roughly within that time frame, the previous set just finishes. I feel pretty terrible since I usually try to watch all the other shows. Meanwhile, all my friends show up, and I'm very touched by how many people came. I got to see a ton of people that I hadn't seen since I'd left for Dartmouth and even before.

Then, I set up. They actually have a feedback monitor and a stage, which is great. Everything is in the opposite part of the room from the last time I played there... which admittedly was a few years ago. The only problem is this crazy hum that won't go away. Someone jokes about seeing if there is a Computer Scientist in the room to help me... which is funny because a plurality of my friends are CS grad students.

We all think it's ground hum but we can't find another outlet. Some other musician tells me he restarted his powermac and that worked for him, once. So... I do that, even though it seems unlikely. Time is passing by. The Nightlight people are completely unhelpful... until someone that played there before tells us about the outlet in the kitchen. Stefan is running around with wires trying to find an outlet himself. Thankfully, I brought a crazy long extension cord just in case.

Yes, it was ground hum. Everything is fixed. Only it took us over an hour to get them to tell us where the other outlet was. !!! Most of wiring in the Nightlight is ungrounded. At this point, a Nightlight person shows up and says I have to go on...now and could I please limit my set to fifteen minutes? Jeez. I just start with better in the dark since its the oldest and I can do it in my sleep. I feel catastrophic, which with my set... works well. In the middle of songs, I go and initialize songs in SC for the next thing. I set up completely for Error of my Ways... even introduce it when I realize (using NetAddr.langPort) that the port number has incremented. The one damn thing I forgot to create a failsafe for between the Baltimore & DC shows. I say, just kidding! and do an accordion number right away. Uh, no accelerometer pieces for this show.

things that breathe and Study in Losing Control go off incredibly well. Every number, too, I'm actively performing and using the space on the stage. I stand on chairs... I use random things as props... I'm oddly cognizant of vertical and horizontal levels in space... I had changed a few parameters in Study in Losing Control since everything lately had been under control since I had... er, over-performed it? or something. Anyways, I had learned how it reacted... so I had changed some parameters in the noise UGENs, etc. thinking that would do something. Well... it did. I had no idea what was going on... also, I was so stressed out that I was actually really freaking out and worried about things blowing up. Sounds were coming out of it that I've never heard ever... possibly in my life. I checked the computer a few times during performance, even. It was horrible and wonderful all at the same time. There is the sense for me though that my set has coalesced and everything makes sense. I'm finally performing the whole way through it.

At the end of my set, the woman from the next act whom I hadn't seen tells me to get my shit off the stage at fast and possible. She is very upset with me. So I do.

Another thing, the entire night was advertised as being a set of experimental music by female musicians. Well, we were all female. As for experimental... the other artists were very good from what I heard... but all definitely fit well within the rock/alt/indie-

guitarish category. Ah, well. Even in the experimental shows I feel like I tend to stick out a bit... especially when the other sets are quiet-ish free improv with very introverted performances.

Afterwards, Amber comes up and tells me that was exactly how she's been feeling lately and she was so glad she came to my show. I think that's one of the best things to hear. Stefan tells me that was the best set he's seen me do... Everyone is very nice, and wanting to chat. They ask me if I want to leave, but I stay because I've been the last act and had people leave, etc. Unfortunately, this also causes some problems. My friends do slowly file out the club, leaving it more than half empty and then saying good-bye, etc. as they leave.

I stay the whole set. At the end, the woman in the act comes up immediately to me and makes another comment. She is extremely pissed off. There's nothing to be done at that point, so I just get my stuff and go.

Then, we go to Vespa and catch the last half-hour of bhangra and I run into more people that I know. Turns out that there was a conflict (of course!). Well, I knew NC Lounge had a Siren's gig thing but there was also bhangra, etc. and Montek & Bruce were djing. So, its pretty damn cool that everyone who showed up, did show up.

Next time I play Chapel Hill I am going to go through another venue or booker. That is actually an extremely easy thing to do. No more damn Nightlight and ungrounded outlets. Stefan thinks I should carry a small electrical generator where I go. Perhaps not a bad idea.

Later, I get more detailed feedback from some of my friends. Rivka, whose dissertation is on embodiment and performance tells me she did really like how I used space on stage in my performance. She also said the accordion really worked since it was such an embodied instrument for me... which I think actually must have happened in the past few years. Pepe likes my rhythms and improvisation stuff... It was nice to get all that positive

feedback. Oh, and Stefan says he's going to start going to my shows and holding up a big black sign that says "ANGST" in red letters.

It was so nice to be home (or a home-like place) even with all the stress. I had a locopop. You cannot find these outside of the Triangle. And rural areas of Mexico. Seriously! I had grapefruit-basil. (it is entirely predictable I would get the one with basil) Other flavors were: Tamirand, Chocolate Stout, Blueberry-Rosemary, Mango-Chile, Indian Rice Pudding, etc.

I also stayed with Gennette, who is a master water-saver. See, there's been a drought for almost a year or something and they were asked to cut water consumption by at least 30%. Gennette took that as a challenge. I think at this point she must be saving over 80% of what she was previously using. Seriously. And she has youtube videos about it.

March 23 @ The Guffey Art Center, Charlottesville, VA

So, as stated before, I did not realize that March 23 was Easter when I booked this gig. It was a few days later when I remember that it is also my mother's birthday! Whoops! Oh, well. It is the place that is closest to Roanoke, where my parents live. So, my family are all coming to see the show. Not only that but Wayne (who gave me Wendy's name in the first place) my ex from long long ago in Roanoke is playing the gig with his girlfriend, Khate. Lots of Roanokers (the correct term) in the audience. Also, Kevin Parks, an eamusic grad whom I met at ICMC is also on the bill. It is nice knowing most of the people involved beforehand.

My family arrives a few minutes before me and help me carry in gear. I give my mom a present and say "happy birthday" a ton before just getting ready and setting up. Set-up does go pretty well, except for one moment where I forget to set the default output to my audio interface and I can't figure out what's up. Well, I find out very soon, but the moment it happens my heart stops and I'm positive that I am fucked and a Nightlight-like fiasco is about to take place. Uh, but no.

First up are Kevin Parks and Jonathan Zorn. They are guitarish with electronics... seems to be free improv and this is confirmed later. Apparently, it was the first time that they played together. It works well, I didn't know that. My sister comes in late, not realizing that they had started. She starts to say something loudly but I shush her emphatically. I have turned into a shusher.

I wonder what my family thinks of it, and what framework they have to attach what people are doing. I remember being a freshman college student living in New Orleans, walking into the Funky Butt and stumbling on free improvisation. I was the one that got shushed. I had thought that they were setting up and equipment and tuning, and not playing. Funny to think of that, now.

Then, me. I drop everything with beats out of my set except for the accordion improv piece. Everything goes smoothly. Except for performing in general and the areas where I have to improvise, I am not winging it at all. Everything works. Error of my Ways is very frustrating, but then again, only because I wrote that kind of thing into my piece. I also am switching songs very fast with very little set-up time. I continue to use the chair as a prop etc., as I am moving around. I stand on top of it, etc.

balancing act is spectacular in that every part of it works the way its supposed to AND I can actually find the dot sometimes and the noise leaves the mix and things sync. Partly its because I'm better at it... partly its because I made it easier in code as part of my general set clean-up in DC. It is less of a steady progression of now I'm successful then less so then I never find the dot. Its more like, hey! I found the dot for a while! Oh, I lost it. Damn... where is it? I'm actually trying to find it...

It also slightly less angsty than usual because I have to switch all the words. Also, I'm using a keyboard amp instead of PA, which is less optimal in some cases, but in the case of the feedback involved in balancing act it is great. There's no crazy shit with feedback happening, ever. I get comments on how it was really neat how my voice affected the

music, etc.... and I think, yes, this is the first time you can hear it in the way it was intended!

Study in Losing Control continues to be unpredictable and one of the best pieces in my set.... or something. Its the piece that feels the most interactive, like I'm pushing against something and its responding... not like an instrument, though... like another person. I do baby-sit the computer as I'm performing, changing levels, etc... even starting new synths in SC3 once things start... it does emphasize my use of the computer, which I wanted to make less salient not more, but it does allow me to fix and adjust things as I'm going which I've decided is more important.

One of the improvements that happened in Chapel Hill and continued in Charlottesville was that I just stopped feeling sheepish about actually performing and having a cabaret-type thing when it was so different from what I was seeing other people do. Not that no one else does similar things but no one that I was playing with had these elements. Rivka asked me what I called what I did, and I said post-modern cabaret, which is mostly true. But I've seen what Meow Meow does and I don't do that. I still need to get a lot better at talking and having a dialogue. Switching between songs quickly is really a stop-gap for that. I think I've at least improved. I feel my show would be more compelling if I could find a persona (other than my natural nerdy computer programmer / composer one because that doesn't mesh with the rest of my performance) that worked for me and I could stick with it.

In retrospect, it was helpful trying to come up with an entertaining bio that really described my show/act, because without the aspects of cabaret and angst, I don't know if my set would have come together... Well, I mean, it first felt like different parts of my set were very disjunct, and now I don't feel that. I feel that my personality carries through and provides a thread. Or, maybe I've just been performing through the set long enough that I've gotten used to it. Or that.

Anyways! Wayne & Khate's set. He calls himself feralcatscan, by the way. It very dramatic for this type of thing. They have glow-y balls and stuff. You can see the Dr. Who love, right there. I am mildly surprised that they are not using computers at all since Wayne was the first guy to use a computer on stage in Roanoke way back then, in the day. But I do know that he's been building and hacking and circuit-bending his own instruments so maybe it isn't that unexpected. Meanwhile, he tells me a desktop is just too much to carry to gigs lately and he won't use laptops because he can't build them himself. (but he still uses Windows!) By the way, he also built their PA and painted it. It is very pretty. We almost always agree on aesthetics. Also, both he & Khate changed into nicer/more goth clothes to perform, which is nice, because it meant I wasn't the only one who was doing that.

Meanwhile, a few people leave. The turn-out is not great since its Easter weekend... (hmmm) Wendy asks me if I still want to do the 3 accordion improv we planned. I'm like, dude! I don't care if people are here or not! So everyone gets ready, etc. Everyone else has a nicer accordion than me that's electric, plugged into an amp, and just, tons of effects. Also, they have more reeds. They both probably have a musette setting. I am so jealous. I want that.

Its okay that I'm not electric and I don't have lots of effects. There is space for me when we are playing in way that there never seems to be when I'm playing with other ensembles. Not that contrast isn't good, but it is really really nice to hear something timbrally and know how to produce that on my instrument and then play off of it in a completely intuitive manner. Its like improvising voice with Carmen, although obviously not as comfortable as that since Carmen & I have been working together for a while. But still! There is that element to it. I still feel like we are being a bit timid... or I can only speak for myself and I was feeling that a bit. Especially with my acoustic accordion with no musette setting. (I don't think they even used that setting, I just want a musette setting a LOT)

Anyways, we pack up and chat and catch up a little bit. I'm kinda in a hurry to get out because I'm driving to DC.... which, by the way, google gives me directions going through the middle of BFE except for as I'm driving through it I realize that it is not really BFE. There's stuff there. Like, some farms. Some houses. Relatively lots of stuff compared to BFE in Vermont / New Hampshire. BFE in Virginia is much, much more populated. People may be handling snakes for religious purposes.... but there is stuff to do there. I mean, when you think about it, people talking in tongues is pretty entertaining. I've only seen it two or three times in my life and it was a spectacle. AND the music in Pentecostal churches tends to be fantastic.

Then, DC! Stefan! Losing my keys! Panic! Finding them again! Overly long trek back to the wastelands of New Hampshire due to me not being an overly ambitious driver.

me: Oh! This roadstop has....internet. My car doesn't have internet... *distract distract*

Also, no matter how much coffee I drank I was tired enough so that it affected my driving ability, unfortunately. Touring is exhausting.

March 29 @ The Outpost 186, Boston, MA

First off, I get lost in Boston. Luckily I end up on Mass Ave., through arbitrary driving decisions, which is, I realize, helpful when I am calling for directions. Anyways, I spent a good forty-five minutes clueless in the city, so I'm a bit late for set-up. Luckily, my set-up time is normally pretty short. I mean, providing that there are grounded electrical outlets available.

Well, I get there, and its a nice little space. We get to perform right in front a Bay window which is nice. I have a fondness for bay windows. Also, I find from Carmen than we got press. Press from The Boston Globe. Whoohoo!!! We're one of the top 5

picks! Unfortunately, The Boredoms AND Laurie Anderson are playing the same night. So, our audience is still pretty small.

I get changed and everything. Then, I take the wires out of the battery re-charger and attempt to connect them back to the wtilt accelerometer. Notice the word choice: "attempt". One of the wires twisted off in this endeavor. Oh noes! Carmen goes on just as this happens. I try not to mess with shit too much while she's performing. She does well... her voice is awesome, as always. She seems to have some problems with the Carmenizer, but interesting sounds do come out. I look forward to seeing/hearing the full version.

So, I ask for a paper clip so I can keep pressure on the wire and perform the pieces despite the disaster. Rob gets me one, and it works. I am so MacGuyver. Error of my Ways goes off without a hitch! I explain that I will lose control of the synth, etc. Later, someone asks me how I am losing control, so maybe she didn't notice my frustrated shaking trying to set off the synth. It could be that it is hard to read as frustration? Well, everything goes well. Well, at one point, the server freaks out before I can do "things that breathe", but I just move on to a pre-recorded piece (accordion improv) and set things up fast. I perform it later.

At this point, my set just goes. I'm so sad. I'm a sad sad girl. I am going insane with the sadness and losing control. By the end of the my set, though, the paperclip has slipped and I can't do balancing act. I could have fiddled with it, but I decide to spare both myself and the audience the time of silence whilst fixing shit, and do "better in the dark", which I wasn't going to do.

Again, I try and make use of the space and levels. I do a bit of crawling and try to incorporate chairs, mic stands as props. I feel I might be moving a bit too much. I tend to be in constant motion, so I force myself to hold particular poses so things don't get too... "busy". I think I need to work on staying still in moments and using it more as a dramatic device.

The very act of performing seems to bring about what I call the "fragile body" sometimes, the disassociation of the self from the body. I find myself often thinking in body parts and where to put them, rather than putting my "self" places. My hands sometimes feel like props in black lace, disconnected from the rest of me. Even though my thesis pieces are exploring these concepts, it is the pieces where I have the most freedom to move that brings about this state most often. In balancing act and Error of my Ways there are moments when I am not aware of things like that, but then it does appear. Actually, until I fixed it, balancing act did produce those sensations the most, perhaps because I was faking it the vast majority of the time and I felt useless... because I was so bad at it. There is a strange continuum in Error of my Ways where I am really using the controller effectively, and then I am wondering what the hell is happening. In the beginning of the piece, I do feel like an embodied performer. Everything contrasts to my accordion pieces where I sometimes even feel like I lose the sense of myself as a self but I am just lost in the activity of it. Reminds of Rivka telling me what an embodied instrument it has become for me.

Afterwards, I get told that I am indeed like an Edward Gorey heroine. Nice. And Rob tells me he's never seen anything like it before. He wants me to send him a DVD of one of my shows. Yay!

As I enter the exit from the interstate back to Hanover, NH, I notice a sign with an arrow pointing in the vague direction of my neighborhood: "KARATE" it says. Indeed.

Appendix B: Photographs of Performances

Performing *balancing act* Hartt School of Music, March 9, 2008,



Performing *balancing act* at The Red Room Collective, March 15, 2008



Performing *balancing act* at The Red Room Collective, March 15, 2008



Performing *The Error of my Ways* at the McGuffey Art Center, March 23rd, 2008



Appendix C: List of Tour Dates

March 2 2008
Hartt-Dartmouth Composer Exchange
Hartt School of Music, Hartford, Connecticut

March 9 2008
Firehouse 13
Providence, Rhode Island

March 13 2008
Monkeytown
Williamsburg, Brooklyn, New York

March 15 2008
Red Room Collective
Baltimore, Maryland

March 20 2008
Lighthouse
Washington DC

March 21 2008
The Nightlight
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

March 23 2008
McGuffey Art Center, Studio 11
Charlottesville, Virginia

March 29 2008
The Outpost 186
Boston, Massachusetts

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