

Contents

1 Delimiting Perspectives	5
1.1 Starting point	5
1.2 Mapping out	7
1.2.1 Limits of intuition in the artistic process	7
1.2.2 Limits of intuition in the technical process	9
1.2.3 Framing	11
1.3 Trial	13
1.3.1 Aims and material	13
1.3.2 Development and tensions	14
1.3.3 Evaluation	17
2 Remapping Methods	19
2.1 Aims	20
2.2 Axes of tension	22
2.3 Evaluation	24

Introduction

This thesis investigates sonic experimentation by cross-examining artistic, technical, and social conditions in construction of exploratory situations that test boundaries and foreground tensions, frictions, and negotiations across contexts and multiplicity of relations that converge in a particular sonic encounter. While the contexts can vary in kind: auditory and participatory works, tools, and workshop activities, they all serve to propel ongoing cycles of reorientation of creative decision-making.

Constructing situations in which mediation between multiple components is a general, but fleeting description of the method. Depending on the context, this mediation demands different things: transparency and self-awareness mean something else when applied to the role and agency of a sound artist or a composer, a software engineer, and again something different in the case of a community member or organiser. The possible outcomes could be described with terms familiar to experimental practices: exploratory potential, emergence, serendipity, didactics, self-organisation; but here they are approached not as much as goals to be guaranteed than as contingent effects of how these situations are configured.

Chapter 1

Delimiting Perspectives

1.1 Starting point

I began my sound practice with a mode of operation that I describe as tinkering, focused on an intuitive process of developing singular experiments. The motivation and guiding principle was sonic exploration: finding ways of making sounds that I had not heard before, with a clear orientation towards the unstable and new. My process involved developing these experiments as empirical tests, or synthesis of acquired knowledge followed by, often much later, thinking about the preconditions for them to display interesting behaviour.

I appreciated auditory works which paid interest to exposing yet undefined timbres, but also ones that re-contextualised the sound material while recognising its cultural baggage. I was interested in uncharted sound encounters, as such in-the-moment experiences can activate a tension that requires renegotiating or reorienting the arrangement of references recalled from a subject's memory. Retrospectively, this is how I formulate my own creative motivations.

Out of these, a directly technical kind of activities emerged, attempting to expand my own creative means and technical knowledge in a hands-on manner. My interest lay more in opening up black boxes than in constructing new ones, assuming that a larger decision-making space would allow more sonic possibilities, which in retrospect might only work as long as the use case remains fixed to solitary rewiring. Developing and branching one software project after another, I was guided by curiosity and intuition almost as much as in my artistic decisions. This meant I kept starting again rather than learning how to carry a project through: I had many ideas for new devices, but almost no experience of running a codebase and a sustainable development process in a way that could actually arrive somewhere.

Working mainly with digital audio environments and tools, while building

my own, I planned to continue this practice of personal experimentation within the research frame of an experimental music institution. What pulled me towards it was the continuum of works concerned with critical approaches to technology and minimal approaches to digital sound making which were of my interest. Specifically in terms of development of synthesis techniques, there were a number of historical projects that were linked to, or in dialogue with, the research that was happening at Sonology. I was looking forward to getting into this context and was curious about how I would find my position there and how I would see myself within it. Following these prior assumptions, some of them were indeed fulfilled: I was able to extend my technical competence, and acquire new points of reference for different kinds of practices connected to algorithmic music and uses of digital synthesis. At the same time, I realised that the aesthetics I appreciated in artistic work produced at Sonology studios in the past century were a result of technological constraints in the respective era, and while the current technological circumstances imposed limitations of a different kind, in my impression it drove encouragement towards complexity; mostly reserving itself to either exploring technical novelty or tributes to post-serialist composition. Likewise, many of the formats and models of practice inherited from musical academia did not appear compatible with my research which attempted to escape the musical field. It has to be pointed out that as much as established formats can still be subverted, experimented with, and have their boundaries-pushed, I lacked the intuition, experience, and personal connection required to engage with them critically.

With gains in knowledge, I struggled to conceptualise the artistic outcome of my research efforts. It did not seem fitting to attempt thorough technical work aiming to build a complex piece of software, since my focus was on aesthetic results of relatively simple technical concepts, implemented in forms that were not meant to function as instruments, nor compositional or improvisational systems. Similarly, I lacked references for sound work formats that would propose to tie my aesthetic stance and practical activity, possibly situated just at the fringes of both artistic and technical fields. This was a problem of my position at the time which, if aiming to sound generous, would be the one of an erudite solipsist: I was only beginning to learn how to verbalise, discuss and justify creative decisions, while simultaneously having strong opinions which I was not always able to put into words; especially in case of the matters that were not strictly technical, yet required systematic answering. Situated within broader critical discourses on music, media and technology cultures which I was not willing to give up on, my immediate stance was increasingly more difficult to define with respect to the many dimensions I would have to consider at every step. Within these constellations of interests, I was incapable of proposing, or

even attempting a specific position that my work could occupy.

Coming to this breaking point, the first realization was that, by no means being inactive at the time, I had little intuition for the kind of work I would seek to produce in an institutional or conservatory context. A matter of not yet being informed by this environment; and the fact that this lack of intuition was a complete block suggested a reflection: whether it could be the conditions and context that have been intuitively informing my process. The choices of form or material were always hardly pre-defined and made on a very ad hoc basis in the case of each creative project I endeavoured in. There was no predetermined procedure to determine these separations, other than taking the context as a point of reference and trying to make sense of what might activate it.

Unsurprisingly, this unsystematic mode of operation fails when the inspiration was not located (a rather fleeting condition to achieve). With no stabilised habits of structuring my works either due to the interdisciplinary nature of my activities, I was rendered effectively unable to define anything specific I could actually execute. This might have been easier had I decided to pick an identity for myself out of the customary pool of choices, be it an instrument builder or a composer; as for these roles the way of operation is already partially established and the choice of materials being worked with is more delimited from the premise. Instead, I resisted containing the range of interests to engage with or settling for the constraints of pre-given rules that could give me a general navigation scheme, still counting on formulating one that might be provisional but on my own terms.

1.2 Mapping out

1.2.1 Limits of intuition in the artistic process

Noticing this point of friction located around the context highlighted it as a recurring step in my process, the conditions as what could have been informing the work so far. To develop understanding around this problem, I will follow the line of tension that's been located, and attempt to map out related concerns within existing frameworks possible to refer to, in order to potentially reappropriate parts that could aid me in navigating it. Until that point, one of my main inspirations had been the minimalist works coming from the milieu functioning in New York in the 1960s and 1970s; the post-Cage generation, most of whom were also active within other fields outside of music, such as philosophy, mathematics, or film, respectively considering the figures like Henry Flynt, Tony Conrad and Phill Niblock. All of these three worked across multiple media seemingly guided by a set of concerns shared across these, which for me remained difficult

to grasp, often appearing very personal and at a high-level of abstraction. The lack of appropriate tools to analyse this is understandable in retrospect. From the musical side, they were functioning in the milieu that moved progressively from serialism, through and beyond John Cage [Josepl], the musicological developments of which I had no interest in. Nevertheless, it is difficult to analyse the extramusical with tools at hand that are mostly appropriate for handling the musical or the technical. This motivated a shift from sonic minimalism to engagement with minimalist art of the similar period, in search of points of reference aligned with what I already could identify in my own mode of operation, to the purpose of serving as a starting point for understanding the latter more systematically.

Hal Foster frames minimalist art as having little in common across different works or practices, except for a general concern with the encounter with the work, which is treated as the main object of investigation. At the same time, work is no longer evaluated by comparative aesthetic value that is socially or culturally established, but in terms of its functionality, with aesthetic value no longer fixed or central [Foster]. What is this function then? Taking the suggestion from Kim-Cohen: “the only irreducible component of works of art—the only thing all works of art produce—are relations: between artist and audience, between audience members, between each audience member and the collective audience, between these actors and institutions, between the present and history, and between artworks.” [Kim-Cohen], in my understanding, the value of the work then comes from its contribution to the considered network of relations within which it is deliberately placed, and so it is simultaneously based on the meanings already established in its context while highlighting or producing new ones. In other words, its efficiency would equal to the production of meanings, in Kim-Cohen’s understanding these being graspable only through the consideration of relations between them (ibid.). Curiously, this would equal to the work never existing in the abstract realm of ideas of the artist, but only emerging as it is experienced in the particular moment of one’s encounter with it.

What troubled me, however, was that this stance was explicitly positioned against work centering perception. If “there is no way you can frame it, you just have to experience it” [Foster], I would assume the need for a sensory entry point allowing the subject to experience the encounter, the perceptual likely being an integral part of the conditions. In that case, the notion of perception would allow for at least two ways of being interpreted. If perception is assumed to be a neutral layer, a transparent interface to an objective reality, communicating the general truth of the composite structure of “things and meanings” into our experience, this notion is indeed problematic. The alternative would be to consider the perception on a per-case basis of each individual subject as dif-

ferently opaque, and shaped by the physiological conditions of the body and its individual history, as much as the collectively shared history of cultural sediment. Tending towards the latter notion of the generalised objective experience being impossible, though often operationally assumed, we could attempt to locate the cause allowing for an impression of this objective experience to be naturalised, unnoticeably becoming the default mode of operation, thus habitually rendered transparent. Said experience of the perceived transparency is then a matter of “an intense form of discipline and pedagogy” [Coles] in place that is enforcing it, pointing to the cultural conditioning as an irrevocable but constructed part of subjectivity.

It seems the investigation of the conditions of the encounter, in turn, opens up multiple layers of discussion that go beyond the physical space where the work is experienced and into the matters of subjective and collective notions of the cultural. Kwon proposes an understanding of the notion of site of that encounter as layered: emerging as phenomenological, institutional or discursive; a work hardly functions within a single site only; and tends to operate at the overlap of several of these [Kwon]. For example, the computer music works of Mark Fell [Fell] and Tom Mudd [Bra] both engage with tool-specificity which can be located within the textual site, the said approach of specificity described as a compound of the technological-cultural discourse by Christopher Haworth in the context of sound synthesis procedures. While focusing on particularities and affordances of these tools on the other hand positions their works within the material site of the tools themselves [Haworth], I would add that while the choice of the sites considered and worked with relies on the agency of the artist, the work might often function within sites outside of their immediate specification. Positioning a work within a site understood in this way functions as a minimal amount of framing that effectively maps onto what was already happening in my creative process. Not at all exhaustive; it is oriented toward the production and criticism of my own work, and its limits are just as instructive as its successes.

1.2.2 Limits of intuition in the technical process

In early 2024, I joined the INA GRM R&D team as an intern to work on the reinterpretation of GRM Tools, positioning myself within an industrial context and an institution with a long history of experimental music and studio practices, aiming to acquire practical insights of their ethos of toolbuilding, but also learning how to provide technical grounds for experimental processes beyond my own.

After the initial couple of months of learning the ropes of industry standards, I progressed to prototyping and was tasked with designing and implementing a

modular unit of an envelope-generator. Unsurprisingly, my tendency towards openness, lack of an articulated final concept, and case-by-case adaptation contrasted with the realities of building commercial software or working in more formal research contexts. Very quickly it became clear that “keeping options open” is not scalable: every alternative branch of a feature multiplies the work of maintaining and composing it with other features, especially when several units are in development and the main project continues to evolve upstream.

Being responsible for this new feature raised many concerns sooner than I expected. Before the development process progressed from bare-bones functioning audio code to more involved interfacing; already at the early stages of implementing and testing the most basic functionalities I had to decide which parameters to expose, how they are presented, and what kinds of behaviour they allowed. I was rapidly confronted with stacking layers of complex, inter-dependent choices that had to be made. Thus, I was constantly moving two steps forward, then one, two, or three backwards, learning to make provisional decisions in order to design functionalities with the specification aims in mind.

Finally, it was an important understanding I arrived at, that what I was used to experience directly as an explorative freedom while using certain tools and environments is mostly purposefully constructed through deeply involved design choices relating to operational paradigms, which in turn impact the functionalities available, these mediated by further layers of interfacing and parameter mapping, eventually arriving at the specific ergonomics of the front-end interface exposed to the user.

Indeed gaining some practical knowledge and shifting my habits towards applied industry standards, the question of how to apply these to my own endeavours remained. Provided the large amount of architecture: libraries, project structure and developed design, that were already in place when I joined the team, to reapproach my own technical work I would have to deliberately pick a starting point that would allow to begin the iterations of the technical research process; this time only guided by my best available judgment to assess how it’s improved.

I again searched for points of reference, as it seemed clearly nontrivial to navigate the process aimed at designing a functional creative device that needs to be reliable in how it operates, intuitive in its controls, and intentional even in the ways it breaks. Thinking of the creative conditions a creative tool constructs, I circled back to the idea of contextuality. Worth pointing out that from the first premises of investigating the history of digital synthesis techniques, the aim of my research was to learn how to build tools both functional and critically addressing their own place in the discourse of creative technology, including its historical and cultural baggage. [Haworth](#)

If approaching this process from the aesthetic point of view, the first step would be to explicitly acknowledge the fact of the design presupposing a particular view or model that provides limited affordances within its constraints. Still, starting from something like a model of sound representation does not appear to immediately give a clear enough direction, as was determined by some of my former projects that started with first design choices made on the sample level.

Taking into account my early interest in opening up black box systems and reassembling their components, it occurred to me in turn that I could attempt to start this process from the other side of the spectrum: aiming to assemble a device providing a familiar functionality with a minimal interface, taking a single but intentional detour somewhere on the way as an experiment to see how this one design decision will propagate throughout the rest of the development process. I arrived at the concept of the said process being explicitly pulled to the surface, in curiosity about whether a tool could make its own *constructedness* perceptible while still being functional; and if that is the case, whether one deliberately divergent part of the specification would result in any characteristic features.

There was no particular musical function I would decide to tackle, understanding the instrumentality as a construct that can develop out of appropriately designed controls, that determining whether it can find its place within an artistic method already or yet undefined. Paraphrasing the words of Benedict Mailliard, the program was not meant to be called an instrument yet, and only made to resonate, a modulated stroke one after the other. [Mailliard 1981](#)

1.2.3 Framing

Formulating this aesthetical-technical stance clarified my framing: considering a specific situation, context, tool or device and its material reality as the space of operation, as a site within which work is constructed, became a helpful notion.

On this basis, I attempted to reverse engineer a negative notion of the contexts I found difficult to position myself within, instead identifying ones where it already functions.

One area emerges as one of creative discourse between multiple domains of activity related to the topic of acoustic and digital reverberation. Repeated engagement with it has led to a comparatively large amount of output, despite its interdisciplinary character. Previously, as it appeared as a vague constellation of interests, this is one site that has not been consciously decided upon, but one which my work effectively constructed and placed itself within through recurring threads and inspirations that repeatedly point back to a discourse related to

reverberation. This includes personal research projects ¹, the development of a system used in my only solo performance at Sonology Performance recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4u-_yqStNyo, two collaborative cassette releases ² ³, and the methods I utilise in my free improvisation practice, where reverberation and room acoustics are treated explicitly as one of the conditioning materials.

As I attempt to examine its parts further, these uncover other sites within which my projects tend to intuitively operate: the minimalist interest in psychoacoustics, history of digital signal processing, machine learning, as well as the canons of free improvisation and field recording, and to an extent, cultures of online communities.

If this single concern of explicitly framing through context proves useful for systematically placing and situating my practice, the next question is how well it functions as an analytical tool for examining what aspects of a particular project actually work. Rather than remaining a broad strategic orientation, it needs to be tested in a more local, tactical setting.

For this purpose, let's apply these lenses we have constructed to a particular project: a SuperCollider UGen for fractal synthesis I have developed utilising the midpoint-displacement algorithm Repository: <https://github.com/wwerk/midpoint/>. The project was carried by what I considered an aesthetically strong concept, connecting both to non-standard synthesis methods, to fractal terrain-generation algorithms, as a one-dimensional version of techniques commonly used in two and three dimensions for simulating landscapes commonplace since the 1980s [Fournier et al.], as well as historical speculative approaches to conceptualising sonification [Kittler, 2006].

It appeared to belong naturally within non-standard synthesis research, which was my main focus at the time. However, as a user, it was difficult to find a convincing way of using it: the implementation was complete and displayed the degree of individual character aimed for, but the interface and functionality of the synth unit could not communicate the conceptual and aesthetic concerns that had motivated the project; amounting to what was essentially a complex oscillator. The chosen framing, as well as design specification remained unproductive. Employing it for algorithmic composition was an available option, yet this appeared insufficient, as it would effectively discard the textual and conceptual dimensions considered as important as the sonic properties themselves. Having invested a substantial amount of time into implementing the project, which involved learning the toolchain required and the standards in which Su-

¹Presentation recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5URLvwFmlb0>

²Release: falt.bandcamp.com/album/two-kendamas

³Release: <https://pressesprecaires.bandcamp.com/album/two-kendamas-ii>

perCollider UGens were structured and interfaced; finally reaching the state of basic functionality and controls, the process seemed to come to a close.

In retrospect, if treated as functioning only within the site of non-standard digital synthesis, its positioning is too restrictive. It might be more appropriate to situate it within a discourse on perceptual modes, psychoacoustics, and discrepancies between sound and image representations. Structures that exhibit rich and interesting detail when visualised do not necessarily afford an equally varied range of sonic results or clearly differentiated outputs when implemented in another medium. Questions of this kind already appear within non-standard synthesis discourse and could have provided an alternative way of re-approaching the project. Another option, if the aim had been to situate it firmly within a technical discourse, would have been to contribute it to discussions on the SuperCollider forum. Requesting feedback or design advice could offer potential for pushing the process further, also integrating the project into community use, rather than leaving it as an isolated personal experiment.

1.3 Trial

4

To follow, the focus narrows to a project that already incorporated an amount of explicit awareness of contextual conditions in the artistic process, deliberate technical choices in specified areas of concern, others simplified or left open; and was navigated taking these principles into account. A piece for a string trio and a digital string model, it had been developed as part of a Sonology workshop organised in collaboration with the ONCEIM Orchestra and Echonance Festival. Four student applicants, including myself, were selected to work over two sessions with three musicians from ONCEIM. It was performed on 23 March 2025 alongside three other compositions by colleagues from Sonology and the Composition department.

The objective of the investigation was to learn how to approach the unfamiliar situation of composing and presenting an ensemble piece, and how can I position myself within it, developing new possible angles to my aesthetic and technical attitudes.

1.3.1 Aims and material

I intended to synthesise several intuitions related to what I understood as the context and conditions of development and presentation of the work. Attempting to problematise the concert hall, ensemble performance situation, and ha-

⁴Recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMeiZKyOdtM>

bitual operation of performers and the audience, I aimed to propose an understanding of text-scores and verbal instructions as human interpretations of algorithms that inherently involve contingency in their execution. The extent of this contingency relates to the nature of the instructions provided, and my interest was in scoring that explicitly defines the actions of the performers, the execution of which is dependent on their subjective assessment of the perceptual conditions of the moment. More so, to put their roles in tension with each other, the concept focused on facilitating timbral and spatial masking behaviours between the acoustic sounds they were producing, and the amplified sound of the digital string model. The final aspect was the tension of active attempts to converge between two contrasting groups of timbre (acoustic, digital).

As mentioned above, the instructions were designed to be clear in the actions they specified, but the presence of triggers for these to be executed was to be subjectively determined based on ambiguous conditions. When a performer could distinguish the speaker from other sounds, they would stop playing; if they could still clearly identify it, they should keep playing and try to mask its timbre as much as possible. Performers were meant to disrupt each other, so another line of tension ran through their mutual interactions. On the level of construction, the main tension was in the dynamics between performers, with the synthesised sound acting as a regulating factor. Two main behaviours were taken into account: timbral ambiguity and spatial ambiguity. The structure formed a soft feedback loop between the three players and the synthetic string. Responsibility here meant both covering one's own range of the spectrum, while attending and attempting to fill any audible gaps within it that emerged from the differing timbres of the violin, viola and cello. I understood it as a proposed experiment in how a parametrised electronic-music logic translates into instrumental practice.

For the audience, a related set of dynamics was meant to unfold: spatial and timbral masking were present as much as for the performers. Additionally, the utilisation of absorption panels placed around the space introduced another disruptive component to the concert situation, ensuring there was no single origin point, neither for performers nor for listeners.

1.3.2 Development and tensions

Once accepted, the situation became more concrete. I was asked for a one-minute excerpt of previous work and encouraged to contact the performers by email ahead of time, which I did rather late. When writing to the performers, I sent two example recordings and asked them to imitate these and send recordings back, as a way of testing whether there was material worth pursuing under the

available conditions.

Conversations with workshop advisors mostly focused on approaching it as a learning process, and how to approach composing for instruments through affordance, which reinforced my initial attitude of context-specificity. The emphasis became: investigate in depth what can be done with these particular instruments and this specific temporal and institutional situation, rather than arrive with a fixed “work”. In practice this meant keeping main assumptions in the plan but leaving the details open.

After going through at least two conceptual versions, and after some reflection, I simplified the concept: I dropped the pitch-tracking and shifted focus to audible masking as the main parameter, both spatial and timbral. What followed were technical decisions to be made around selecting the single pitch to be played, what kind of wide or narrow-band sounds they could obtain from their instruments that could compliment the synthesised output. All three players were instructed to use open strings, effectively creating octaves of G at different registers depending on the instrument and the Karplus synthesiser. The provisional concept was that I would simply turn the feedback up and then down, moving from noise to pitch and back to noise.

There was also some figuring out to do around tuning and behaviour of the synthesis. In my notes I describe a trajectory from quiet to clearly present, pleasant but not loud, going from high-feedback, prominent pitch towards lower feedback and a noisier spectrum. The performers were instructed to cover up as much of the synthesiser’s band as possible, with the masking bandwidth increasing over time. The initial idea was to move from pitch to noise, but in the end we reversed this: starting from noise and moving towards pitch, because the noisy part of the synthesis was much less prominent and easier to control dynamically. The instruction I gave was that it was better to move out of the band entirely than to leave the synthesiser clearly audible.

For the rehearsal, I prepared the space by spreading out chairs and scattering the acoustic screens. The rehearsal schedule reduced the plan to two main synthesis variants: one static version where the gain simply moves up and down, and another where the feedback is modulated over time.

The first question was how the synthesiser behaves under these conditions; the second was how to position everything. One rehearsal segment was dedicated to trying out speaker movement: where the speaker starts, where the performers sit, and whether it should be the speaker or the performers that move. This quickly produced too many unclear variables, such as where exactly the speaker should be placed at different times and where the performers should begin, so it was dropped in favour of a more stable setup and a final run-through. Questions about static versus modulated synthesis, and whether there was any point in

using two speakers instead of one, were settled in favour of a single source. In practice, we reduced the setup to a single bluetooth speaker running a single synthesiser voice.

Another realisation was that pitch is perceived much more prominently than noise. Playing a pitched tone extremely quietly is difficult, and my instructions and communication remained somewhat ambiguous for the performers, so they were not fully sure what my intention was.

There were also problems with the positioning of performers and panels. I wrote out a rehearsal procedure that helped: trying two alternate setups in terms of the listening situation and deciding which sounded better. The simplest configuration worked best.

Initially, I wanted the performers to walk around: when they could no longer hear the speaker, they were supposed to stop playing, locate it, and bring it closer. This turned out to be impractical, especially given the planned low lighting in the room.

My role in performance was to control gain and feedback: fade the sound in slowly, increase and decrease feedback, and adjust gain to compensate for the level changes caused by feedback.

Placement of performers and panels remained problematic and ended up being decided on site at the conservatoire. The problem that emerged once it became clear the performers would remain seated was that the panel setup started to determine who could hear whom. Depending on how the panels were placed, one of the three players might never really hear the other two, or two of them might be in constant contact, or unable to hear each other at all because of distance or obstruction. With that many components, the whole system risked collapsing into something arbitrary.

The second rehearsal remained exploratory. Performers were placed at the edges of the audience and spread out, with a relatively quick fade-in and the instruction to match dynamics and keep things quite static. What emerged was a simple structure providing a temporal base for me to follow in operating the synthesiser, the execution of which had to respond to the perceptual circumstances of the moment. Interestingly, this meant I also ended up being included as a subject required to make judgements based on what I could hear, or thought I could hear. I moved around the space, taking different listening positions at outer edges of the crowd and the musicians went silent whenever they heard the speaker clearly. Once they fell silent, I moved the speaker again.

The idea was to play with volume while keeping the dynamic balance, and to question who actually “starts” in such a quiet situation: whether the musicians fade in first and the synth follows, matching their volume, or the other way around. Again, the instruments were more prominent than the speaker, and

bowing near the bridge, with its slight harmonic content, turned out to sound quite attractive.

During the last rehearsals, there was more satisfaction with sounds on the noisier side of the continuum, where no specific pitch was played and the instruments produced more indeterminate noise-like textures. Yet it felt slightly absurd to simply ask the performers to bow on the body of the instrument, or similar, for ten to fifteen minutes.

Eventually, it was suggested to change to a more comfortable (and in some ways more efficient) division of labour which would allow the musicians to stay in fixed positions to focus on listening and playing, and require me to actively guide the performance from the inside by handling both the speaker movement and the synthesis. As a result the piece moved away from being driven by a text score and towards the synthesised sound mediating the conduction.

The feedback I received from people involved in overseeing the workshop was that the piece seemed to remain in flux, and only stabilised when it was presented. I would interpret that it was the convention of the concert that ensured the closure of the work.

1.3.3 Evaluation

The experience of the audience I can only speculate on. From my listening position, the failure was not achieving the degree of precise masking I aimed for. The concept did not fully account for physical constraints of the instruments: producing a very quiet, very stable pitch with as few overtones as possible over a long duration is technically demanding. Likewise, modulations between noise and pitch are perceptually far less linear in the case of physical instruments than in the case of a synthesiser. This is something I thought I would be able to account for, at least at the level of verbal communication with the musicians; however, as it turned out, I was not able to do so appropriately, which I understand as coming from my basic conceptualisation of parameter modulations as clear trajectories, most likely drastically different from the way an instrumentalist conceives of them.

As a composer, my implicit role required a degree of professional competence: entering the rehearsals with a relatively stabilised idea for the piece, while still leaving room for contributions and adjustments. Indeed, the purpose of participating in the workshop was learning how to function in this new context, where a mostly finalised composition would have been the straightforward way to open up a focused development over the course of the rehearsals. Tight time constraints imposed a requirement of more professional communication and collaboration focused on efficiency, rather than my habitual informal setting where

an iterative, less goal-oriented process could unfold over time. Within this, the institutional and logistical dimension appeared as another site I could only address partially. Due to the shift in how I navigated decision making, coming out of my internship research which preceded the workshop (and which will be elaborated on in the following chapter), I was determined to approach the compositional process while sticking to my personal convictions. My scepticism towards the established codes of the composer, ensemble, and the institution of the concert hall had to be preserved in deciding how to fit into my role with contextual and self-awareness. At the same time, I was taking this stance consciously as provisional: not having too many illusions about my obvious lack of knowledge of the context I was operating within, and the risks coming with it.

In retrospect, it proved problematic in the rehearsal situation, where plenty of time had to be spent on testing the viability and efficiency of multiple setups, all potentially accomplishing similar aesthetic goals; each requiring an amount of logistics and, at times, time to reflect and make decisions which would normally be settled before the compositional process reaches the stage of navigating interpretation. However, within the concert situation, where I expected the most issues to appear, its evaluation remains ambiguous, as this stance had only minor impacts on practical matters, some complicating (stage situation), while some simplifying (for example the lack of standard technical requirements regarding the PA).

If this line of work was to continue, I expect to reapproach the role of the composer, readjusting—not to remove friction, but to approach it with more artistic intention and nuance. An ethical, political, or social stance often has aesthetic implications, and vice versa, and here this relation surfaced mainly as another, still only partially articulated, line of tension.

Chapter 2

Remapping Methods

I

This chapter describes practical experiments in constructing a community-situated place for sound practices to emerge. Complementing earlier reflections on individual arts and engineering practices, it pushes those reflections into practical application in a social setting, attempting to experimentally disentangle the decision-making processes present in both. It engages these processes over a temporal axis of consecutive iterations as the workshop sessions unfold.

Each meeting is understood as a particular, locally defined space, specific to its time and site, whose objective is to facilitate emergent situations through the procedures and activities it proposes, the procedural scores being nothing more than means toward that emergence. Given that the group composition is not consistent across meetings, it is not possible to track the development of individual practices, so the focus is instead on the evolving workshop methodology itself, adjusted in a recursive feedback manner and shaped by other practices and discussions with teachers and peers about formats, variables, and strategies. Sharing concerns with other parts of my practice, the series also asks a pragmatic question: what is a viable minimum to make ongoing iteration possible. The social aim can be summed up as setting up a hospitable place to meet, discuss, and experiment, and, once it emerges, finding ways for that place to continue existing.

Priors The context and motivations for these workshops come from prior, consistent experience with improvisation sessions and sound walks during undergraduate studies, occasional participation in similar improvisation meetings elsewhere, and informal shared improvisations with peers. In the case of group formats, several aspects of how those sessions operated became reference points:

¹Documentation of these sessions is available at <https://practicalmusic.substack.com/>

the role of a leader and how it is executed; the types of activities and structures used; the relation of the meetings to institutions; the logistics and equipment required and how those were handled; and the social context and individual experience as a participant.

My main point of reference was the Improvisers' Collective I was part of during my undergraduate at Goldsmiths, a weekly meeting that followed minimal, mostly suggested structure, with the organiser participating in the improvisations herself. The format relied on free improvisation in small shifting constellations, with no imposed time structure beyond a shared sense of when a "take" had run its course, and the conducting role largely reduced to signalling closure once the group had already arrived at silence. Over the course of each semester, the group would shrink from large, mixed-background cohorts of newcomers to a small core of regulars, creating a balance between periodic encounters with unfamiliar practices and a more continuous trajectory for those who stayed. Precisely for these reasons, in my judgment it was an open but fruitful ground for developments of improvisational practices, as own experiments were parallel with observations of how other improvisers continuously re-worked their combinations of tools, techniques, and aesthetics. In retrospect, it functioned as an open, iterative social lab, but one where reflection remained largely implicit and where the 'method' stayed distributed across individual trajectories that only briefly crossed during the sessions.

2.1 Aims

Based on these past experiences, there were some initial assumptions on how the workshop sessions should be set up. The fundamental one was to lead only as much as necessary, doing so from within the group while actively participating, and to keep the hierarchy as horizontal as possible, explicitly inviting participants to find their own mode of operation somewhere between sound-art practices, improvisation, or something not yet explicitly named, with the prospect of eventually encouraging them to develop and bring in their own ideas for experiments, scores, or other activities to interpret as a group. This openness toward different kinds of practice and encouraging exploration and involvement was a principle I attached critical weight to, while remaining unsure how far it could be realised in practice.

A more practical concern was keeping equipment and technical requirements minimal so that simplified logistics would make the meetings easier to facilitate. There was also an aim to organise these workshops outside the conservatoire structures, while still in relation to some kind of public institution, to give the meetings visibility to a more general public and help probe beyond art-education

social circles.

In terms of site, location, and institutional affiliation, the workshops settled as hosted by West Den Haag, which was running a summer programme at the Open Pavilion on Lange Voorhout open for community proposals. After the second meeting the sessions moved to the premises of West, but all of the meetings involved engaging with the public square setting of Lange Voorhout; the workshops were thus mostly situated outside, in public, and from the outset there was no PA. The meetings were set up as 90–120 minute sessions held once a month and briefly described as sound improvisation meetings where participants bring their own equipment, with a minimal technical setup; in essence, it was concluded that what was needed was simply a space for activities and not much more, which was experienced as a confirmation of the underlying pragmatic concept.

The goal was for the meetings to be open to everybody: naturally open to passers-by as observers, since they took place in a public space, but with the restriction that people could not simply join in the middle of a session in an impromptu way. To facilitate joining and to give potential participants a concrete hint, the description mentioned that they should bring a sound-making object of choice with them, which turned out to be effective as an entry hint for newcomers. For people without equipment or ideas, before the second meeting the group went on a trip to an art materials store to pick a selection of objects to be used in the workshops; alongside, a few tentative sound-toy patches were implemented using web audio, to be run on mobile devices for the more digital-media inclined.

Leaning on West's institutional support and visibility raised an ethical question about whether institutional support is needed at all; reflecting on that, the conclusion was that a minimal tie to an institution can provide a more open route of access than visibility alone, making it easier for the general public to join than many grassroots activities, which often remain contained within a small group of friends. Prompted by suggestions from the curator at West, attempts were made to contact practitioners within the local DIY music scene and to look for other improvisation initiatives in nearby cities as potential allies or, at least, points of reference.

Formats, guidance, and changing groups Across the four meetings, the formats were diverse, ranging from free, time-based improvisation through object- and text-prompted procedures to sessions focused on discussion followed by field-recording and field-listening investigations. After each meeting there was a cycle of reflection, tweaking, and adjustment based on participant feedback, gathered after sessions or through individual follow-ups and conversations; these

responses were concerned with the nature of the activities themselves, how they were guided, what goals they seemed to imply, and what kinds of dynamics unfolded from them. This feedback led directly to adjustments in how the next session would be formulated and framed and which tasks and procedures would be planned, turning the series into an ongoing methodological experiment testing different balances between openness and direction, with the evolving methods themselves becoming the main object of inquiry rather than a fixed workshop template.

In terms of group size and composition, attendance remained small, roughly between six and twelve participants, each session bringing a different social mix. Most of the crowd still consisted of Sonology affiliates, people from media art and performance backgrounds, and novice electronic musicians, represented in different proportions and with composition shifting constantly, making it elusive to define what would count as a workable or inclusive structure when planning the sessions.

2.2 Axes of tension

The most valuable outcome of these workshops was the awareness they raised of multiple axes of tension that manifested themselves over the course of the sessions, prompting adjustments and ideas for further iterations that would address them. Several themes came to the foreground, related to the way the meetings operated at different levels: the procedures executed, how they interacted with group composition, scale, environment, and other conditions, and higher-order questions of organisational principles, continuity, and evaluation of the aims.

Similarly to my personal practice, these tensions became starting points for exchange and discussion, opening up areas of interest inquired into within the group, directly after sessions or later in separate conversations. What follows is a tracing of how the workshop design developed along these lines.

Procedures The first attempts at formulating procedures emphasised temporal form. Activities were defined as simple text scores prepared before the meeting and communicated verbally, with strictly defined timing and a fixed mode of traversal of the group, but no guidance on what kind of content might inhabit that frame. In practice this produced visible confusion and stress before people settled into playing, and later feedback from newcomers and non-improv participants made clear how quickly such “neutral” constraints become exclusionary, even when musical experience is present.

Later meetings attempted to address this by incorporating text prompts, object-based processes, and discussion, moving toward combinations of form-level

structure and content-level guidance as a more approachable way to engage. The construction and conceptualisation of activities had initially been guided by a bias toward open investigation, but this under-definition showed its limits quickly, even in groups of more experienced participants, such as the meeting composed exclusively of Sonology-affiliated people familiar with improvisation; there, the lack of framing produced fatigue and a diffuse sense of having done “something” without a shared understanding of what had been at stake.

In response, attention shifted toward designing discussions and conversations and toward treating procedural activities as building blocks with adjustable variables. Parameters such as time, group size, level of instruction, and environment could be partially imposed and partially tuned from meeting to meeting, turning procedures into explicit decision-spaces rather than assumed backdrops. From this perspective, a baseline level of guidance in both form and content appears less as a concession and more as an experimental requirement: without it, “open investigation” tends to test participants’ tolerance for ambiguity in an unstable situation rather than probing the qualities of the situation itself.

Formats Any adjustments to the format are specific to the nature of the procedure being tried: organising a sound walk involves different considerations than organising a group improvisation session, and different again from facilitating a discussion. Switching the overall type of activity between sessions did not prove problematic in practice, apart from the fact that it removes the possibility of directly comparing the same activity across different groups.

Within a single session, changing activity types can be effective if each step develops smoothly from the previous one, allowing different participants to become more active depending on their backgrounds and the situations they feel more comfortable in. However, these transitions require many parameters to be readjusted, and they can easily become destabilising, especially for newcomers who have just become comfortable with one kind of activity; if the shift is more of a disruption than a development, the group may enter a period of confusion, needing to re-establish itself in the new situation, so even a small spoken transition or an intermediate step between activities can help to ease this.

Reflecting on what this experiment shows about minimum frameworks for practice, one point concerns the choice of activity types. Even if there is no need to bind the series to a single format as an objective, pragmatically it often seems easier to settle on one main type of activity and let variation happen around it. After trying a range of different ones, the reflection is that, to make a series sustainable, it might make more sense to frame it as improvisation with a relatively simple, settled procedure that can be executed each time and that scales, rather than constantly reinventing complex guidance; such a procedure

can still be lightly varied, but without introducing too many new variables at once. Experience with other groups suggests that this can be sufficient for ongoing work, at least until a certain level of routine and familiarity calls for deliberate disturbance or change, while activities that are less about improvised creativity but more explicitly social—such as sound walks or outings like the trip to SCRAP—may need to be more thoroughly planned and structured, or even positioned outside the main schedule, if the core series is to remain consistent.

2.3 Evaluation

Behind the idea of keeping the workshops “low-maintenance” lies a set of logistical and organisational concerns that remain largely backgrounded: questions of institutional hosting and access beyond an immediate art-school milieu; uncertainties around criteria of “success” and how they are distributed across organiser and participants; and practical limits of scale, acoustics, and facilitation that “openness” alone cannot resolve.

In overview, the workshop goals can be expressed clearly: they were set up as an attempt to understand how to locate an experimental sound practice in a manner that can allow it to viably operate and iterate, without making many assumptions outside of what the conditions required. Reapproaching organising these meetings from a perspective of time, the realisation is that they go beyond this simple attempt. Tracing back to the previous considerations of this thesis, these workshops present themselves as a setting that allowed for analysis of my creative process in the situation of very broad generalisation. Thinking of how the principles of navigating an organisational practice could translate into the engineering activities of constructing deliberately restricted spaces for creative exploration that also lend themselves to discourse opening, or the process of making artistic decisions informed and engaging with a multiplicity of conditions and contexts, setting the grounds for an encounter that places a subject within that network of relations; applying the gained intuitions might not be as unfamiliar as it could have been initially expected. These meetings, positioned explicitly within the temporal and the local, point to the importance of orientating a practice towards the social and sustainable as they prove as a critical testing ground.

Reflections

This thesis proposed a set of general orientation principles as a way to navigate experimentation in a practice across artistic, technical, and social domains. Across the chapters, instability between fields, roles, and methods has been treated as a contingent condition that complicates the creative process through an explosion into multiple dimensions of meaning, forcing positions to be continually negotiated rather than definitively secured. What has been at stake is how such ongoing re-orientation can remain viable and how, with careful navigation, its contingencies can become productively generative for further work.

Starting from a scattered practice in which activities proliferated without shared objectives beyond intuition, the project framed recurrent collisions within and between modes of operation as prompts for re-orientation instead of problems to be eliminated. Rather than fully stabilising these situations, the work gradually articulated high-level principles that support orientation, priority-setting, and navigation as fields of activity, methods, and roles keep shifting. Changing modes has been treated as adding dimensions to practice, where each obstacle encountered can feed back into prior work.

Managing instability crystallised into different navigational concerns across three domains: context-awareness in artistic practice, the need for provisional yet explicit and deliberate decision-making in technical practice, and pragmatic handling of distributed agency and limited control in social practices. The trajectory of strolling, straying, wandering, and roaming became a way to name shifts in intensity and in how orientation is sought, rather than a path toward resolution. Across sounds (artist–work–audience), software (engineer–tool–artist), and situations (individual–group–institution), the configurations explored here aimed to compose the tensions in sound work, tool-building, and social experimentation in ways that are reflective without resolving them, leaving orientation as an open, ongoing task.