

Kathryn Williams: Performance PhD Research Proposal
University of Huddersfield
Duncan Druce Scholarship in Music Performance
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**Restriction as a means to go on:
Exploring restriction in performance practice and as creative impetus in
composer/performer and interdisciplinary collaboration.**

Introduction and research aims

For this research I am interested in preparing and performing repertoire characterised by severe restriction and in establishing/refining a definition and categorisation of restriction in a creative performance context. This will include experimentation with the interpretation/reinterpretation of historical repertoire and collaboration on new musical/interdisciplinary works. I believe this will lead to new knowledge within a continuing experimental music performance practice associated with restriction and, I hope, add to a wider scholarship in this field.

This research proposal emerges from strands of my current practice as a flautist. This includes a critical reflection on performing two works by composers significant to experimental performance and performer restriction; Brian Ferneyhough's *Unity Capsule* and Alvin Lucier's *Self Portrait*. This also includes an on-going creative collaboration with the composer Larry Goves and a project just underway, *Coming up for air*; a set of twelve commissions each limited to the performance of a single breath. All of these are elaborated on below.

Initial research questions

How can I articulate and develop a creative performance practice based on a wider understanding of limitation/restriction?

How can this be applied to facilitate new, unusual and/or radical historical musical interpretation?

How can I explore notions of restriction and limitation to develop a collaborative 'space' for performer/composer/interdisciplinary interaction?

Background

It is axiomatic that any musical performance can be expressed as an imposed, or self-imposed, set of restrictions (whether through, for example, the instructions in a score, a set of spontaneous decisions or physical or instrumental limitations). Part of my interest lies in opening up Brian Ferneyhough's assertion that 'all invention comes from restriction'¹. At this stage I have established some categories as starting and reference points to explore areas of restriction:

- 1) Intellectual/personal: This would include extreme restriction in creative scenarios generated artificially by the artist themselves. This would include Brian Ferneyhough's complex, restrictive notation, personal limitation in decisions made in improvisation and the

¹ Brian Ferneyhough, *Collected Writings*, p.132

constraints devised for predominantly aesthetic considerations (for example the *Ouvoir de literature potentielle* (Oulipo)).

- 2) Bodily: Contexts where restrictions are made to the body including preparations and attachments. Examples would include Christopher Fox's *Thermogenesis* where the pianist wears mittens and gloves as part of the performance, Megan Beugger's *Liaison* for bowed piano and dancer, and Oskar Schlemmer's Bauhaus Dances and the use of the performer as an art object.
- 3) Instrumental: While instrumental preparation has been extensively explored as a means to fundamentally modify the sound of instruments, here I'm interested in more obstructive modifications of the flute. This might be summed up in the differences between John Cage's prepared pianos (which change the sound but leave the performance practice largely unchanged) and Nam June Paik's prepared pianos (where the fundamental performance practice is radically affected).
- 4) Environmental: As with instrumental preparation, notions of site-specific work are well established. Here I'm interested in discovering music where environmental concerns are restrictive (for example performance in extremely confined spaces or, as in Georg Friedrich Haas's *In iij. Noct*, music performed in complete darkness). I'm also interested in exploring how an environment might inform a performance artwork (as in, for example, the films associated with the Dogme 95 manifesto).
- 5) Social/political: I am concerned with exploring the rationale behind music/performance associated with restriction/limitation and how this has historically motivated relevant approaches. Examples include the manifestos associated with Futurism, Fluxus, Gutai and Dogme 95.

In considering features of limitation in his solo flute work *Unity Capsule*, Ferneyhough writes that 'the imprisonment of an instrument within the limits of the material assigned to it in a given composition and the restrictions imposed upon the selection of material by the relatively arbitrary sound-producing qualities of the instrument in question form twin poles whose interaction via the meditational activity of the composer can, but seldom does, lead us to the true inner essence of musical characterisation'². Richard Toop, writing in 1987, suggests that a performance of the piece 'could only (and intentionally) place the interpreter in a continual state of mental and physical stress'³; the piece is characterised by a saturation of complex, detailed information and engages numerous performance parameters simultaneously (including physical movement, vocalisation as well as numerous non-standard or 'extended' performance techniques, see Figure 1). Lois Fitch, in her 2013 Ferneyhough monograph, argues that in a performance of this piece a 'vital ingredient of his personal style is palpable: expression resulting from extreme limitation. The performer is constrained – like a pressure cooker – to render the piece *against* almost overwhelming demands upon his/her virtuosity'⁴. The 'meditational' activity identified by Ferneyhough might be as much the responsibility of the performer managing and navigating these restrictions.

² Brian Ferneyhough, *Unity Capsule* programme note

³ Richard Toop, *Ferneyhough's Dungeons of Invention*, p.624

⁴ Lois Fitch, *Brian Ferneyhough*, p. 6

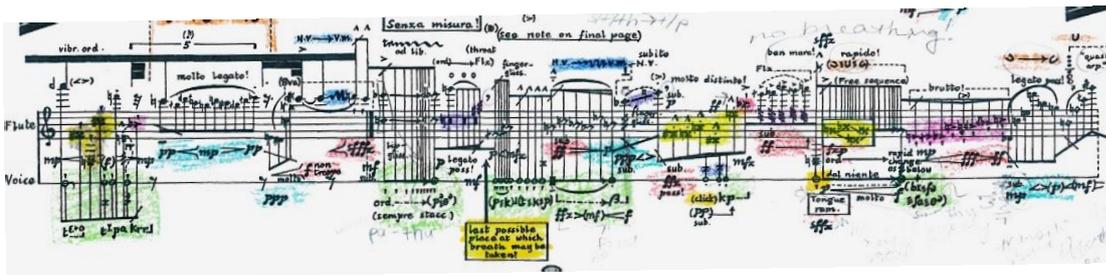


Figure 1: Brian Ferneyhough, *Unity Capsule*, p. 19, start of the 3rd system
Short extract marked up for performance; colours assigned to represent different performance techniques.

By contrast Alvin Lucier's *Self Portrait* for flute and wind anemometer is characterised by his open instructions. The piece involves the performer playing through a wind anemometer with a light shining through it so that the instrumentalist controls how much of her face is visible or obscured (hence the self portrait of the title). The text score reads:

*A small wind anemometer is placed on a stand and positioned several feet away from a flutist. The flutist plays a series of long tones in scalar, wedge or random patterns, with more air than pitch sounds, causing the blades of the anemometer to spin at various speeds.*⁵

The direction of the air flow is not usually a consideration in flute performance practice and the air speed and power is usually emergent from a desired sound; here these are all essential considerations in moving the blades of the anemometer. The collision between Lucier's description of the sounds and the reality of engaging the anemometer is at the heart of the work; the restrictive element provides the agency for the sounds produced.

I have found that through reflections on preparing these two works⁶ I have considered relationships between physical movement and prescriptive notation leading to a new collaborative work with composer Larry Goves. This is an on-going creative relationship⁷ and continues to be motivated, in part, by my research.

Larry Goves' *The dance along the artery* developed compositional strategies based on jointly designing physical performance restrictions through the observation of my Dalcroze Eurhythmics sessions employed to manage the 'decoupled' physical demands of *Unity Capsule*. We arrived at four simple hand positions and (predominantly) one pattern of hand motions. The piece's trajectory broadly engages a move from restriction in the Ferneyhough sense (where the performer is operating against the notation – a variety of specifically notated pitches and multiphonics which are highly problematic to access given the limited fingerings (Figure 2), to sections where the sounds are emergent based on specific fingerings and approximately described embouchure (Figure 3) to a section where the pattern is maintained but the fingerings are at the performer's discretion (Figure 4). These final two examples are more like the Lucier as the sounds emerge, in part, as a consequence of the restriction.⁸

⁵ Alvin Lucier, *Self Portrait for flute and wind anemometer*: Material Press, 1993

⁶ I prepared *Unity Capsule* over the final nine-month period of my MMus at the Royal Northern College of Music and, to date, have given ten performances. I have performed *Self Portrait* three times.

⁷ A second work in the series, *Extracts from South Korea and Japan 2002* for flute and projected text has been completed and more pieces are planned for 2017.

⁸ I explored some of these issues in a joint paper written with Larry Goves for the 2nd International Dalcroze Conference in 2015: *Dalcroze Eurhythmics, Brian Ferneyhough's Unity Capsule and developing a compositional methodology*.

Figure 2: Larry Goves, *The dance along the artery*, bb.29-31

Figure 3: Larry Goves, *The dance along the artery*, bb.52-55

Figure 4: Larry Goves, *The dance along the artery*, bb.89-91

Methodology, methods, and provisional timeline

For this proposed performance PhD I intend to deliver a number of relevant concerts of existing and new collaborative repertoire. I intend to document all performances and, where appropriate, performance preparation, collaborative conversations and relevant workshops. I will prepare an accompanying written commentary exploring the performance practice associated with restriction. I believe this practice research will open up new territory in a growing area of scholarship including

dialogue within composer/performer collaboration, instrumental manipulation, and experimental performance practice.⁹

I intend that the initial project for my PhD will be *Coming up for air*, a set of new commissions. Taking the features of restrictive breath control central to Lucier's *Self Portrait* and the last written instruction in Brian Ferneyhough's *Unity Capsule*, also indicative of restrictive breath control¹⁰, I have commissioned twelve composers to write solo works for flute limited to the duration of a single breath. The confirmed composers are Laura Bowler, Vitalija Glovackyte, Larry Goves, Caroline Haines (CHAINES), Cassandra Miller, Mauricio Pauly, Michael Perrett, Matthew Sergeant, Jack Sheen, Laurie Tompkins, Charlie Usher, and Nina Whiteman. I intend to develop some of these works through further collaboration and critical reflection.

Other initial plans include preparing a sequence of reimagined pieces by J.S. Bach using physical and instrumental restriction to find new interpretations (inspired by Aisha Orazbayeva's recording of Telemann Fantasias employing extended techniques and our conversation regarding her approach). I also intend to approach more recent flute repertoire that extends the mechanisms found in *Unity Capsule* and *Self Portrait*, for example Richard Barrett's *Vale* and *Narrow Path* by James Weeks respectively.

This potential timeline is highly provisional given the new directions and relationships that this research may lead to:

Year one:

- *Coming up for air* project developed through initial premieres, documentation and critical reflection, widening scope of collaborators, further performances and recordings.
- Literature review of existing relevant solo flute repertoire and wider literature on performer restriction.
- Selected pieces to be prepared and curated into relevant concert programmes alongside experiments in improvisation.
- Ongoing commentary and documentation.

Year two:

- A continuation of the work in year one.
- Selection of historical repertoire (possible examples include J.S. Bach, Marin Marais, G.P. Telemann and Claude Debussy) to experiment with interpretation through restriction.
- Development of collaborative projects within an interdisciplinary context.

Year three:

- Continuation of work in years one and two.
- The development of a relevant larger-scale work.
- Rehearsal & development leading to staged performances and recordings
- Collating writings, recordings, and reflections

Indicative Bibliography

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⁹ Including articles by Philip Thomas, Fabrice Fitch/Neil Heyde, and the doctoral theses of Heather Roche and Sarah Nicholls.

¹⁰ He writes, 'last possible point at which to take a breath. If the performer runs out of air, do not take a breath and mime the rest of the passage'.

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