

**A JOB WELL DONE: an experimental analysis of making**  
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Lately I've been thinking a lot about problem-solving in one's creative practice. Artistically, I have been feeling increasingly sensitive to the nuances of having positioned myself between the roles of author and technician. Often I feel like I am negotiating my art *against* my craft, in order to identify and pursue opportunities for an objectively rewardable *job well-done*. I've only recently recognized that this *job well-done* and its rewards are things I have actively sought out since the beginning of my career.

As a trained musician, I've always been accustomed to doing a *good* or a *bad job* of performing, particularly in formal, or idiomatic [and often academic] settings. When musicians like myself are initially learning their art-craft, whether through a general music class, extra-curricular band, or rigorous private instruction, we do not need to concern ourselves with authorship or creative license. Musicians' only task is to do a good job reading music, watching and obeying their band director/teacher, memorizing marching routines, symphonic concerts, and solo recitals. This is our predisposition. After many years of many *jobs well done*, I, and many others like me developed an entire language of musical mechanics that we could call our own. With more advanced vocabulary, facility, and experience, we could eventually communicate more widely and intricately with each other and with our audiences. Like any practiced skills-men, musicians gradually branch out with independent endeavors. As an adult, I began breaking the rules, using my acquired trade creatively: interpreting, composing, repurposing, recombining, dissecting, juxtaposing, augmenting, and distorting what I had learned. I had more or less mastered my trade; my problem-solving skills, and now I was designing the problem and solving it.

Musical artists often design problems specifically for other individual or groups of musicians to solve in their unique way, like tailoring garments for particular bodies. Within this modality, music has become a language of languages. Creative craftsmen turned musical artists have taken their trade and elevated it to one of innumerable dialects. My dialect evolved through improvisation, spontaneous composition, and quickly favored experimentation and the avant garde. For me, this was a natural fit, having chosen two of the most expansive and rapidly growing metier: jazz and percussion.

The language and applied skill set of a musician comprise a thoughtful approach to storytelling in an ephemeral listening environment. The experience is a unique transmission of physical activity, performing an invisible sequence of sensory events that instantly become memories. I think, in this ephemeral exchange, we work hard to synthesize and summarize so many details in order to convey what might ultimately amount to only a vague or a rapidly fading memory. Recipients are left with an impression that defines itself with only bare elements; descriptors borrowed from everyday life.

This is to say that to my ears, each aspect of music expresses something general about the world: a timbre, a melody, rhythm, or chord, in a style, at a tempo, a dynamic, and with an instrument. A melody can suggest, imply, meander, or assert a singular narrative character. Assembling singular characters into, for example, accompanying and/or melodically sequenced chords can detail an otherwise emotional sound spectrum- an abstractly formed context or a setting. Sounds and timbres can depict colors, textures, and shapes. Style (genre), tempo, and dynamics translate to physical modes of velocity, motion, and momentum. I conceive of each characteristic to have their own 'sensory politic'. In other words, I think different musical elements are positioned > registered > received in a fundamentally visceral and

psychological space. I feel these spaces defined more clearly by what a characteristic is *not*, than by what it is: not off [on]. not light [dark]. not loud [soft]. To me, a sensory politic refers to the way in which each musical element can tell a listener something about the world at large. Music can depict both linear and non-linear events, space, weight, volume, depth, breadth, focus, perspective, constant/variable relationships, stories. With complex layers and simultaneities, music more clearly expresses this information.

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I have tried, in my performance art, to create *new* stories about the world and its design, taking music's aforementioned storytelling powers, and applying them to physical subjects, with various gestures. I've tried to transpose my ideas about music's occupation of visceral and psychological space, into a multi-sensory experience. maybe transuseable?

For instance, sound events that might abstractly inform a listener about the attributes of a glass jar, *become* a creative exploration of an actual glass jar. The jar is treated as a raw material object in space. For the purposes of my work, it is divorced from its commonly associated usages, and can lose its glass jar meaning. It is thick, dense, transparent, cylindrical, makes a sound, and can contain other materials. The physical actions behind the curious exploration of the jar is almost always equally important, and the gestural data becomes crucial aesthetic content. For me, this is an intuitive, spontaneous investigation of a subject's physical properties and their effects on the senses, through different roles, positions, and spatial relationships. Other examples could include: a square, a circle, and the implications thereof; layered with light, dark, solid, frayed, on:off, present:absent, rising:falling, movable:immovable. It is important to me that these qualities are felt; that they make an impact- one that is familiar and viscerally, psychologically relevant. Within these layers of action and depiction, various materials interact in ways that might even suggest social behavior, such as: distracted, ignored, explored, dormant, collected, distributed. This is how new relationships and newly imagined histories and futures emerge.

+ social/geopolitical ?

Recently I am asking myself whether I actually want this freedom to construct these new stories; to invent the glove rather than wearing the glove. New stories need to be told or executed with an entirely new set of gestural behaviors. The old gestures are what have historically earned me affirmations or rewards for that *job well-done*, retelling old stories with or without my own interpretation. Idiomatic music contains the old stories that want to be retold, but my solo work does not, at least not overtly. The original proclivity for a recognizable *job well-done* or problem solved with my learned trade remains strong. I am trying to reconcile this motivation with my penchant for something new and multi-sensory. In my musical ensembles, and my participation in others' ensembles, the stretching and bending of my craft is clear. In my solo performances I often feel too free; that I'm riding a fine line between a contrived spectacle and an noticeably authentic process with a clear structure and clear goals. For an audience, there are many points of entry: visual, musical, personal, and I am aware of the fact that I am often working within an extremely abstract or unclear context. It's been challenging to know whether these new elements can be digested or unpacked by viewers. I want to be accountable for a *job well-done* in the most extremely abstracted performances, in which the job is not so apparent. I fear simply 'getting by' with my distracting newness. I fear getting lost in the applied performative actions that I use to achieve a goal that has only been identified and established by myself, and not by an ensemble or a bandleader or standardized genre, with an expected outcome.

visual artist as master or authority of other disparate histories/mediums/fields

I become particularly aware of this unwanted freedom in performance environments in which audiences are captive from the time they enter the physical space. A performer wants to make an important exchange, and needs expert human witnesses, trained to receive; to hear, see, taste, smell, touch, and feel. How does my audience know the difference between a good and a bad performance? How can they know a successful performance whilst I float freely in my own context of combined media forms? I'm on a stage, exploring multiple materials, often for the first time, often simultaneously, trying to figure out how they may go together in a compelling way. A captive audience of witnesses can apply a poignant type of pressure to my performance, passively demanding that I create something great; that they get what they came for, or in some cases, what they even paid for. I have noticed how easy it is to rely on that captive environment, pregnant with anticipation of the delivery of virtuosity, independent of actual virtuosity. With an arsenal of new tools, new approaches, juxtaposed in new ways, I am finding new virtuosities, but the richness of discovery can be overshadowed by the pregnant expectation. It's hard to fail when I am doing something so new and ridiculous with no precedent of having been done well. How to solve this problem, I don't know. I hope these explorations make lyrical sense to viewers, the way a piece of music does. At various points in a performance piece, viewers may think "Oh, *that's* what he's doing [with that]. " Neither I nor my audience know what the problem is until after I've solved it. I myself do not even know if it is a story until I reach the end of it. It is a journey within a journey- my audience joins me on my investigation from point A to B, (with or without detours). I'm asking them to take a leap of faith; to believe in my promise to tell a recognizable story about the world. This is what compels us to witness and remember art- something we can grab onto, as vague and as fading as it may or may not become.

why is watching a improvisation (or solving of a problem) important ?