

Charlie Sdraulig

many translations

for amplified percussion trio

2017

For line upon line percussion

Note

Learning (as redefinition of self) via translation.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Julie Herndon and Chris Lortie for their advice on the performance materials.

Instrumentation

- 3 large, similarly sized cymbals on stands—one cymbal and stand per percussionist.
- Smallest recommended cymbal size = 16” thin crash or suspended cymbals
 - Percussion 1 plays their cymbal with all their fingernails
 - Percussion 2 plays their cymbal with a bundle of sticks (e.g. ca. 10 wooden/bamboo chopsticks)
 - Percussion 3 plays their cymbal with a large deck brush with many thick, long bristles (e.g. a ‘Weiler 44026 Palmyra Fill Deck Scrub Brush with Wood Block, 10” overall length’)



Amplification

- 3 condenser microphones
 - 1 condenser microphone per cymbal, positioned close and directed down onto the top of the cymbal
- Routed to mixer, going to at least 2 speakers (preferably more, surrounding the audience)
 - If the percussionists cannot hear their amplified sounds clearly, use earbuds or a monitor speaker as well
- Someone at the mixer to ride levels; aim for a very high level of amplification throughout (while minimizing system self-noise and feedback)
 - Light compression and EQing may be employed, in order to emphasize the quality/profile of each percussionist’s initial sounds/character

Staging suggestions

- Slight horseshoe/semi-circle position, with percussionists seated, and slightly turned in towards one another
 - Percussionists arranged 1, 2, and 3 (left to right from the audience’s perspective)
- 3 soft, diffuse portable lamps (attached to microphone stands or similar); 1 per percussionist.
 - Aim to light each percussionist’s cymbal and hands

Contact

If you have any questions, don’t hesitate to contact me via email: c-sdraulig@hotmail.com

Interaction: detail

This piece must be performed from memory; each percussionist memorizes their individual set of **initial attributes**, and a **form**. The piece is akin to a guided improvisatory game:

- Each percussionist has different means of interacting with their cymbal, as well as a different **initial attributes**—a pre-defined starting point comprising two types of attributes: **invariant** (attributes that are maintained throughout the entire piece) and **variable** (attributes that are open to be changed during the piece).
- You will play through a somewhat ritualistic, pre-determined combinatorial **form**.
- If you are leading a section (**L**), *propose* some sounds i.e. a *phrase* (never propose exactly the same series of sounds as you did before). For your first two phrases as a leader (**L**), propose phrases defined by your **initial attributes**.
- If you are following (**F**) a leader, aim to *translate/imitate* one another's phrases *as exactly and accurately as possible, with only your available means* (at times, the piece is like a game of 'telephone' and you may translate a translation i.e. follow a follower)—this is your primary objective as a follower, don't think about attributes etc.
- All percussionists should notice *which sounds are accurately translated/imitated, and which sounds are not*.
 - 'Gaps' in translation between percussionists (i.e. attempts to translate that do not or cannot match the other percussionists' sounds despite your best efforts—differences that cannot be rendered into equivalencies) are actively encouraged and should be embraced!
 - For the **leader (L)** percussionist being translated, these 'gaps' signal that they have discovered a technique/affordance that is *unique* to their set-up.
 - For the **follower (F)** percussionist attempting to translate, these 'gaps' signal a *limitation* in their set-up.
 - Both percussionists in this scenario have gained some form of *self-knowledge* through their interaction.
 - This self-knowledge should partially *inform* the next sounds you propose as a **leader (L)**. In this way your **variable attributes** should change over the course of the piece.
- The aim here is to use this self-knowledge to demonstrate to everyone that the other percussionists are *influencing/transforming* your attributes over time (via social learning/interaction in music). *Increasingly recall and develop the various translation techniques you have learnt* as a follower (**F**).
- Transformations in your attributes should happen gradually and increasingly over each successive time you are the leader (i.e. incorporate more and more of what you have learnt over time—*evolve*).
- Aim to end up with a consequentially different attribute states to the one you started with, while retaining some of your initial core characteristics.
- As a leader (**L**), be sure to propose both sounds that only you can do, as well as sounds that the other percussionists can translate well. At turns, adopt both a *testing* (emphasize what is unique in your attributes) and *conciliatory* attitude (emphasize what is common among all percussionists) toward your fellow percussionists. Be sure to *include some distinctive musical features that will be easily tracked by the audience*, when translated by the followers (**F**).

When you are playing focus your eyes down to your hands and to your cymbal. When you are not playing, look at the percussionist who is playing. All of your movements should be consistent with your attribute states at the time. However, avoid overacting and extreme facial expressions—all movement should still primarily serve the necessities of sound production.

I would suggest rehearsing and learning your set of **initial attributes** on your own; then try out individual sections or imitation/translation games to assist with familiarization, memorization and embodiment of a repertory of techniques.

Interaction: summary

As leader, never propose exactly the same phrase as you did before.

As **leader (L)**: propose a phrase (first phrase based on **initial attributes**) *OR* as **follower (F)**: translate/imitate preceding phrase as accurately as possible → note what can and cannot be translated by others → inform next proposed phrase as leader (testing and/or conciliatory) → repeat, always incorporating a little more of what you have learnt over time (i.e. gradually change/evolve your **variable attributes**, recall previous translation techniques) etc.

Initial attributes as leader: percussion 1 (fingernails)

If you can, let your fingernails grow out a bit.

Invariant:

- Only use your fingernails to interact with the top of the cymbal (but you may use your forearms to dampen the cymbal's resonance)
- Behavior toward other percussionists: more conciliatory than testing

Variable:

- Character: exploratory, open, curious, moderate, mediator
- Phrase duration: ca. 20-30 seconds (a.k.a. medium)
- Vocabulary: slow, light scrapes and delicate taps (you may occasionally aggressively scrape and flick your fingernails off the edge of the cymbal to produce a snap-like sound); different fingers may move at different speeds, executing different types of techniques to achieve multilayered textures; later, incorporate high pressure scratches
- Resonance: mostly undamped, but you may dampen the cymbal's resonance with your fingernails and forearms from time to time
- Dynamics: aim for a moderately soft dynamic level (through the speakers) on average; later, incorporate exceptional peaks and troughs
- Transitions: organic, smooth, and gradual transitions between sounds/textures
- Not all of your fingernails need to be in contact with the surface of the cymbal at all times, but generally use most of them, most of the time

Click the link below for a sample of a few minutes of playing in this initial attitude (from which possible initial phrases might be extracted)—headphones recommended:



<https://youtu.be/T0eZjreYRuk>

Initial attributes as leader: percussion 2 (bundle of sticks)

Invariant:

- Try to only use your bundle of sticks to interact with the top of the cymbal (but you may use your forearms to dampen the cymbal's resonance)
- Behavior toward other percussionists: more testing than conciliatory

Variable:

- Character: extreme tension and strength; unpredictable outbursts
- Phrase duration: ca. 5-10 seconds (a.k.a. short)
- Vocabulary: grasp, clutch all the sticks with both hands, crushing and twisting them all together; aim to cause creaking wood sounds, and snap-like sounds as sticks suddenly change position and are thrust against the cymbal's surface; push downwards, tilting the cymbal as you do so
- Resonance: dampen the cymbal's resonance with your sticks and forearms, but you may occasionally allow the cymbal to resonate freely
- Dynamics: aim for extreme louds and softs (through the speakers) i.e. polarized contrasts
- Transitions: jagged and abrupt transitions between sounds/textures
- Not all of the sticks need be in contact with the surface of the cymbal at all times, but generally ensure most of them are in contact, most of the time

Click the link below for a sample of a few minutes of playing in this initial attitude (from which possible initial phrases might be extracted)—headphones recommended:



<https://youtu.be/o1cxH073Ui4>

Initial attributes as leader: percussion 3 (deck brush)

Invariant:

- Only use the brush's bristles to interact with the top of the cymbal (but you may use your forearms to dampen the cymbal's resonance)
- Behavior toward other percussionists: often impassive (doing your own thing), but sometimes conciliatory, sometimes testing

Variable:

- Character: extreme calm, focus and sensitivity; deliberate, disciplined
- Phrase duration: ca. 40 seconds (a.k.a. long)
- Vocabulary: slow, simple movements back and forth; generally hold the brush between 1 and 2 mm above surface of the cymbal; allow the natural nervous twitch of your muscles to cause intermittent, almost accidental contact with the surface (the quality of physical contact should be similar to holding your thumb and index finger as close together as possible without intentionally touching); later, intersperse this approach with occasional moments of light and heavy contact
- Resonance: mostly undamped, but you may dampen the cymbal's resonance with your forearms from time to time
- Dynamics: aim for extreme softs (through the speakers) interspersed with a few impulses triggered by the bristles
- Transitions: a mixture of smooth and abrupt transitions between sounds/textures
- Not all of the bristles need be in contact with the surface of the cymbal at all times, but generally ensure most of them are in contact, most of the time; you may subtly tilt the brush in various ways to achieve this

Click the link below for a sample of a few minutes of playing in this initial attitude (from which possible initial phrases might be extracted)—headphones recommended:



<https://youtu.be/TZFrSa2Rb9w>

Form

This form gives the phrase order to memorize.

Read and perform each line from left to right, with each phrase following on from the other *attacca*.

Numbers refer to the percussionist who plays a phrase.

Once all the indicated percussionists have played in a given line, begin the next line after a short ca. 2-5" pause.

L = Leader, F₁ = follower 1, and F₂ = follower 2.

section title	line	L	F ₁	F ₂	additional instructions	
<i>introduction</i>	<i>a</i>	1				
	<i>b</i>	2				
	<i>c</i>	3				
	<i>d</i>	<i>all freeze, ca. 20" pause</i>				
<i>repeat after me</i>	<i>e</i>	1	2			
	<i>f</i>	1	3			
	<i>g</i>	2	1			
	<i>h</i>	2	3			
	<i>i</i>	3	1			
	<i>j</i>	3	2			
	<i>k</i>	<i>all freeze, ca. 20" pause</i>				
<i>telephone</i>	<i>l</i>	1	2	3	(n.b. F ₂ translates/imitates F ₁)	
	<i>m</i>	<i>all play an exact repetition of their previous phrase simultaneously</i>				
	<i>n</i>	2	3	1		
	<i>o</i>	<i>all play an exact repetition of their previous phrase simultaneously</i>				
	<i>p</i>	3	1	2		
	<i>q</i>	<i>all play an exact repetition of their previous phrase simultaneously</i>				From the end of this line, 3 plays continuously <i>ad lib.</i> * until the end of the piece
<i>free(r) play</i>	<i>r</i>	1	2			
	<i>s</i>	<i>1 and 2 play an exact repetition of their previous phrase simultaneously</i>				
	<i>t</i>	2	1			
	<i>u</i>	<i>2 and 1 play an exact repetition of their previous phrase simultaneously</i>				From the end of this line, 2 plays continuously <i>ad lib.</i> * until the end of the piece
	<i>v</i>	1				
	<i>w</i>	<i>1 plays an exact repetition of their previous phrase</i>				From the end of this line, 1 plays continuously <i>ad lib.</i> * until the end of the piece
	<i>x</i>	<i>free testing/conciliatory/impassive play ca. 2'</i>				
	<i>y</i>	<i>non-verbal, improviser's ending</i>				

**ad lib.* = free testing/conciliatory/impassive play with the other percussionists; continue to gradually change/evolve your attitude

An example of a previous realization of this piece can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-B1xEvu_Y5g&t