

*Haecceitas* and Aaron Cassidy's *they mark the zone where the force is in the process of striking* (or, *Second Study for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion*)

**[Phrase 1]**

How does one learn and perform a work like Aaron Cassidy's *they mark the zone where the force is in the process of striking*? As with any work, the performer must find an avenue by which to enter the piece, to find a practical understanding with an eye to physically executing the prescribed notes and gestures idiomatically, and a musical understanding that communicates the sense of the piece. This is a very broad and concise description, but let us take it as a starting point to consider a general performative approach to this particular piece of Cassidy's. The initial consideration is the notation itself. Cassidy has notated three different layers of the physical action of playing the trombone on separate staves: a multi-parameter polyphonic treatment of single-instrumental technique. The top staff shows the slide, notated with the slide all the way in at the top, and all the way out at the bottom. The next system below shows the harmonic series (i.e. the lip tension) with a range from partial 2 to as high as possible. The third staff, which will appear for the first time in the next section of the piece, shows the valve, with three positions indicated: undepressed, half-depressed, and completely depressed.

Every notational decision is a window into the composer's world, particularly with notations like these, and seeing which elements they choose to foreground or background is one of the first and most critical elements to consider. Let us compare this score to three other previous pieces: Klaus K. Hübler's *Cercar*, Richard Barrett's *EARTH*, and Aaron Cassidy's first trombone solo, *songs only as sad as their listener*.

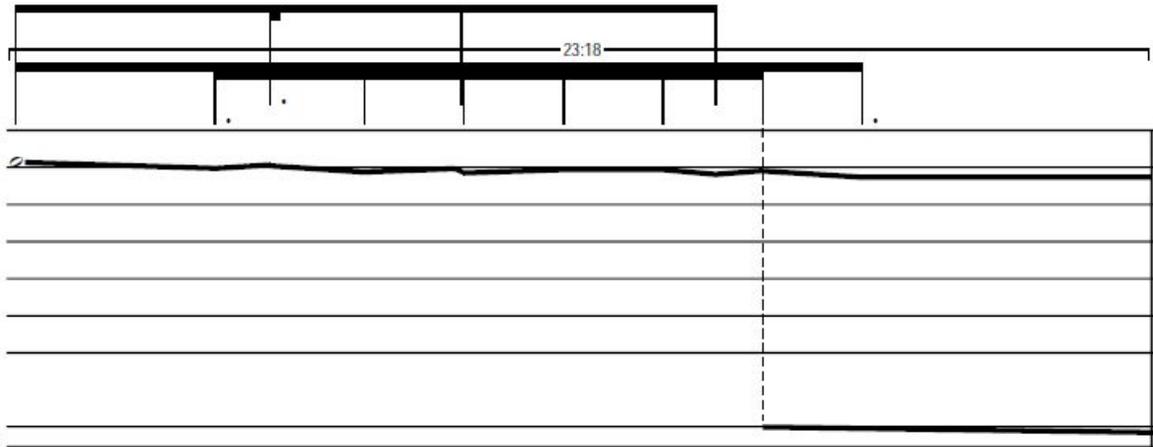
**Klaus K. Hübler: *Cercar* (1983)**

When compared to Hübler, it is interesting to see how much is left out by Cassidy: Hübler notates as many layers as possible, and they are treated very equally. Cassidy, though, has left out many of these layers (including mute, diaphragm accents, voice, and mouth shape), and he has reduced the specificity in both the harmonic series and slide content, which are both relativized.

**Richard Barrett: *EARTH* (1988)**

Unlike Hübler, Richard Barrett's notation treats almost exactly same parameters as Cassidy's *they mark the zone*. However, in Cassidy's score there is quite a bit *more* specificity of rhythm, and the relationships of the different strata of material are far more active. We have now seen two of the earliest tablature notations for trombone, and we can already see what sorts of decisions have been made by Cassidy in *they mark the zone*, where he has both limited material and also treated the material he has complexly.

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**Aaron Cassidy: *songs only as sad as their listener* (2006)**

Finally, in comparison to Cassidy's earlier trombone solo, *songs only as sad as their listener*, one sees simultaneously increasing and decreasing complexity. The rhythmic constraints of *they mark the zone* are somewhat less extreme, but the overall level of activity is drastically more frenetic.

With even these short examples, all precursors to *they mark the zone*, one can begin to see quite clearly which elements are foregrounded, and which elements are backgrounded or omitted entirely. One begins to see how the different physical actions are related to and interwoven with each other. As I play the next section of the piece, hear the physicality of the instrument deconstructed as the primary physical actions are all stratified, decoupled, and treated polyphonically.

**[Phrase 2]**

In his essay *Determinate Action/Indeterminate Sound: Tablature and Chance in Several Recent Works*, Cassidy remarks that performing one of his works requires an effort to approach or express the haecceity of the piece. In a footnote thereto, he remarks that haecceity is a term used by Gilles Deleuze. While Deleuze and Felix Guattari do introduce and make extensive use of this term in *A Thousand Plateaus*, it is also worthwhile to note its original provenance in the work of the 13th century Scholastic philosopher Duns Scotus. *Haecceitas*, or the *individua differentia*, is one of Duns Scotus's primary contributions to scholastic philosophy, along with the real, or formal, distinction. Haecceity refers to the thisness of a thing or person, as opposed to its quiddity, or whatness. This is to say that in a traditional scholastic view of ontology, there are many different properties that constitute a being: the form, the matter, etc. In the combination of these elements we find the essence of each entity. Duns Scotus's haecceity, the individual difference, is a means to isolate the mystery of the individual within the ontological framework--in other words, what is it that makes Socrates Socrates, beyond being merely a man. Why exactly is he Socrates and not Plato? This was a major problem occupying Scholastic philosophers, and for Scotus, it was intimately tied to the concept of indivisibility. The humanness of Socrates is part of a common nature, what Scotus calls a non-numerical unity, which is to say that humanness is divisible, or rather, expressible in many different entities: Socrates, Plato, and so forth. The individual difference is tied to the indivisibility and individuality of Socrates. Like any property, a haecceity is an entity itself, and yet it is fundamentally indivisible, and so not separable from the larger particular itself. This, in turn, relies on Scotus's formal distinction. For our purposes, we can say that the formal distinction refers to a property or element that is both distinct in itself and yet necessary and requisite to the whole. It is thus indivisible and inseparable at the same time that it is *formally* distinct. A haecceity is itself an entity that is a property of but inseparable from the whole. The distinct individuality and indivisibility of this whole resides in the haecceity.

Let us also consider briefly one other instance of identity that was hugely important and controversial for Scotus and his contemporaries: the Holy Trinity. The question of the three members of the Trinity's unity or distinctness has a long and troubled history. How can three different things coexist in separate forms and yet be one and the same? As part of his treatment of this issue, Duns Scotus posits the divine essence as an immanent universal, meaning the divine persons are expressions of this universal, which is expressible in its purest form in multiple instances. There are, of course, many metaphysical implications of such a position, but in the context of our discussion today, it is sufficient to note that "the divine essence is communicable...however, the divine essence is indivisible. The divine persons, although they are exemplifications of divine nature, are not substances or individuals, since they are incommunicable. The only indivisible thing in God is the divine essence."<sup>1</sup> This is not identical to a haecceity, since God is notably different from an individual such as Socrates. All the same, there is a very pertinent point here as we think about haecceity in the context of Cassidy: the divine essence, analogous for our purposes to an individuating quality and identity, is the true individual, and the seat of indivisibility. The more visible and definable exemplifications of this divine essence, the three forms of the Catholic god, are not in themselves individuals. Applying this distinction to *they mark the zone*, we can see a similar relationship between the three layers of physical actions and the underlying individuality of the score. The three physical actions are exemplifications of the individual in the same sense as Scotus's divine persons: they

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Cross, "Duns Scotus on Divine Essence and the Trinity," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 11 (2003): 188.

are visible; they are tangible; they are fundamental expressions of the notation and of the haecceity that coheres within it. They are not, though, individually communicable.

In this piece, the haecceity resides within the *interaction* of these three decoupled physical actions, which are both separate in their decouplement and unitary in their holistic performance. They are independent and yet completely co-dependent, both hindering and helping each other. The valve action would simply not respond the same way, let alone sound the same way, without its interaction with the other two physical strands of material, which are likewise as affected themselves. Listen once more for this co-dependence within the independence of movement, for the haecceity that emerges from the performance of these actions.

### [Phrase 3]

Haecceity is an access point, a way for the performer to understand the piece as something beyond a prescribed set of gestures. Each piece is, rather, a unique performative and physical system with a sense and identity all its own. Deleuze and Guattari write that, “it is a matter of surrendering to the wood, then following where it leads by connecting operations to a materiality, instead of imposing a form on matter.”<sup>2</sup> A performer’s analysis of this piece resides in surrendering to the physicality of the piece, learning more than just the *specific* motions of the piece, but also the *types* of motion within the piece, of the types of interactions that occur at the intersection of the decoupled gestures. This is following the operations where they lead to a materiality, and this materiality is the individual essence. As in Scotus’s view of the trinity, where the indivisibility was located in the divine essence and not in its exemplifications, the materiality is located in the haecceity and not in the distinct lines of motion that are constellated around it. It is these actions that we follow; these actions are the connecting operations that reveal to us the form and the materiality. In this sense, materiality is a performativity, something deeply rooted in the actual manipulation of the instrument in real time. It is a physicalization and temporalization that is indivisible within the act of realizing and performing it. This performance reifies the haecceity that is the essential essence of the piece.

After all, a piece like this does not exist on paper, or theoretically: it exists only in the actual collision of physically dissynchronous actions. The consolidation of these elements is not merely a composite, it is the essential nature of an idiomatic reading of this score. This consolidation is the distinct identity and thisness of the piece. Remember, the different strands of decoupled physical material do not exist in a bubble. They exist alongside each other in the same body, and are consequently inextricable and co-dependent. For example, the slide arm responds to the rest of the body, and to the fluctuations in air resistance, amplitude, and tension that change in relation to the other parameters. Cassidy refers to such intersections of physical actions as “polyphonic byproducts.”<sup>3</sup> The polyphonic byproducts are, in essence, the haecceity. They are the element that is inseparable from the piece, indivisible from the interweaving

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<sup>2</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, tr. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1987): 408.

<sup>3</sup> Aaron Cassidy, “Interconnectivity and Abstraction: *metallic dust* as a Testing Ground for Monoponic and Structural Polyphonies,” in *New Music and Aesthetics in the 21st Century*, Vol. 1: *Polyphony and Complexity*, ed. Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, Frank Cox, and Wolfram Schurig (Hofheim: Wolke Verlag, 2002): 151.

of the decoupled physical actions. Were the slide, valve, or lip motion to be separated, the extracted material would not be identical to the same action executed in the context of the piece. Were other parameters, say voice, to be layered on top of what we see here, the result would again alter, irrespective of the precision of each independent parameter. The haecceity of the piece emerges from the entanglement of these particular actions. Finding the particular and distinctly individual dialogue of the physical actions in this piece is the performer's practical challenge, for therein is the haecceity of the piece, the materiality that emerges only performatively.

There are actually several further parameters notated in this piece. They lurk slightly on the periphery because they are more obvious: namely, the dynamics and character indications, many of which are extremely descriptive. From the performer's perspective, after struggling with such precise and occasionally overwhelming control over so much of the physical performance of the instrument, how is there room then for interpretation? After relinquishing control over so many fundamental aspects of technique, how can they effect the difference between 'frail, embarrassingly awkward' and 'mangled, inelegant'; between 'increasingly focused, collapsed' and 'flabby'? By focusing on the interaction of these physical components as a path towards the haecceity, the detailed notation is not an obstacle to interpretation, but rather a means to access the language of the piece that, in fact, allows for interpretation to emerge. Pursuing idiomaticism leads the performer to surrender to the motion within the piece, and to develop an intuitive sense for the types of motion and physicality it requires. The composer's control over such fine nuances of physical technique do not preclude character and interpretation, but rather necessitate it: the physicalization of the piece demands the interpretation of a live performer.

#### **[Phrase 4]**

Orienting our performative approach towards this concept of haecceity leads inevitably to the question of judgment. The performer always desires some barometer by which to track their progress, but with this type of performance, which is so dependent on these polyphonic byproducts, how do we judge ourselves? What is precision in this case? What is an idiomatic or successful performance?

To be able to play this piece precisely, or to even feel comfortable striving towards precision, means to intuit or learn the haecceity: to come to terms with the individuality and thisness of the notation; to access the strata of physicalized actions and how they create a unique set of interactions and interdependencies in each piece. The composer has notated an interwoven texture of physical elements. For example, the speed and shape of the slide arm in relation to the valve depression and the lip tension demands a type of precision that is not so intimately connected to the question: was the resultant pitch on the downbeat of measure 11 exactly middle C? This can be counter-intuitive, but ultimately, engaging with this idea of haecceity, with the individual and unique language of each piece's physical realization and what that actually translates into performatively, leads to an idiomatic rendering of a piece, as opposed to a purely denotative execution of gestures.

So what does that mean in reality? In this example, rather than aiming for middle C in measure 11, I am actually focussing much harder on creating appropriate relations of velocity and directionality between the different physical strata. I am interpreting the notation as sets of relationships, not isolated points of

arrival. Deleuze and Guattari describe this as relying “not on points or objects but rather on haecceities, on sets of relations.”<sup>4</sup> The relations determine the motion, and the resultant pitches are exactly that: resultant. I could mark various reference points and strive to hit middle C as I approach measure 11, much like a telephone pole supporting a wire stretched across it. However, this kind of interpretation misses the essential haecceity, which is in the relationships between the actions, and the way that they intersect with each other to create the actual physical language of the piece. Deleuze and Guattari discuss haecceities as topologies, in opposition to geometries and geometrical rules: this is the difference between a pure circle, which is a geometrical rule, and round objects in the world, each of which is circular in its own individual and irreproducible way. A geometrical precision requires the plotting of individual points and the subsequent explication of their relationship functionally, graphically. The haecceity requires a topographical precision, which has less to do with the reproducible placement of a particular point, and more to do with the precision of its placement within a plane of motion, within a shape. This fundamental shift in what constitutes precision is essential to interpreting precision within the context of a piece that relies so heavily on a polyphony of physical motions. It is a precision that not only coheres within constant motion, but actually requires it. Deleuze and Guattari write, “it is not...a question of extracting constants from variables but of placing the variables themselves in a state of continuous variation.”<sup>5</sup> Returning to the very first observation we considered about this piece, a composer’s notation is a hugely important window into the haecceity. In this case, if the pitch is so relativized, as it is, and the motion is so intricately notated, it should be obvious that these elements of motion and interactivity are essential to the piece in a way that isolated pitches are not. The interrelationships of these constantly varied variables are the most fundamental and basic essence of the piece. We can see that this continuity of motion and polyphony of physicality are foregrounded. An idiomatic interpretation of the piece has to integrate this into the basic practice of the instrument. One has to explore these motions until they reach a point of intuition, which is achieved by following the lines of motion and learning from them. Practicing this means not just capturing a specific moment, but learning how to create and interact with a type of moment. One follows between the lines in search of this performative materiality. Being precise means exactly this. It is the discovery of a haecceity.

This notation can actually be inviting, welcoming. The haecceity of the piece is a personality, and it is the key to the performer’s ability to actually interact with the notation, to confront the often extreme performative demands and to collaborate on the realization of a unique and interesting phenomenological document. The piece demands that you learn *it*, not just its denotative gestures, but its identity and individuality. The performance of the piece is a presentation of the history of learning the piece. It is a document bearing the history of accessing and engaging with a piece’s haecceity.

## **[Phrase 5]**

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<sup>4</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 382.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 369.