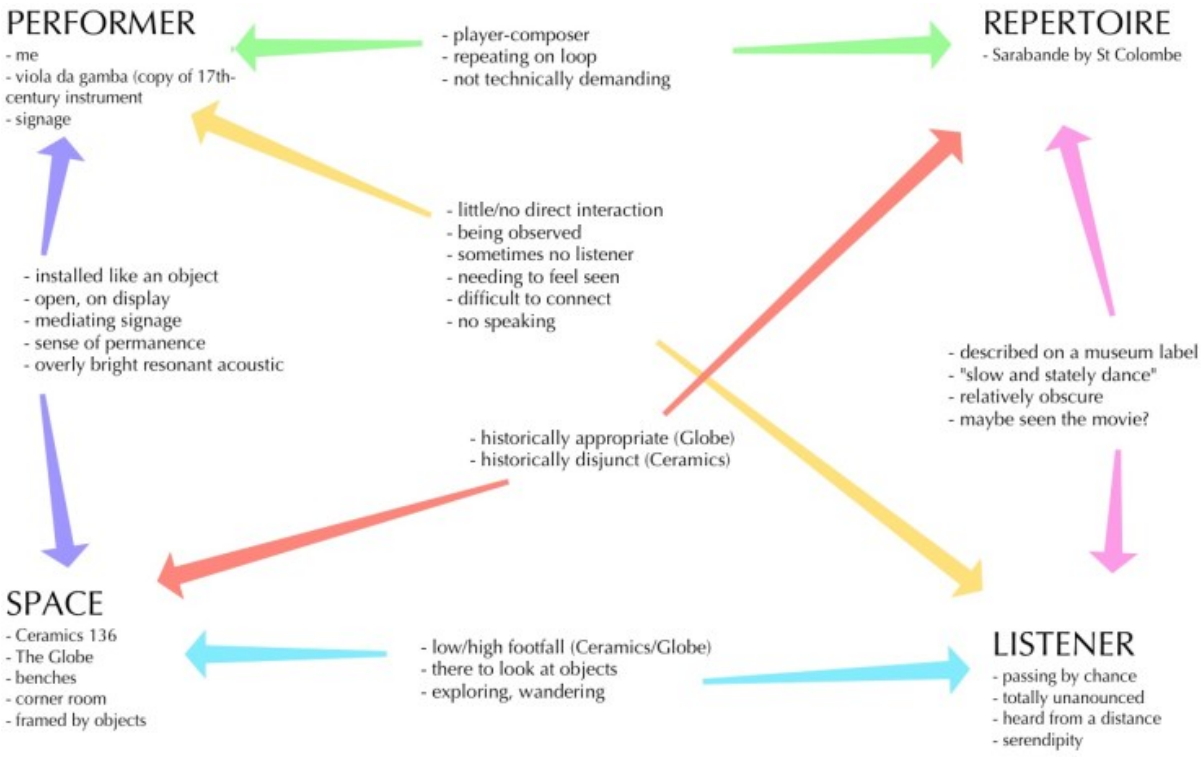
One Piece – Presence

One Piece is presented to the public as a performance installation for one musician, who is instructed to repeat one piece of Baroque music for an indefinite amount of time in a museum gallery. I first did this in Ceramics gallery 136 at the V&A in December 2018. The glass cases formed a natural enclave and there was a small bench with room for a few people to sit if necessary. I positioned myself so that I wasn't blocking access to the glass case, and played for about 3 hours, with breaks. The performance was completely unannounced, but next to me stood a little museum label, with the following text printed in V&A house style:

> *One Piece (2018)*
>
> *Liam Byrne*
>
> *Approximate duration 2 min*
>
> *The performer is instructed to repeat one piece of Baroque music on the viola da gamba for an indefinite amount of time. This work asks what happens when we look at a historical musical practice the way we look at a piece of ceramic, a painting, or a sculpture. The performer also is challenged to find a different way of embodying the piece from that which occurs on the concert hall stage. Today's piece is a Sarabande, a slow and stately dance from circa 1660 by the French viola da gamba player and composer Jean de Sainte Colombe (c.1640-1700).*

I chose this roughly 2-minute Sarabande so that the whole piece can be heard in about the same amount of time it takes to give a painting a decent first look. I'm particularly interested in the temporality of this experience; I wanted the listener to feel like they can casually saunter past the music much the same way they would walk past a painting. In addition to being free to move through the physical space, I wanted to see what happens when the listener is not bound by a commitment to the timescale of a traditional musical performance. The listener has a different kind of agency in this experiment, where they are not expected to stay or indeed to behave in any way at all. Here is our vector diagram again:



Vector diagram: *One Piece*

In this experiment, as it suggested on the museum label, I did try to present myself as much like a museum object as possible. It was important that this performance was completely unannounced, that none of the listeners knew they were going to hear a piece of music until they were already hearing it. Inspired by the material culture

approach discussed earlier, I wanted to centre the practice of playing as if it were a museum object, removing as many of the trappings of normal concert performance as possible.

I also had a second objective going into this experiment, which was a challenge for me as performer. I anticipated an obvious physical endurance aspect, having to play for a long time without stopping, which was indeed much more difficult than playing a concert of similar duration. But what I really wanted to observe was how my relationship with the piece would change after repeating it many times. The inspiration here came from the practices of the Baroque dance-band performer, the folk musician, and the modern actor; all of these artists repeat their texts much more than we classical musicians do, as part of their practice and their preparation. Classical musicians tend to stop rehearsing something once we have "learnt" it, once we know we will be able to reproduce it without obvious flaws. I wanted to see how my own embodiment of the piece changes once I move way beyond that point, whether new expressive variables would emerge, and what aspects of the piece I would continue to engage with or manipulate after a few hours.

A brief side note here on the notion of embodiment: Very early on in my academic reading I came across the work of Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt, who consider a form of "embodied" or "situated" knowledge as central to the practice of artistic research.[1] In the following chapter, I lean in (perhaps sometimes too heavily) to the idea of embodiment as the moment in my artistic practice where new meaning, independent of text or theory, has been created within and as a result of my practice playing the viol. As we shall see unfold in the following pages, this process of embodiment also refers to the moment of friction between the self and the artistic practice, particularly the reduction of this friction as is often achieved through processes of repetition, as external elements like repertoire start to become internalised. On a personal level, this notion of the legitimacy of embodied knowledge as a factor in the academic process has served as a validating stamp for much of the consideration of my own playing that follows.

The listeners behaved mostly as expected. Most lingered for a moment, not necessarily the whole piece, although a majority of people seemed to be reading the placard. Some took photos and video, some walked right past. Some kept talking amongst themselves, and others were quiet. One woman stayed and sat on the bench right opposite me for about 4 repetitions and then thanked me before she left, which was quite special. Every once in a while someone clapped for a second or two. It was exactly the diversity of behaviour I had hoped for. Unlike in *Inside Voices*, I decided not to speak at all in this performance, but to let the museum label and my playing be the only form of communication with the audience. This was also a challenge for me. I am aware that some of my success as a performer is due to the accessibility of my spoken presentation and explanation, and so I wanted to remove that element from this work to see how those vectors of listening energy between me, the listener, and the piece play out without linguistic intervention.

Immediately after the first day of performance in Ceramics Gallery 136, I scribbled the following notes:

> *It was much harder to connect. I wonder if it was harder for the listeners too. That one woman who clapped got her own private-luxury-stumbled-across-experience. That was nice.*
>
> *Once I got into the swing of the piece it felt like it didn't make sense doing stuff unless someone was listening.*
>
> *It made me think about the importance of feeling seen, and how maybe part of what draws me to performance is wanting to be seen. That convo with Connor about not feeling seen, how even tolerant hetero environments are hard.*

This conversation to which I refer was from a few days earlier with a close friend who's also a cis gay man. We were talking about a sort of micro-phenomenon that we had both experienced, where spending long days working closely and socialising with heterosexual colleagues left us feeling particularly drained, and with a sense of needing to somehow go out and do something *gay* immediately afterward, whether it was running to the nearest gay bar for a drink, finding actual gay sex, or even just having a private dance to a bit of Kate Bush (which of course is not an inherently gay activity, but that's the subject of someone else's PhD).

What interests me is that we had both experienced this need to articulate our gayness after time spent with perfectly progressive, lovely, tolerant and accepting colleagues, straight people—allies, even—who would probably be mortified to learn that we had felt anything other than entirely comfortable being homosexuals in their presence. The conclusion Connor and I reached was that the experience of being the only gay was tiring because when our colleagues simply treat us as if we are the same as they are, we do not feel *seen* as who we really are. In a way, slight discrimination or teasing would almost be preferable to the indifferent presumption of equality, because it would be an acknowledgement of an identity that I struggled for more than a decade to express. Of course this need to be *seen* is not unique to homosexuals; it's a universal human emotional need.

My suggestion in the notes that I was drawn to performance by a need to be seen recalls the issue of peer validation as it came up in *Inside Voices*. There, we saw my using performance as a way of presenting an edited version of myself, with the ultimate aim of validation from the listener. As that experiment went on, I started editing less, but then my emotional dependancy on the listener grew.

Sitting there in the Ceramics gallery, playing for whomever happened to wander through the relatively low-traffic area, I was so struck by this sort of "tree falls in the forest" problem, and I found it very hard to feel a desire to play unless I felt someone was listening. I wrote later in my notes:

> *Most exhausting thing was feeling not seen or appreciated. And when it seemed like I had a chance to connect, it made me really jump to it.*

This performance succeeded in giving me one of the things I really wanted, which was for me as a performer to be confronted with the audience's boredom, or disinterest, or fascination, or total absence. Although it was very difficult, I did find it somehow refreshing and also liberating for me as well, even if at the end of day one I was not quite sure what to do with this liberation. My notes continued:

> *It's hard work being an object. But what I wanted was really to feel like the audience had total freedom to express themselves. Sometimes when people were talking quietly and listening to me, it didn't really bother me. Cos it felt like they had sort of checked in first. When someone stayed for a few rounds, it was much more inspiring.*

> *Still it sort of feels like there is something in me that's resisting really going there, really going for the intense expressive beautiful thing I know it can be. I wonder if this has something to do with the whole fear of orgasm, subverting time thing. Like I'm afraid I won't be able to do the special thing more than once or twice so I'm holding back.*

In the previous chapter, I talked about my big epiphany, the Catholic baggage time/judgement relationship, but I skipped over the "orgasm anxiety" bit of that therapy session. Basically, it falls under the category of the "absolute moments" which are sources of anxiety, and of course death and *petite mort* have been a classic pairing since long before psychoanalysis came along. I don't think we need to explicate the personal aspects too deeply here in order for me to observe that what was likely going on in the Ceramics Gallery that day was that my normal expressive time-bending tricks weren't working.

If a large part of what draws me to music is the opportunity to subvert absolute moments in time, this automatically becomes more difficult when those moments keep repeating themselves. Part of what makes that exciting time-bending possible in concerts is that each discrete moment I'm trying to subvert only happens once, so there is a frisson of "now's your chance" which is absent in constant repetition. The set parameters of the experiment were such that the expressive variable "time" functioned differently, and I was not successful in manipulating it to gain a sense of agency.

This sense of a familiar expressive variable no longer working within changed parameters reminds me of a very instructive chamber music experience I had as the one-time guest of a British group in 2012. I'd been a full-time member of the viol consort Fretwork for a few years by that point, and as I had a colleague in that group with a particularly rigid sense of time, I had developed a phrasing habit where I would try to force him to be more flexible by snatching little moments of flexibility wherever I could. Say, for example, he finished one phrase on a semibreve and I moved just a minim later. Before he played his next note, I would seize that opportunity to force him to stretch by taking a kind of conspicuous, exaggerated amount of time before placing my minim (which in principle sat bang in the middle of his semibreve). It sort of forced a reaction but only a slight one, and the result was this expressive moment that suspended time but didn't derail it, because he would only react *slightly* to my intervention. So when I was playing with this other group as a guest in 2012, I occasionally tried to use this trick, which had become a standard part of my phrasing vocabulary by that point, and it just kept falling flat. The sensitive and flexible bass player I was working with just kept giving me this look like, "what *are* you doing?". In the context of different colleagues, my conspicuous snatches of time just read as bizarre affectations because they had nothing ploddy to pull against. I realised in that moment that this particular approach to phrasing was highly situation-dependent, an expressive variable that only worked within certain parameters.

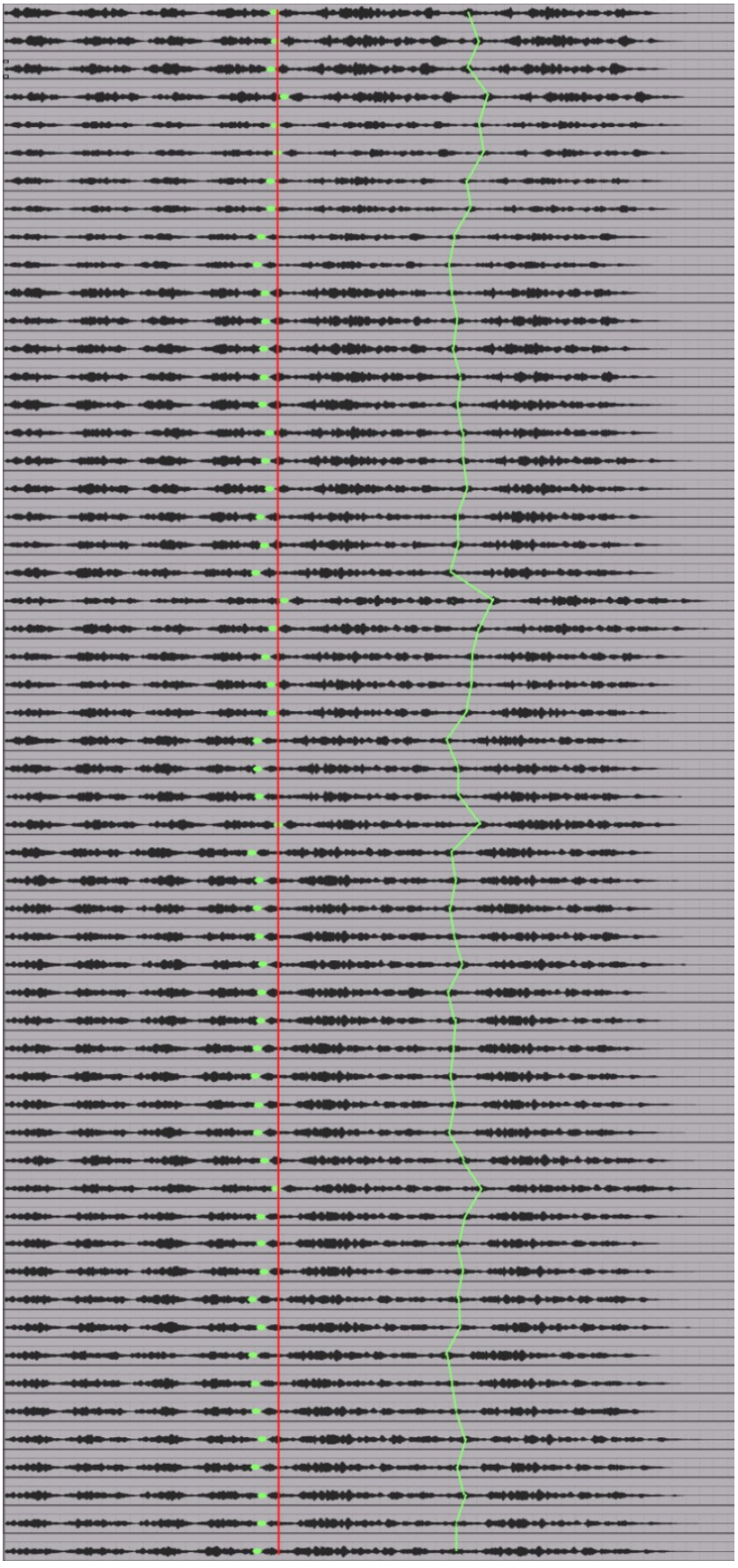
So in the *One Piece* experiment, the unusual performance parameters were corrupting my sense of how much time I could take, especially when not many people were listening. My notes continued:

> *It did feel a bit like I could take more time without taking time. Would be interested to see how tempo and duration fluctuate over the course of the experience. I think one of the big things here is gonna be the power of silence as an independent thing from time. What ma kes me feel sexy as a performer is when I feel like I can stop time. That's basically why I do it.*

The last line about stopping time (written in notes 2 December 2018) foreshadows the epiphany I was to have in the newspaper interview the following April. In order to compare tempo and duration, I have aligned the recordings of 56 of the 62 Sarabandes I played that afternoon.[2] The quickest was 1:56 and the slowest 2:08, and the sound of all 56 together is quite remarkable:

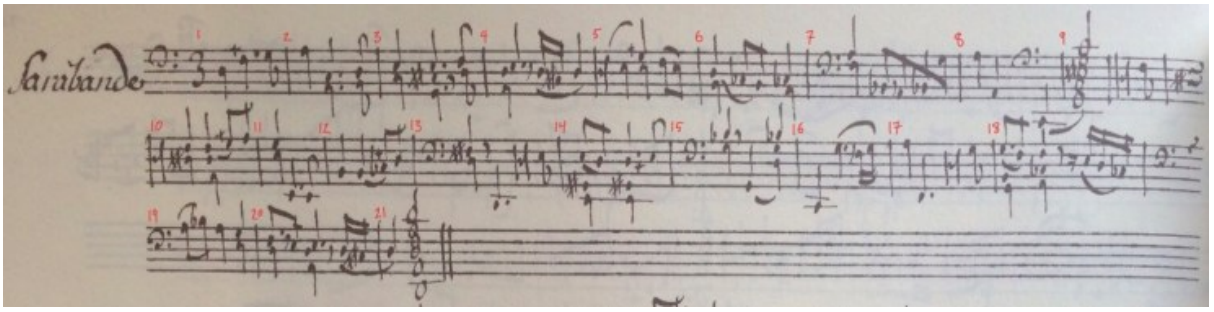
Ex 14 All the Sarabandes

The following image stacks all of the waveforms on top of each other in chronological order from top to bottom, for the sake of visual comparison (if you click, it will open full-size in a new tab for detailed viewing). The green dots represent the beginning of the first B section, and the straight red vertical line shows the beginning of the first B of the very Sarabande, for evolutionary reference. The wavy green line charts the beginning of the second B section.



As you can see, there was a degree of fluctuation, but we see quite a lot of gradual tendencies between groups of repetitions. The zig zag of the green line among the first few repetitions shows a kind of alternation between slightly slower and slightly quicker pacing at the very beginning of the session, which then smooths out into more gradual evolution as the day goes on, with the obvious exception of the three jagged jumps to the right, representing a few particularly slow versions. We can also see from the thickness of the waveforms a certain degree of dynamic alteration as time progresses, although this is not so exact. The way a microphone perceives volume of sound is different to our ears.

An audio comparison of all 56 Sarabandes would certainly drive us all insane, so this visual representation of the afternoon will have to suffice as an overview. However, I would like to compare the first repetition with the last, in the interests of identifying potential evolutionary outcomes. Firstly, here is a score:



St Colombe Sarabande

Here is the first repetition, S1:

Ex 15 S1

And here is the final full repetition of the day, S56

Ex 16 S56

We will get to a detailed analysis of timing shortly, but first I want to look at the relationship between line and physical gesture, and how differently this plays out in these two versions. In S1 we hear more shapes on single notes, the sound of me attempting to be expressive with my individual bow strokes. But in S56 we hear less shape on individual notes but more shape in the line. Let's compare the very beginnings again:

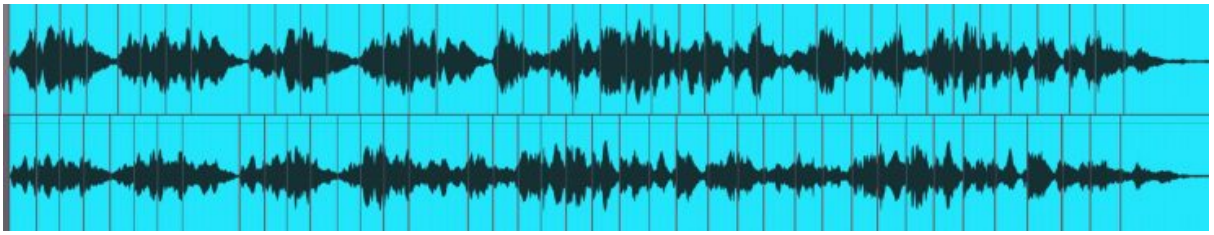
Ex 17 S1 bar 1

Ex 18 S56 bar 1

S1 one sounds a little bit more lyrical, and S56 lets go of the notes more. Some might prefer the directness of S1 but to me it sounds like it's *trying* to say something, almost to project something. To S56 there is an air of almost resigned acceptance of the phrase; it doesn't need to try because the phrase already exists. S1 one doesn't let go of the A on the downbeat of bar 2, unnecessarily pushing through it, but S56 just sort of lets it happen. In a sense, there is something almost aspirational about S1, where there is something noble about S56. Or perhaps S1 could be telling us something we already know, whereas S56 tells the story with a bit more acknowledgement for the listener's perspective and familiarity.

If we go back and listen to the full A section in the recordings above, notice the difference between the low A in bar 8: S1 is trying to hit it, while S56 is just letting it happen. There is an efficiency of movement that has come into S56 through all the repetitions. The physical and emotional demands of playing the piece over and over have forced me, or allowed me, to focus on the most important expressive variables and shed the rest. It reminds me of an anecdote a former teacher of mine told about going to visit the Benedictine monks at Solesmes, one of the strongholds of Gregorian chant in the modern world. One of the monks told her that they chant so much that every novice loses his voice in the first week, and only after he has been through that and recovered, does he know how to sing chant.

Interestingly, if we put S1 and S56 together, they take *exactly* the same amount of time, but apart from the very first and very last note, they are never in sync. In fact, by the time we get to the repeat of bar 6, S56 is fully out of phase one bar ahead. In the picture below, the waveform of S1 is on top and S56 on bottom, and I have added barlines to show how each version stretches the tempo. (Because the beginning of bar 9 is blurred by the rolling of the A major arpeggio, I have left that barline out.)



Top: S1, Bottom: S56

As we can see, S1 generally keeps something closer to a steady tempo, whereas S56 is faster in the A section and slower in the B section. Rhetorically, the compacted and expanded timing in S56 makes a certain amount of sense: the two 4-bar phrases of the A section are a relatively straightforward paring of antecedent and consequent phrases, with nothing harmonically unusual about them. But then the B section gets a bit more adventurous, with the first 8-bar phrase taking us through a more distant series of harmonies and the final 4-bar phrase taking us from the relative major through that wistful, gorgeous inverted E diminished chord back to the tonic D minor. So a faster A section and a more expanded B section is rhetorically logical.

When we look at the image of all 56 Sarabandes, we see a gradual general compacting of the A section and expansion of the B section. It is unsurprising that over the course of many repetitions, as my understanding of the piece became more embodied, I began to say the “normal” phrases with more flow, whilst lingering on the more “unusual” ideas. Here is a video of the waveforms from both S1 and S56 together, but for the sake of comparison the faster-moving version (which is not always the same take) has been cut and realigned at the beginning of each phrase. S1

is on top and in the left channel, S56 on bottom and in the right. Listening to both together may or may not be helpful, so alternating earphones might give more clarity.

Ex 19 S1 and S56 aligned

So we see both 4-bar phrases of the A section have become considerably quicker by the end of the day. And even the beginning of the first B section is more forward-moving in S56. But from bar 16, S56 starts to pull back into the warm, rich cadence to F major. Where things really diverge is in the diminished chord in bar 18. I described this moment as wistful before, and to me there is a strong sense of lingering on that second beat. Harmonically it feels justified, especially with the trill. It's not a typical forward-moving cadential trill with "Nachschlag", but a languorous distinctly French trill of relaxed arrival, like a musical yawn.

If we were to imagine a baroque choreographic parallel, I would see this diminished chord as a coupé ouverte on the second beat, a balance on one leg in relevé while the other straight leg brushes out and draws a half circle in the air. There is a sort of virtuosity to balances in this movement language; if we stretch them out a bit they become more expressive. The coupé ouverte is a dynamic balance, whose expressive tension lies between the momentum of the leg in the air and the balance of the standing foot in relevé, with the body's centre of gravity not entirely secure.

Dance is of course an important element of much Baroque instrumental music. It is also, on a personal note, a passion of mine. I studied ballet as an amateur, but intensively, for several years in my twenties, and have dabbled in Baroque dance, and I will always jump at an opportunity to work with dancers from any background. One of the things that most fascinates me as a musician entering the world of dance is that physical gestures have their own inherent sense of rhythm. This physical time is similar to musical time inasmuch as it has its own structure that deviates from clock/measured time, but it deviates in a completely different way. Dance's bodily rhythm also has its own type of temporal expressivity. Trying to match music's

time-bending exactly with dance's time-bending will do both a disservice, but I think it can occasionally be useful as a musician to try to empathetically understand the temporal expressivity of gestures.[3] It's been a long time since I've done any serious dancing, but here is my attempt to empathise with the coupé ouverte:

Ex 20 Coupé ouverte silent

So the (theoretical) beauty of the movement is in this little moment of suspending time while the body both falls and swings the leg at the same time. Here, in isolation, is the relevant moment in bar 18:

Ex 21 S1 bar 18

Ex 22 S56 bar 18

Here is the same dance step, synced with the audio from S56. Interestingly, I recorded this illustrative video in silence, and when I later put it together with the recording, I was pleasantly surprised to find that the inherent bodily rhythm of the gesture fit so well onto the musical rhythm I'd found in S56.

Ex 23 Coupé ouverte with Sarabande

As we've mentioned, instrumental art music based on dance forms was not necessarily danced to, so this is not a question of one of these two versions making my imagined choreography easier. If we understand St Colombe's Sarabande as being a piece of viol music written upon the model of a Sarabande, we can appreciate his composition almost like a choreography in its own right. So this lingering trill and extra time in the middle of bar 18 seems a reasonable use of the temporal expressive variable within the Sarabande parameters, the musical metaphoric equivalent of a balance on a coupé ouverte.

In the Ceramics gallery that day, I may have been growing gradually more indulgent as I came to embody the piece through repetition, yet this particular type of intentioned time-stretching feels less purely indulgent and more like an attempt to see how far we can push the tension between conveying structure and being expressive, through the suspension of time (just like the tension between gravity and momentum in the coupé ouverte). *It is an indulgence that is aware of what it asks of the parameters within which it operates.*

Indeed, this relates to the "power of silence as an independent thing from time" to which I referred in my notes above. I read this as stillness outside the jurisdiction of time, stillness that has the power to suspend time. Again we are coming back to Liam vs Time. It's important to point out again that, as I wrote in my notes at the end of this first day, I felt like I wasn't quite getting it yet, that there was an expressive potential in my performance of this work I still hadn't unlocked.

This notion of making time stand still through embodiment by way of repetition reminds me of my first show at Shakespeare's Globe in 2010[4]. It was a new play, with about 40 cues of music that had to be played very closely on the actors' lines. At the beginning, the cueing was a real challenge: the music director had to catch the actor's timing, have a feel for when the music should start in response, and then give the other two players a cue in musical time & tempo, and then we all had to play together. It was quite frustrating because there were quite a few different senses of time to negotiate in that equation, but eventually the MD's gestures became calmer and smaller, and once we were into the run, they had reduced to a sniff and a nod; after a few weeks just a nod, then an eyebrow. Eventually we went on a 7-week tour doing the same show 7 times a week and that is where the magic started to happen. The actors had all fully internalised their roles and were playing with them to differing degrees, some more consistent and others actively as volatile as possible. We musicians had got to know each other very well, too, but more importantly we'd got to know the piece and the pacing tendencies of the actors, and fully understand

the dramatic purpose of the music. By this point we had stopped cueing each other entirely. The tempo of each piece had been so engrained, and how it needed to time with the delivery of lines and energy on stage was such an unspoken understanding that it just happened. Most importantly, it happened without our having to resort to any of the normal mechanisms of organising musical time to which we resort in our regular professional musical lives.

We were, in a sense, free from the sniffs and nods and other crude gestures we so regularly rely on. Instead we could communicate in micro cues, moods and emotions, body temperature and facial expressions. It was a level of embodiment in musical activity that I have not since achieved in professional ensemble playing. And it is not a coincidence that this happened in the theatre. In many senses, actors and classical musicians do much the same thing: we both take a text written by someone else (often dead) and attempt to interpret it, embody it, and present that text to an audience in a convincing, beautiful, and expressive manner in accordance with the nature of the work. Yet the structures of our industries and our rehearsal cultures could not be more different. Actors are expected to reach a much higher level of embodiment to be convincing in their performance, and they take so much time to repeat and repeat their texts until it all becomes boring and ingrained and only *then* do they come out the other side fully present in their roles. In the theatre metaphor, the vast majority of our western classical music performances could only really be considered staged readings. I think, perhaps, that after the first day of *One Piece*, I had not yet "come out the other side" fully embodying my role.

Four days after playing this St Colombe Sarabande in the Ceramics galleries, I did it again in the Globe in the Europe 1600-1815 galleries. This was an entirely different experience, being on the ground floor in a much higher-traffic area. I was also inside the wooden structure of the Globe, which offers lots of seating opportunity and is so obviously a structure designed for things to happen in it. As it says on the V&A website , "Like the salons of the 18th-century, where the ideas of the Enlightenment

were debated and music was performed, The Globe provides a space for conversation, programmed salons, and special events."[5]

Shortly after this performance, I wrote the following in my notes:

> *Playing in the Globe, I felt a bit more distant, but also more private than in Ceramics. Somehow the performance structure of the Globe offered me a bit of emotional protection, and I didn't find it quite so difficult not being seen as the day before.*

Much of this is simply down to the physical layout of the room and the structure itself. In Ceramics, I had my back to the two entrances, so I could never see people coming; members of the public saw and heard me long before I could be certain they were there, which is classic anxiety-inducing Feng Shui. In the Globe, I could see both entryways from my playing position, and even though people could walk behind me, the space behind my back was smaller and I could see them before they went there. Most people stopped and read the sign, and sometimes they would come in to the Globe and sit down on the bench, especially if there were other people already sitting on the bench. To set the scene, here is a short video extract from two perspectives: one from a stationary camera behind my head, and one from a phone camera held by my assistant attempting to represent an audience perspective. Unfortunately they are not synced, but it hopefully gives a sense.

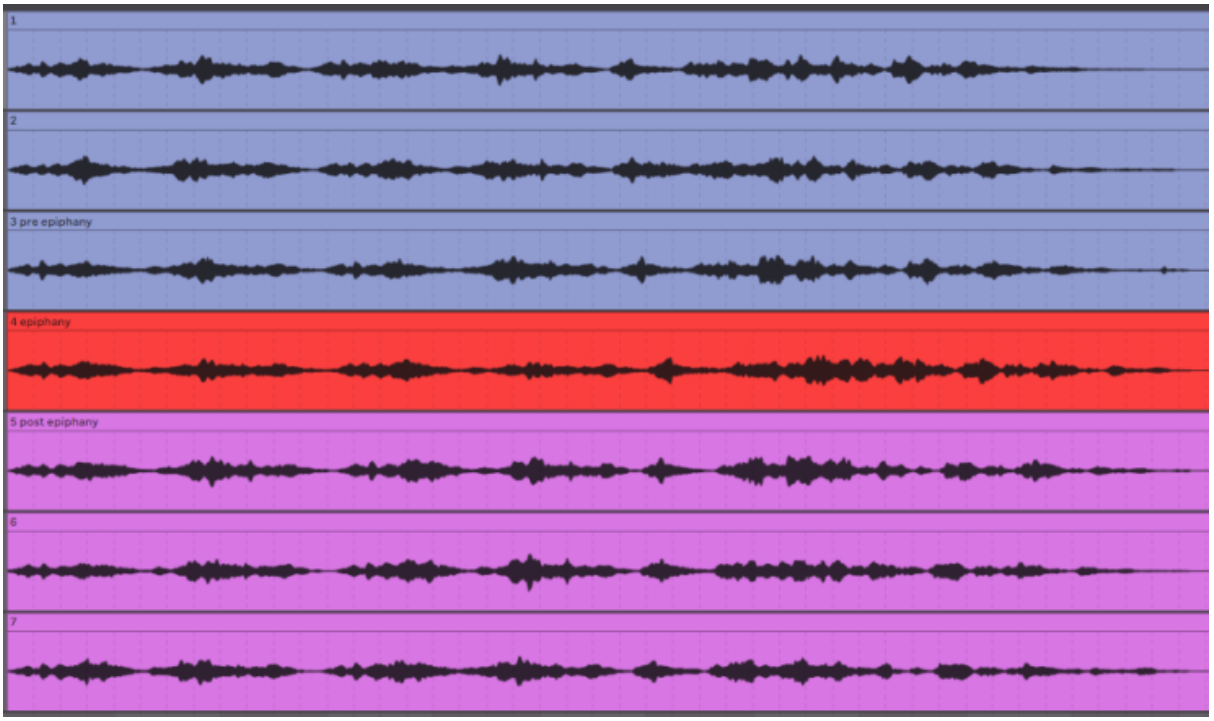
Ex 24 Globe scene

Comparing the audio recordings from Ceramics with the recordings from the Globe, things seem mostly quite similar. For some reason, I decided not to repeat the B section in the Globe, but did roughly 60 repetitions of the same Sarabande AAB. I suspect, in hindsight, that it may have been a subconscious attempt to reduce the emotional fatigue of the whole experience, as the B section—as we have seen—is slightly more demanding in that sense, but this is pure conjecture. My notes left me

no guidance on that decision, so I will assume that I considered it not very significant at the time. What *was* very significant, however, was a small moment of epiphany I had right before the end, which I managed to describe to myself in a voice memo transcribed here:

> *So three pieces before the end it was the… I made this realisation that I was thinking like I was holding back from… the issue was that…. no one was really getting a very real, very full version cos I was trying to always present a perfect version each time. I was… everyone sort of heard me struggling against a certain ideal. And around the time that the guy in the blue t-shirt was looking through the doorway three or four pieces before the end… I started to realise that I should relish the things that are not the ideal, and there was a sense of connectivity with the actuality of the gestures as it was happening that got much stronger and I felt then much much more present in the experience, and so I'm curious to listen back and see what that sounds like.*

My memory of this moment is that it was like breaking from a mould, but without losing the form of the piece. I felt like I had found a place from which I was free to shape notes without disturbing the flow. Luckily, thanks to the stationary camera behind my head, I was able to identify the arrival of this blue-shirted gentleman in the 4th repetition from the end of the recording. Even before I listened to it, from looking at the waveform alone, it stuck out. It's almost as if you can *see* the thought process, like reading an EKG. Here are the final 7 repetitions of the Sarabande from this day, with the "epiphany" moment in red:



In comparison to the repetitions before and after it, the epiphany moment is quieter in the second repetition of bars 5-9, louder somewhere around bar 14-16, and takes significantly longer than the repetitions before it. When I listen to it, I can pretty safely identify this moment of breaking from the mould as happening in the middle of the second A section, the fourth blob from the left on the waveform above. The figure in bar 5 seems almost to stop mid thought, and the final A major chord in bar 9 is extremely introspective (whereas before it had always been quite obviously the end of a sentence). In the B section, the gestures get more separated and even a little grotesque at times, like the fat buzz on the low C. I remember kind of needing to find my sea legs with this new conception of phrasing. It sounded like this:

Ex 25 S4 epiphany

What's interesting is that the three variations leading up to the epiphany are all quite similar. They sound good, well shaped, but perhaps a little complacent. As we've heard, the epiphany repetition is a bit eccentric, but then the three final repetitions after the epiphany are significantly more expressive and indeed, present than what came before. They were focused attempts at enacting this newly adopted philosophy.

They take slightly longer than the pre-epiphany repetitions but not as long as the epiphany itself. Here, for comparison is the last repetition before the epiphany and the first one after it:

Ex 26 S3 pre-epiphany

Ex 27 S5 post-epiphany

From the very first phrase, S5 has more energy. The second beats of the bars feel like they have more grammatical purpose; they're not more accented, but they have more intent. The lower voice in the double-stops also comes out as a bass line; and the chromaticism C to C# is more expressive in S5 than in S3:

Ex 28 S3 bar 1

Ex 29 S5 bar 1

The distinction is subtle, but S3 feels to me as if it's following a plan, whereas S5 is leading but without being demonstrative. We see something similar at the beginning of the B section; the dotted rhythm in S5 is snappier giving us more energy into the C# minor. The big difference is that in S3, the third beat of bar 10 is politely quite accurately in its place. It's much lighter than beats 1 and 2, as it ought to be, but if we compare it with S5, there the third beat is ever so slightly delayed and thus even more lightened. The quavers don't *feel* actively overdotted or squished; there is enough time for the *battement* to happen as its own discrete thing, but it all has more poise and flow into the next bar. Indeed, the D on beat 2 of bar 11 gets a softer but still weighted landing in S5, which feels like a more elegant mini arrival (even if it does have a clickier shift before it):

Ex 30 S3 bar 10

Ex 31 S5 bar 10

Bars 12-15 in both versions sound "good", but if we were to imagine this text as poetic French, S5 delivers the words with slightly more declamation *and* at the same time sexier liaisons. In bars 16-17 of course there is no contest; the velvety sweetness of the cadence to F major in S5 is especially charming in contrast to the dramatic statement before it; S3 doesn't quite achieve the same fire and ice. Now that we've touched on a few specific details, I would advocate listening to each repetition again in its entirety.

It's important to remember that, by this point in the exercise, I had played the same piece over 100 times, and S3 and S5 come basically right next to each other. S5 is not just a more interesting or embodied performance because I'm improving, or deepening my understanding of the piece with more repetitions (as was certainly the case on day one). The difference has to do with my sense of presence, my feeling that I am the one steering the ship, that I have *agency* in my performance.

When I first started studying viol with Laurence Dreyfus in 2006, he would often chastise me for looking out the window or into some other middle distance while I was playing, and he'd try to get me to look at my bow or fingers instead. At the time I thought it was because there was something "wrong" with my bow (which may well have been the case), but now I realise that he was trying to drag me away from this performed trope of wistful distraction and trying to get me to become *present* in my own playing. In 2019 I wrote about the following in my notes:

> *Perhaps I have always used music as a form of escapism to step outside of time, which—as discussed above—we've determined in therapy is a source of anxiety for me? And thusly perhaps I enjoy hiding in between the beats and not taking the reins of time when I'm playing? But even if taking these reins is difficult for me, requires more focus, and more energy, it is I think something that results in a better performance.*

Taking the reins of time feels like an appropriate metaphor for what happened during this epiphany in the Globe that day. The idea of seeing music as a space outside of time, as a place I can go to escape time, also resonates with me. But of course, running away from our fears is not as interesting or constructive as confronting our fears, and it doesn't make nearly as good a story. It would be perfectly OK for me to engage in a form of music therapy and simply use playing music as an opportunity to escape my temporal anxieties and step outside of time (and this is in fact precisely what I do when I go out dancing to techno), but that escapism would not result in a kind of music-making that's as interesting to perform for other people. Confronting fear makes for a much better narrative, and it is the dramatic tension in that confrontation which makes the kind of playing I did in the post-epiphany Sarabande S5 much more vital and interesting, as the brave protagonist in my own musical journey.

I said before that recalling the absolute finality of death makes me feel relieved, but I think now that the more important lesson is that this *memento mori* gives me a sense of *agency*. The epiphany that I had in the Globe that day, that sense of taking the reins in my playing, is absolutely related to the feeling of having agency in my own life.

One completely unexpected but fascinating side effect of the *One Piece* experiment is that I noticed after the second day of doing it that, going about my normal daily activities, I was *significantly* more relaxed and not irritated by things that would usually bother me. Just moving through the London Underground with a viol in a flight case, for example, normally induces feelings of misanthropy and anxiety on my part, especially when I'm physically tired. But during the period of this repetition project, I was extraordinarily chill.

I then slowly began to realise that what I was in fact doing here might possibly be understood as a form of meditation. My basic oversimplified understanding of Zen

practice is that meditation often involves having a thought but letting it go, and sort of watching it go past without engaging with it. This is precisely how it felt to me playing this Sarabande 120 times, both with the music itself (especially the repetitions that were less engaged) and particularly with the other distracting thoughts that entered my mind while playing (which are, generally speaking, numerous and in my experience one of the principal barriers to higher-level music-making). I think in some ways that this practice of repetition was a meditation *on* the piece itself, and in other ways it was *using* the performance of a piece of music as a sort of limiting task, like making a sand mandala, to allow me to engage in a separate form of meditation. This is certainly a vast oversimplification of a very complex subject, but a little bit of preliminary reading into Rinzai Zen practice has brought me to the concept of the kōan, a simple utterance upon which one meditates in the hopes of attaining a breakthrough:

> *The kōan is said to pose to the Zen practitioner a paradox unsolvable by the rational, intellectualizing mind. Driven into an ever more desperate corner by his repeated futile attempts to solve what cannot be rationally solved, the practitioner finally breaks through the barrier of rational intellection to the realm of preconceptual and prelinguistic consciousness variously called pure consciousness, no-mind, without-thinking, or emptiness. This breakthrough is called satori or kenshō.*[6]

We don't usually think of a Sarabande as a paradox unsolvable by the rational mind, but in a way it could be seen as such. It is after all a dance that is not danced. And I certainly felt that before my moment of epiphany, I was preoccupied with finding a kind of sense or purpose in the Sarabande, letting go of which allowed me to be more present and play more beautifully. I don't mean to suggest that on that afternoon in the Globe, I reached the first stage of enlightenment, but I do think I may have inadvertently meditated on this Sarabande enough that I reached the first stage of embodiment.

References

↑1	See Barrett, E. and Bolt, B. (2013) *Carnal Knowledge: Towards a 'New Materialism' Through the Arts*. and also Barrett, E. and Bolt, B. (2007) *Practice as Research: Context, Method, Knowledge*.
↑2	Five repetitions were disqualified from the comparison because mental fatigue led to asymmetrical repeats: one had three A sections, one had three B sections, one had only one A section, and two had three B sections. And the very first Sarabande was a "practise run" to check that I could remember everything; it had a wrong note near the beginning and was generally very slow. So whenever I refer to the first Sarabande, I mean the first "for real" repetition.
↑3	I would absolutely love to go deeper with this, but it is perhaps best left for another project, maybe even a collaboration with a practice-led dance researcher. My knowledge of dance, especially of historical dance, is not strong enough to academically explore this avenue alone.
↑4	*Brenton, H. (2010) Anne Boleyn.*
↑5	Hoskin, D. (2015) 'Presenting The Globe • V&A Blog', *V&A Blog*, 14 August. Available at: https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/creating-new-europe-1600-1800-galleries/presenting-the-globe (Accessed: 27 February 2021).
↑6	Hori, V.S. (2000) 'Koan and Kensho in the Rinzai Zen Curriculum', in *The Koan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*. p. 280.