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# What Can Music Learning Do? Audiovision as Research-Creation in Undergraduate Music Studies

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Article abstract

Livestreaming as research-creation for music studies introduced students to research-creation and the felt experience of extralinguistic concepts. As a way of both rethinking the divide between musicology and music performance and engaging in much needed critical reflection on how music teaching has always been done, research-creation in audiovision creates a laboratory for extralinguistic musicology. By connecting research-creation literature with practical training in the production of audiovision music studies, dominant image of thought emerges and a new machinic image of thought is introduced. If music studies is to find its way beyond the disciplinarity of inherited models, it will do so along with a wider engagement in a diversity of what it means to teach and what it means to do research. This is, at its core, a question of what image of thought will be allowed.

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## What Can Music Learning Do? Audiovision as Research-Creation in Undergraduate Music Studies

Michael B. MacDonald

In *Research-Creation in Music and the Arts* (2018), Sophie Stévanca and Serge Lacasse describe a fault line between musicology and music performance, a tension between university music and music conservatory modes of knowing. Research-creation they suggest, has a role in investigating this in-between space, a “practical musicology” (Zsgorsky-Thomas 2022) to help rethink musicology education. Artist-researchers working in Canadian undergraduate music programs are also inquiring after ways to respond to Dylan Robinson’s (2019) observation that “decolonizing music programs involves challenging the received values of such programs” (138). This is an encouragement to think pedagogy as more than the replication of the university’s valued *modes of knowing*, what Gilles Deleuze called an *image of thought*, some of which have been shown to be exclusionary, inward-looking, disciplinary, and disciplining (Harney and Moten 2013). In *CineWorlding* (MacDonald 2023), the distinction between recognized modes of knowing and a new machinic image of thought was described this way:

I can describe in words an experience of cinema-thinking, in the event that produced a refrain that acts as a germ of an idea that stretches out and calls together a variety of forces, linking to other events, moving the force of perception across the curves and undulations of the world, but it will never simulate cinema-thinking. Cinema-thinking will only happen as machine-thinking, whether you are operating a camera, working with an editing software, or watching blocs of sensations in duration as you become entangled in audio-vision. (20)

Cinema-thinking/machine-thinking emerged from the hyphen between research-creation and can operate as a proposition for practice-based research. It invites artist-researchers to inquire after alternative ways of thinking music, to ask, “what can research do?” beyond replicating existing methods and methodologies. It can also do the same for music pedagogy by asking, “what can music learning do?” Music research and music pedagogy can work through each other, *transversally* operating on each term in ways that leave neither unchanged. To embrace research-creation may be to engage in the cultivating of an image of thought for music studies that is both research and pedagogy, musicology and performance.

In Erin Manning’s “Ten Propositions for Research-Creation” (2016b), proposition 1 states: “Create New Forms of Knowledge (Embrace the Non-Linguistic).” In this proposition, Manning writes: “Research-creation generates new forms of experiences; . . . it hesitantly acknowledges that normative modes of inquiry and containment often are incapable of assessing its value; it generates

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forms of knowledge that are extra-linguistic; . . . it proposes *concrete assemblages* for rethinking the very question of what is at stake in pedagogy, in practice, and in collective experimentation” (133; italics added). The space of innovation that Manning suggests is intoxicating in its research and pedagogical possibilities. But as Stévanice and Lacasse have noted, any path toward this way of thinking has to deal with the practical realities of a cramped student schedule so oriented to immediate issues in performance practice that abstract thinking like this too often feels alien and alienating to students (and understandably so). Livestreaming graduation recitals became a *concrete assemblage* that at first presented itself as a unique opportunity to learn a practical emergent technology for music performance. But it soon became a laboratory for an extralinguistic research-creation practice in music studies that may transform our understanding of what research and teaching can do.

### **The Emerging Concrete Assemblage of Audiovision**

As the first (ethno)musicologist in a new BA in jazz and popular music, pedagogical innovation has been central to my practice and with mixed results. I joined the faculty with the intention to work against replicating the division between musicology and performance practice that I had experienced at other universities while at the same time refusing the notion that musicology is the vegetable in a dominantly performance-oriented program: good for you and necessary for academic credentials, but not very much fun nor of much practical value. Critical thinking, I kept telling myself, was my value and contribution. But I could feel (and read in my student evaluations) that I was not getting through. Over the years, my courses in music studies became informally known as the “Michael courses.” The disciplinary perspectives that I was attempting to share (popular music studies, cultural studies, musicology, ethnomusicology) were reterritorialized by students as *my* interests and perspectives. It was not until I began working with students to produce livestreams of graduate recitals that the research-creation concepts that we had been reading became living thinking-feeling.

The path to livestreaming as research-pedagogy was indirect. At the beginning of COVID-19 closures, the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada put out a special call for COVID response grants. The *Choral Music Video* was a project that had livestreaming and choral music videos as components. The project investigated the interface of research-creation, audiovision (Chion 2019), and emerging audiovisual livestreaming technology in the context of mandatory home viewing. The grant provided an opportunity to purchase livestreaming equipment to utilize the cameras that I had been using for music video production in my cine-ethnomusicology course. At the beginning, student research assistants worked with me to livestream choral music workshops with an Edmonton-based professional choir, Pro Coro Canada. At the conclusion of the grant, the department hired a student to supervise the livestreaming of graduate recitals that were closed to the public. It provided an opportunity for family and friends to watch the recitals. With university life coming back to normal and special funding to support livestreams coming to an end, I began to think about Erin Manning’s suggestion of extralinguistic musicology. Central to *CineWorlding* (MacDonald 2023) is an interest in what Margaret Langer calls the musical matrix. The musical matrix is a refrain that grabs extra-musical resources to itself and makes them musical. I utilize Michel Chion’s idea of audiovision as that which emerges with/from the musical matrix. I recognize that the experience of this matrix is what occurs when perception and affect become territorialized in audiovision’s mobility. This provided a starting place for thinking research-creation as pedagogy, to collectively feel forward toward concepts that entangle with audiovisual percepts and affects in musical duration.

Students were put into groups and over the semester we read a collection of research-creation essays and Michel Chion's "Three Modes of Listening" chapter from *Audio-Vision*. In the preparation for the recital livestreams, students contacted recitalists and asked for charts/scores of the performance. My intention was for the research-creation students to study these charts/scores and begin to think about realizing the performance as audiovision. This aspect failed: "What is this audiovision that Michael keeps talking about?" More work needed to be done before students could begin to imagine a process of moving a chart/score into audiovision. Which is another way to say: to develop the skills of a music producer.

### **Audiovision's Percepts, Affects, and Concepts**

On recital day, cameras were set up and switching gear was hooked up. Students were given a tour of the process that was going to unfold. I provided as much information as I could about what livestreaming means: that we would not be reproducing a live performance but instead composing in audiovision, mobilizing the musical matrix through this technology. I could tell students were doing their best to understand. Five minutes before the stream went live, everyone in the group could feel the nervous energy. This was different somehow.

I announce over the headsets—"we are live, one minute till showtime"—and students begin to express how nervous they are. I explain that at the beginning I will be very bossy about what needs to happen, that I will be calling shots and modelling how live audiovision works. Then slowly students will take over as they are comfortable, bit by bit. As the livestream develops, I keep referencing our readings as I call shots. I remind them about Chion's *causal listening* (2019, 25–28) and explain that in audiovision what viewers see is what they hear. As a psychoacoustic consequence, an instrument seen is an instrument heard more loudly. So audiovision impacts the audio mix. It is essential to show viewers the musical development of the score being realized. It is also necessary to consider the affects of musical production. The intensity of music production both physically and emotionally mobilized through audiovisual percepts that entangle affects, this is the composition of musicalized audiovision.

As I slowly introduce techniques of camera operation (panning, tilting, focus, and zoom), students begin to get comfortable with these basic techniques. Then comes the introduction of more advanced switching techniques of fading-in a moving or a focusing camera. With each of these introductions students respond excitedly. I point out that these responses are affects emerging from the experience of artfulness (Manning 2016a, 46). After these advanced techniques we begin thinking-feeling duration and movement. The tempo of any camera movement, cut, or fade either resonates with the musical matrix or it does not. There is no way of knowing in advance what is correct because it happens in the event of the camera movement, cut, or fade that is always already inside the audiovisual-performance compositional coupling. This is the in-act of musical experience where one *knows* immediately. And it is *this* knowing, a knowing within the processual in-act of the musical event taking form that *opens within* the space between musicology and performance, research, and creation. This *space opening within* is an extralinguistic image of thought replete with felt virtualities of *time's durational folds*. This is the extralinguistic contribution of livestreaming pedagogy.

## Thinking-Feeling Time's Durational Folds

Imagine musical pulses layered over space. Moving visually through this space with a camera requires aligning visual motion with music's moving, and when aligned it is felt to be correct, and by correct we mean artful. There is no way to actually depict this, and it is difficult to describe; it has to be felt and is artful only when it *feels* artful. This requires intuition; it is: "the art—the manner—in which the very conditions of experience are felt. Intuition both gets a process on its way and acts as the decisive turn within experience that activates a productive opening within time's durational folds. Intuition crafts the operative problem" (Manning 2016a, 47). The students begin to experiment with these techniques, and I physically back off, complimenting and correcting as the recital develops. The students suggest angles, movements, cuts: they begin to follow their intuition and when it is artful, everyone cheers over the headphones. When it does not work, it is not wrong; instead, it is unrealized, since it does not quite actualize in audiovision the felt virtualities. I point out that this cheering is a collective affective response to their audiovision composition. These complex concepts that point to so much virtuality become actualized in the in-act of livestreaming. In the flow of experience, many students begin to rethink the value of chart/score analysis, that they could know in advance what may be coming, that is, in a Deleuzian sense, to be alive to its virtuality. Time folds again. And in this fold intuition is primed for a future chart/score reading session.

## Conclusion

Livestreaming introduced music students to research-creation, to process philosophy, and the felt experience of extralinguistic concepts. As a way of rethinking the divide between musicology and music performance, research-creation in audiovision creates a laboratory for extralinguistic musicology. The project created a research-creation space for students to be inspired to develop chart/score reading, research-creation concepts, audiation, intuition, and artfulness. Beyond this there were extrinsic rewards: it provided them a product for their research-creation portfolios, an experience to write about; it provided the recitalist with a professional document of their performance, an audiovisual archival document; it was mobilized using YouTube, which increased the visibility of the MacEwan music program in ways that we hope will increase the accessibility of our program to those who cannot yet see themselves in university. Finally, it helped students see how Michael works as an artist-researcher, that there need not be a division between thinking music and making art. That it is possible to invent methods, to find intellectual value in the work that they are already doing, and most importantly, to not know. That university can be an exciting space for both individual and collective creation and transformative experience. It also provides a critical piece. Students had direct experience in thinking-feeling audiovision as music. Even if the complexity of the musical matrix that guided our actions was still blurry, they felt it moving through them. My hope is that this direct experience of extralinguistic thinking-feeling required for the composition of musicalized audiovision will provide a seed for their own investigations. By working on a machinic image of thought with students, research-creation can *open within* the space between conservatory and university in a technologically complex music world. If pedagogy is planting seeds for future thinking-feeling, research-creation in audiovision may be an excellent approach for those undergraduate music programs trying to reimagine themselves.

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