



School: Bath School of Music & Performing Arts

Researcher: Dr Matthew Sergeant

Project Title: KISS (2014, for solo violin and twine bow)

UOA: 33 - Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies

Research Questions

KISS (2014) is a 3-5 hour performance-installation¹ for solo violin and twine bow².

The primary research questions explored in the composition concern a re-examination of the material components of music-making, in this case a violin and bow, through the lens of recent developments in critical theory and new materialist discourse.

The recent Twenty-first Century 'material turn' (Barrett & Bolt 2013) in critical theory has radically expanded understandings of the material world. If this 'new materialism' holds any internal consistency, it is that '[M]atter is no longer imagined [...] as a massive, opaque plenitude but is recognized instead as indeterminate, constantly forming and reforming in unexpected ways. One could conclude accordingly that matter "becomes" rather than matter "is"' (Coole & Frost 2010: 10). Through such a lens, the material world is not considered as something inert and static, but as sometime active and innately temporal. As the architect Juhani Pallasmaa says, '[a]ll matter exists in the continuum of time [...].' (Pallasmaa 2012: 34) and architectural theorist Tim Edensor points out, material things exist in a 'fluid state of material becoming' (Edensor 2005: 16).

Musical instruments are rarely, if ever, considered in these terms, as objects that change through and across time. We assume the violin to be the same – to respond in the same way to player's actions, to occupy the timbral space, etc – at the end of a performance of a given work to the outset (even though, of course, the tuning of the strings will have minutely and naturally adjusted and certain hairs of the bow will have fallen away).

As a result, the primary research questions of this project can be considered as follows:

How might the temporality of the violin and bow as material object be foregrounded in a piece of music?

How might the violin and bow be adjusted (physically) so as to encourage natural material change (with sonic consequences) through and across a musical performance?

How might a formal/structural strategy be devised so as to emphasise the ephemerality of material stasis in the momental present?

¹ Meaning that the audience are able to arrive/depart at any point during the work's performance, as opposed to a more conventional concert presentation.

² The twine bow is a re-designed violin bow developed specifically as part of this research project, where the horse hair is replaced with coarse garden twine.